FCJ–177 Television Assemblages.

Teresa Rizzo
University of Western Australia

Abstract:

Television has become a multiplatform medium that houses content on a number of different sites and devices that encourage new forms of engagement. This new digital environment has transformed television from a closed system, where programmes are transmitted to a television set for viewers to tune into, to an open system that produces new television connections and configurations. Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Latour and current media theorists, this essay turns to the concept of assemblages for theorising this new interactive multiplatform television environment. Thinking about multiplatform television through the concept of assemblages offers a means of exploring how television devices, texts and media are reconfigured or modified so as to display new functionalities and capacities. It also enables us to consider the way television culture can be deterritorialised and reterritorialised through new connections and in doing so introduce new qualities such as interactivity and reciprocal determination.

Introduction

It is an understatement to say that television and television culture have undergone a dramatic transformation over the last decade. As little as ten years ago typical Australian viewers would sit in front of the television set at a particular time to watch their favourite show. If they wanted to record a programme they would have to go through an elaborate process which included: searching the scheduled programme time and then entering the start and end dates and times on a video recorder; rummaging for a free tape and making sure the video recorder was left on. Today, by contrast, viewers can access their favourite shows in a number of different ways, on a variety of platforms and devices, at a time of their choosing. New forms of digital television have emerged, including Internet television and IPTV, that offer new ways of accessing programmes and increasing personalisation and customisation practices. Internet TV includes new platforms such as Apple TV and Netflix that deliver programmes over the Internet. In the midst of this change at least three new and distinct functions stand out: pay per view, search and retrieve, and upload and share. With pay per view 'the consumer pays for the content package separately and in addition to, the broadband access package' (Barr, 2011: 60.1). Search and retrieve practices form the basis of watching television on a computer or using applications on mobile devices to download programmes or stream live television. Upload and share practices enable viewers to engage with a show's interactive material or create and distribute user generated content. These changes have transformed television from a single platform medium into an interactive multiplatform medium that encourages viewer (if this term is still appropriate) participation.

This new television landscape requires us to rethink how television functions socially and culturally. The emergence of digital, multiplatform television also puts into question many of the central concepts and theories for understanding television and television culture, such as: appointment viewing, mass audiences, liveness and broadcast-flow (Meikle and Young, 2008: 67–8). As a result of these changes some television theorists suggest that there is a need to develop new theoretical frameworks that encompass more than the analogue broadcast model. In the US context, Amanda Lotz argues that the shift to the digital multiplatform has altered television's industrial logic and therefore requires 'a fundamental reassessment' of how television 'operates as a cultural institution' (Lotz, 2007: 23). For Joke Hermes television and television viewing is so vastly different than it once was that 'we are in need of evaluating what television is about and, perhaps also, of updating our theoretical frame-work to understand the medium' (Hermes, 2013: 36). Contributing to the debate, Bennett and Strange have edited a collection of essays that attempt to 'form a new critical paradigm for thinking about television in the digital era' (2011: 7).

In his study of new forms of television, William Uricchio proposes that rather than thinking about television's recent transformation as unique, '[t]he history of television is a history of change' (Uricchio, 2013: 65). Judith Keilbach and Markus Stauff follow this line of thinking by stating, '[p]art of the 'power of television' lies in its constant transformation process, enforced by a continuous reflection on the 'appropriate' use and an ongoing redefinition of television' (Keilbach and Stauff, 2013: 80). Uricchio further argues that, as a medium television was only relatively stable between the years 1950 and 1980 and that in the long run this will be considered a blip in the history of television (Uricchio, 2013: 66). However, he also emphasises that the years of stability have had a great influence on the way we have theorised television. '[T]hey have helped to mask some of the medium's fundamental transformations, and they have continued to shape key assumptions about television's interactions with its audiences, whether on the part of the head-counters or some academics' (Uricchio, 2013: 66).

Keilbach and Stauff have a similar issue with the framing of television as a stable medium. They argue that recent discussions about the dramatic changes in television that 'distinguish the medium's current heterogeneity from television as it used to be … [imply] that television once had a stable identity that is now being called into question' (Keilbach and Stauff, 2013: 79). By looking at a number of experiments over the history of television, Keilbach and Stauff conclude that change and transformation are not simply 'characteristics of the medium's current phase but more generally [are] one of television's integral features' (Keilbach and Stauff, 2013: 80).

One concept that shows promise for thinking through the new multiplatform television landscape is that of assemblages. As Goggin notes assemblage theory 'questions the constitution, production, and reproduction of the social, pointing to how particular objects suggest different conceptions, ordering and politics' (Goggin, 2009: 153). According to Goggin assemblage theory 'takes seriously the particular objects, technologies, and forms through which culture is brought together' (Goggin, 2009: 153). The goal of this paper is to explore the applicability or affordances of the assemblage for theorising multiplatform television. More specifically, in this paper I argue that the concept of assemblages provides a means of accounting for the formation of new kinds of connections between discrete devices, texts and applications, at times across different mediums. It enables us to think about how previous and current devices, texts and medium are reconfigured and adopt new functionalities or are modified, so as to display new qualities. The concept of assemblages takes into consideration the way television culture can be deterritorialised and reterritorialised, so that new functionalities and qualities are introduced. It also allows us to consider how agency is reshuffled, as new connections are formed between new kinds of devices, texts, practices and applications. Finally, the concept of assemblages shows promise in theorising multiplatform television as an arrangement that challenges

a linear determination based on a cause and effect logic, in favour of a multi-determinate trajectory. In this sense television and television culture is conceived as something that is constantly being reconfigured according to the introduction of new elements and components. This essay turns to assemblage theory because it specifically focuses on open and dynamic systems. However, it needs to be pointed out that within the scope of this essay, it is only possible to attempt a preliminary consideration of assemblage theory for understanding the social and cultural implications of multiplatform television.

This essay is divided into three sections. The first outlines assemblage theory and how it applies to the social. The second section examines two examples of multiplatform television in relation to assemblage theory. The first example focuses on the Foxtel's catch-up application Go and the second focuses on the LetsPlay YouTube channel Stampy. The third section applies some key aspects of assemblage theory to some recent changes in television and television culture. It also argues that the shift from broadcast television to multiplatform television signals a shift from a molar assemblage to a molecular one, and analyses what each of these approaches offer as well as what they limit.

Section One: Assemblage Theory

Assemblage theory has many layers. The theorists that are mostly associated with assemblage theory are Gilles Deleuze, Bruno Latour and Manuel DeLanda. Each has their own particular understanding of assemblages and has developed the concept in different ways. The diversity of approaches can be understood as a response to the limitations of traditional social theory. As Latour argues, social theory privileges stability and tends to structure the social around fixed terms and binaries such as 'actor and system, or agency and structure' (Latour, 1999: 16). Social theory also finds it difficult to account for changes in the social that come about as new connections are formed, and how these potentially reformulate or transform the way the social is ordered or assembled. In traditional social theory, the social is understood as a closed system with a fixed set of parts that constantly relate to each other in a predicable way. Furthermore, the social does not connect with, or is not influenced by, anything outside its structure and set of relations. DeLanda makes a similar point in his critique of sociology's understanding of social structures as 'displaying an organic unity' or a 'seamless totality' with 'relations of interiority' (DeLanda, 2006: 9). Here, he says, all the parts of a structure are so reliant on each other and seamlessly fused together to form a whole, that they can only function within the structure. 'A part detached from such a whole ceases to be what it is, since being this particular part is one of its constitutive properties' (DeLanda, 2006: 9). In his work on organisations and social movements, human geographer Joris Van Wezemael looks at the problems with this

understanding of the social. He states, '"Structure" both in the natural and social sciences grounds determination within a logic of stability and linear causality. Although this mode of theorizing provides a basis for prediction and thus for intervention and rational governance, it falls short in accounting for change' (Van Wezemael, 2008: 169). The implication of this is that social theory misses transformations in culture and the social itself.

Assemblage theory counters the idea of the social as a constantly stable structure. Deleuze, Latour and DeLanda have all taken their own path in developing the formal concept of assemblages. However, there are significant consistencies between them. Complicating matters is the fact that different theorists use different terminology to describe what might appear to be similar phenomena. For example, although he may be overstating the point, John Law argues, 'there is little difference between Deleuze's *agencement* (awkwardly translated as "assemblage" in English) and the term "actor network"... Both refer to the provisional assembly of productive, heterogeneous, and ... limited forms of ordering' (Law, 2009: 145). Law also highlights the similarities between Latour and Deleuze by pointing out that 'Latour has observed that we might talk of "actant rhizomes" rather than "actor networks"' (Law, 2009: 145). Actants are entities that contribute something new to the assemblage and can be human or non-human. According to Latour they '...modify other actors through a series of trials', or in other words a serious of actions (Latour, 2004: 75). The term rhizome has a special status in the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Latour. Latour writes 'the word network, like Deleuze's and Guattari's term rhizome, clearly meant a series of transformations—translations, transductions—which could not be captured by any of the traditional terms of social theory' (Latour, 1999:15). In order to understand how this occurs it is necessary to examine the assemblage itself.

In broad terms, there are two types of assemblages: stratified and rhizomatic. This paper privileges a rhizomatic assemblage because it best describes the dynamic, interactive qualities and functions of multiplatform television. A stratified assemblage is based on a fixed structure with relatively homogeneous parts and is frequently called a molar assemblage. A rhizomatic assemblage, also called a molecular assemblage, is a relatively stable formation made up of heterogeneous components that include human as well as non-human elements. A rhizomatic assemblage also forms connections with new and disparate elements outside its arrangement, thereby introducing to the assemblage new qualities and capacities as well as change and transformation. In this sense, it is not that a rhizomatic assemblage is not a system, but rather what it is what Ronald Bogue describes as an open system (Bogue, 1996: 257). In addition, unlike relations of interiority the parts of the assemblage retain their unique properties even when they form new relations and become a part of another assemblage. DeLanda explains that 'assemblages are made up of parts which are self-subsistent and articulated by relations of exteriority, so that a part may be detached and made a component of another assemblage' (DeLanda, 2006,18). What this

implies is that even assemblages that appear fixed and stable are susceptible to change when connections that were assumed to be permanent, are made redundant or new connections alter the structure of an assemblage.

Thinking about the social as an assemblage, made up of parts that connect to external elements, has two significant implications. First, because assemblages form new connections with the outside, the social itself becomes open to change. As old connections disappear and new ones form, it changes quantitatively, in terms of the number of connections it has: however, more importantly it changes qualitatively or in nature. As Deleuze and Guattari put it:

> *When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis. Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 21).*

When this logic is taken further, it becomes apparent that as the nature of the system changes, its capacities or what it enables, also change. DeLanda discusses this process in terms of emergent properties. These are properties that arise from the interactions of heterogeneous parts so that the assemblage as a whole acquires new attributes. At the same time, the parts of an assemblage retain their unique properties, and do not lose their distinctiveness. (DeLanda, 2006: 6). Unlike fixed structures that always act in the same way and produce the same outcomes, assemblages introduce new possibilities.

Section Two: Two Multiplatform Television Assemblages

In this section, I seek to use the concept of assemblage to theorise multiplatform television as a social formation that favours change and privileges reciprocal determination. Firstly, I explore differences between broadcast and multiplatform television in terms of assemblages. Secondly, I use two scenarios to explore how multiplatform television acts as a rhizomatic assemblage that produces new qualities, emergent properties and orderings that privilege reciprocal determination.

Two aspects of the assemblage that have particular relevance to rhizomatic television social formations are deterritorialisation, and reciprocal determination. Both are central to the process that enables change and new possibilities. Processes of territorialisation can over-code an assemblage by giving its parts fixed roles and meanings and by producing a closed unified structure with a central point of power and signification. These assemblages are based on a stable and predetermined hierarchical structure, that aim toward a unified whole and a centralised power structure. Processes of deterritorialisation, on the other hand, undo fixed orderings, disrupt hierarchical power structures, and by privileging contingent relations between heterogeneous parts, open the assemblage to new possibilities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 3–25). DeLanda explains that the different relations and association within an assemblage can go through processes in which these components become involved and that either stabilize the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries, or destabilize it. The former are referred to as processes of territorialisation and the latter as processes of deterritorialisation (DeLanda, 2006:12).

These processes also affect how agency operates within an assemblage. Firstly, agency cannot be attributed to any one component or actant, human or non-human but emerges from the association of different parts. It is intrinsically tied to the kinds of connections that make up an assemblage, and what these connections enable and what they limit. I will elaborate on this point in the final section of this essay.

An important concept for understanding how assemblages challenge the construction of the social as dominated by linear causality, is that of reciprocal determination. Reciprocal determination is a non-linear form of determination that emerges from a process of interaction. To appreciate the importance of this concept to the functioning of assemblages, it is necessary to understand how it relates to both the virtual and the actual. Assemblages function on two planes: the plane of consistency or virtuality, which is made up of becomings or pure differentiation; and, a plane of organisation that actualises these viralities by segmenting and stratifying them. A key concept in understanding the relationship between the virtual and the actual is duration. Deleuze states that 'duration is what differs from itself' (Deleuze, 1999: 48). It is a non-dialectical form of difference that negates nothing and is contrasted to nothing, because it is not what differs from something else, but a continual unfolding or a continual process of transformation. In addition, every element in the virtual has a tendency or a quality and when combined with other tendencies, something new is expressed and actualised. Tamsin Loraine uses the example of a tree that might be comprised of tendencies toward bending and falling. If combined with other tendencies such as a tendency for the ground to saturate and tendency for strong winds to manifest, the tree will express falling (Loraine, 2011: 7). While this event may be read through a linear cause and effect logic after it has occurred, it is first a series of heterogeneous tendencies that come together to form an expression.

This approach means that the actual is always informed and influenced by the virtual and that, while the virtual may have an infinite number of possibilities, only some are actualised. It also implies that 'the determination of every actual being by the virtual past in its entirety remains contingent for Deleuze: it only has determinacy when read retroactively; it could always have happened otherwise' (Holland, 2013: 19). Furthermore, because the virtual and the actual are incomplete without each other, they are in a relationship of reciprocal determination. James Williams argues that '[t]hese realms depend on each other for their determinacy, that is, for the relative determinacy of terms within them in relation to others…' (Williams, 2005: 13). In this sense, determinacy is always multiple as it is contingent on a number of possible outcomes rather than a cause and effect structure.

The concept of reciprocal determination is important for challenging the centrality of broadcast television and the idea of television and television culture as something with a fixed and stable structure based on fixed roles, binaries and hierarchies such as production/consumption, producer/audience, industry/consumer and even technologies/text. These are the result of the actualisation of numerous possible outcomes, not a given. If we think about these components as simply the actualisation of a number of possible virtualities, then it becomes apparent that their actualisation is contingent on a variety of tendencies coming together and not the result of a linear logic. Furthermore, it implies that other virtualities can always manifest and introduce new qualities as different tendencies cross paths and form new television assemblages. This is a potentially interesting idea for understanding new television formations that have co-creation as a central quality, because it offers a way of exploring emergent properties. If we understand multiplatform television as an assemblage that is constantly forming new connections between viewers, texts, technologies, polices and practices, we can imagine a virtual realm full of possible outcomes. However, it is difficult to predict which will be actualised and which will remain in the realm of the virtual. This sense of contingency and chance means that social and cultural television formations are open to the new and unthought rather than limited to fixed relations. Furthermore, it we consider television in terms of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, we might think about the way that, with its centralised source of communication and one-way flow of information, broadcast television resembles a highly territorialised and codified assemblage. For example, broadcast television is a highly organised structure that revolves around a centre of significance, tends toward homogeneity and produces images and representations for viewers to consume. This includes highly organised programming and scheduling structures that may address age and gender groups at particular times, and that are based on broad generalisations. As a highly stratified assemblage, broadcast television offers viewers very few opportunities to actively participate in the media texts that they are directed to consume, the exceptions being reality and game shows, which offer a virtualised form of participation. At the same time, I am not assuming that prior to multiplatform television viewers were passive, as acts of reading and making meaning are also forms of activity. However, the focus here is on how connections between different elements engender emergent properties through new

activities and forms of participation that result in a redefinition of television and television culture.

Unlike broadcast television, multiplatform television can be understood as a rhizomatic assemblage as it contains no centre of significance and cannot be unified into a whole. Multiplatform television consists of a number of different media sites, services and devices where viewers can access the programmes of their choice at any time. Multiplatform television is also made up of a network of connections that shoot off into different directions, are sometimes temporary, and as a consequence form rhizomatic assemblages that are open and susceptible to change. Furthermore, as viewers become programmers, producers and distributers on a variety of platforms they participate in the process of assembling and reassembling television, television culture and social orderings.

In order to explore multiplatform television as a rhizomatic assemblage I now want to turn to two concrete examples. These examples are based on scenarios that describe new multiplatform viewer practices and their connection to a number of new televisual elements. The scenarios focus on the use of the Foxtel application Go and the Minecraft LetsPlay channel Stampy. The advantage of using scenarios is that they offer a tangible means of exploring the usefulness of the concept of assemblages for digital multiplatform television. The scenario featuring the Foxtel Go aims to demonstrate how this actant has led to a number of new connections that have reterritorialised television to privilege reciprocal determination over a linear determination, produced emergent qualities such as mobility, and, reshuffled agency. The scenario based on the LetsPlay channel Stampy explores a form of hybrid television that emerges from a mix of television and gaming elements. Its hybrid nature prompts questions about television's ontological status and raises the possibility that television has always been a hybrid medium.

Scenario One: Foxtel Go—From Anytime to Anyway

I'm on the bus. I take out my iPad and open Foxtel's application the Go. I can watch programmes on 60 live channels, or I can choose from hundreds of shows and movies from the 'on demand' menu. I decide to watch the latest episode of Orphan Black (Space Canada and BBC America, 2013-) on SyFy. Foxtel Go is one of a number of television applications (or 'apps') that enable viewers to watch television on different devices. The ABC's version is called iView, whereas most of the other broadcast/network channels in Australia use the name catch-up TV after the channel's name, as in Channel 7 catch-up TV. I have chosen Foxtel Go for this analysis for several reasons. First, as Foxtel is a

multichannel platform, it has a much wider range and choice of programmes than network channels. Foxtel Go also contains a number of interesting functions such as the ability to programme a recording schedule for the iQ (the Foxtel's Personal Digital Recorder or PDR) from a computer, smart phone or tablet. It also gives the owner the ability to remotely enable parental control.

Go contributes to a new kind of television assemblage that enables new kinds of emergent properties and reciprocal determination. In particular the introduction of Go and apps like it offer new lines of connections that potentially reformulate television culture by deterritorialising appointment, mass and home viewing. In this context it is interesting to explore how activities such as creating playlists, viewing on mobile devices and searching and retrieving, privilege reciprocal determination over linear determination.

In my previous work I have examined how Foxtel iQ and playlist apps have disrupted broadcast viewing practices such as appointment viewing, mass audiences and broadcast flow through new cultural practices such as time shifting, personalisation, customisation and co-participation (Rizzo, 2007). I will briefly revisit some of these arguments here, as they are relevant to the Foxtel Go. One of the most interesting aspects of Go is that it incorporates a number of functions that were previously distributed amongst different technological devices such as the television set, the remote control, the set top box, and the Personal Digital Recorder (PDR). By doing so, it literally brings new elements into an assemblage that deterritorialises a number of connections fundamental to broadcast television. For example, while television viewing has always taken place in a number of environments, since its popularisation in the 1950s the television set and the remote control have held a central place in the home (Spigel, 1990: 76). More recently, the set top box and the PDR have become important technologies for broadcast and cable television to attract audiences by offering more control through practices such as timeshifting and multichannel environments. However, unlike mobile phones and tablets which promote mobility, I would argue that these home based technologies attempt to maintain the television set as the privileged site for viewing and the home as a central location.

By taking over the combined functions of the television set, the remote control, the set top box, and the PDR, Go produces new lines of connections that cause a shift in how we understand what television is and what it does. In this sense, the set of associations and connections that shape broadcast/network television culture are disassembled and reconfigured as some of its vital actants and their connections disappear and new ones emerge. Go becomes the primary actant within this new assemblage, as it takes over the functions of those previous entities, as well as automating and scheduling them. Moreover, it also modifies a number of other actors so that they are able to perform new functions. It

enables computers, tablets and phones to do what just a few years ago only the television set could do; that is, receive live television. Viewers are therefore no longer bound to the television set to watch live television. While viewers have been able to download programmes on computers and mobile media for over a decade, live television has remained a function of the television set. In essence, Go enables these devices to function as proxies for the television set and the Foxtel PDR. In Latourian terms we could think about Go as an entity that modifies other actors through a series of actions. This signals a shift in how television is viewed; live television can now be viewed without the need for a television set.

What is more, as Go forms multiple connections with these different components and deterritorialises fixed television configurations, mobility becomes an emergent property. New sets of relations between viewers and Go, Go and technologies such as mobile phones and tablets and between texts, viewers, apps and media technologies enable viewing anywhere. Emily Keightley and Anna Reading point out that mobility is 'fundamental to the changing nature of media technologies and their integration into everyday life' (Keightley and Reading, 2014: 208). Thinking about how mobility is actualised through new lines of connections reveals how television can be an open rhizomatic system based on contingency rather than a single determination.

Another important function of Go is that it works in conjunction with the Foxtel iQ to personalise and customise viewing preferences. Previously, I have argued that, with its integrated Electronic Programme Guide (EPG), the Foxtel iQ disrupts appointment viewing or a temporal mode of viewing by enabling viewers, to not only record programmes easily (that is without needing to know the start and end time or date) but also 'create a personal playlist from the pool of programs they have recorded, which can then be watched at the viewer's convenience' (Rizzo, 2007: 111). Go extends this function by enabling viewers to remotely set up a recording schedule on the Foxtel iQ. This means that rather than use a remote control and search through an EPG on the television set, as was the case with the Foxtel iQ, viewers can select the programmes they wish to record from any computer or compatible phone and tablet. On first consideration this function may appear to be just a frivolous gimmick. However, considering the large amount of time people spend away from the home and in front of a computer, using an iPad or smart phone to operate the television remotely offers new forms of control. The introduction of the Foxtel iQ and other PDRs had a major impact on shifting television culture from a temporal mode of viewing, where viewers tune in at specific times to watch their favourite shows, to a spatial mode of viewing that is based on a search and retrieve logic. The Go takes this spatial logic a step further by extending search and retrieve practices beyond the television set and the remote control. It makes Foxtel channels and the programme guide available on a number of different interactive devices. This new interactive multiplatform television environment

signals a shift from a linear cause and effect logic toward a multiple determination. The number of possible outcomes in the activity of searching and retrieving is not dissimilar to that of the virtual realm where what is actualised is not a result of a linear cause and effect logic, but contingent on a number of possible choices and interactions, many of which may be accidental or the process of following diverging paths.

Go's search and retrieve logic also challenges a fixed idea of a television schedule that is organised by the scheduling department of a television channel with the aim of enticing viewers to immerse themselves in its flow. Go, on the other hand, is defined by a multiplicity of possibilities that may or may not actualise as schedules. Viewing is no longer reliant on schedules as viewing on Go means choosing programmes from a number of lists and menus that can be swiped through, personalised into favourites or arranged into a number of different playlists. This form of interaction removes programming and scheduling as something that is solely the domain of the industry and reconfigures it into a shared arrangement. While the programmes on offer still rely on what the Foxtel platform supplies, new interactive forms of viewing challenge ideas of mass audiences and refine forms of personalisation and customisation. Within this rhizomatic assemblage, Go behaves as an agent that enables new viewing practices by forming connections between different parts of the assemblage including viewers, industry, texts and related technology. It has reconfigured the television assemblage so that viewers enjoy an extent of personalisation that did not exist previously. This is no small matter when we consider the scenario described at the start of this essay, where as little as ten years ago not only did viewers have very little control over where and when they watch television, but they also had to deal with incredibly cumbersome technology. At the same time, we could also ask what is lost in this new formation? One possibility is that members of a household act in isolation from each other in relation to planning and scheduling communal viewing. While many things have disrupted the practice of family viewing over the last few decades, applications like Go, as the name suggests, encourage viewers to take their television viewing with them from place to place.

Latour argues that it is through the process of reshuffling agency that associations between objects are revealed as social. He argues that the social 'is an association between entities which are in no way recognizable as being social in the ordinary manner, except during the brief moment when they are reshuffled together' (Latour, 2005: 65). By thinking about the new kinds of connections that are formed around the figure of the Go app the social effects of the previous connections, which were ubiquitous and taken for granted, are also foregrounded or revealed. Processes of reshuffling, which are prompted by the introduction of relatively small entities such as Foxtel Go, demonstrate how systems that appear to order the social in a stable structure with fixed power relations are actually temporary and open to change. Latour argues that when these changes occur 'we have to

reshuffle our conceptions of what was associated together because the previous definition has been made somewhat irrelevant' (Latour, 2005: 6). What is particularly useful about this idea is that it eschews debates about the demise of television in favour of discussions that focus on new television configurations.

Scenario Two: LetsPlay as hybrid TV: The Case of Stampylong-head

My 7 year-old son enjoys watching 'stampylonghead' (a popular gamer) playing Minecraft on YouTube. Sometimes he watches it on the iPad, at other times he will use the YouTube app on the Smart TV. For him, it is all television. He doesn't distinguish between YouTube, watching programmes on the iPad or watching them on a television set. He also doesn't distinguish between television programmes with high production standards and amateur videos of gamers playing Minecraft. Today some of the most popular channels on YouTube are LetsPlay channels (BBC News, 7 March, 2014). These are niche channels that feature recordings of gamers playing video games with an added commentary track. The most popular LetsPlay channel is PewDiePie, run by Swedish Gamer Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg. Joseph Garrett's (aka stampylonghead or stampylongnose) channel Stampy, which focuses on playing Minecraft, is not far behind in popularity. While PewDiePie focuses on violent games and horror genres, Stampy is aimed at children and uses safe language and a friendly enthusiastic voice. According to the BBC, Stampy's audience is mainly made up of children between six and fourteen years old and is split along gender lines; 60% girls and 40% boys (BBC News, 7 March, 2014).

LetsPlay channels are interesting for understanding new televisual social formations because they challenge established broadcast/network production standards and aesthetics. They incorporate a mix of television and gaming elements and cultural practices. Their hybrid nature puts into question television's ontological status and the idea that it is a stable medium. While I agree with Uricchio who argues that historically television demonstrates a propensity for change and that different models of television have always existed, I would also suggest that examples like LetsPlay channels signal that digital technology has considerably increased the number of different forms of television and the rate of change.

LetsPlay channels participate in a reshuffling of agency as new connections between game cultures, online culture and television culture come together to reveal a new social assemblage around the figure of the child. One of the advantages of assemblage theory

is that it doesn't overlook the way children's emergent viewing practices reassemble the social around new forms of television. In fact, children's viewing practices should form an important base for how we rethink what television is and what it does, because today's children have had little or no exposure to television prior to a digital age. This means taking into account that children are not tied to temporal modes of viewing based on schedules and other expectations to do with broadcast television such as high production standards and established genres. Discussing today's child viewer, television theorist Jason Mittell writes:

> When my children ask, "what shows are on?, they are not referring to the TV scheduler—rather they mean what's on TiVo's menu. For them, the transmission of television via a simultaneous schedule is an entirely foreign concept, even though this has been one of the defining elements of television as a medium for decades (Mittell, 2011: 48).

In a television environment that includes LetsPlay channels, Smart TVs and video sharing channels, today's child-viewer is unfamiliar with the broadcast/network model of television, its time based viewing and forms of address that focus on mass audiences. By engaging young viewers, LetsPlay channels reorder the production of the social away from a broadcast model and open it up to new configurations. They direct new lines of connection with game play and hence new tendencies and qualities. Even the name given to these channels 'LetsPlay' beckons viewers to become engaged and to become players rather than passive viewers. While the LetsPlay programmes themselves are not interactive, they are designed to teach and share gaming skills. LetsPlay channels are not fully television and not fully games but a hybrid assemblage that shares qualities and tendencies from both. With their simple content and amateur production standards, LetsPlay channels have very rudimentary aesthetics that challenge the broadcast/network model. By significantly renovating broadcast production and viewing practices, LetsPlay channels put into question the idea of television as a stable medium, and invite us to rethink what television is and what it can be.

According to Nick Couldry, '[n]etworks, by the particular set of links they combine, reinforce certain ways of connecting, while effacing other possibilities' (Couldry , 2008: 96). The years of stability that Uricchio refers to could be understood as precisely a set of links that reinforce particular arrangements and by doing so block other possibilities. However, digital technology has enabled new links to form that open up the television assemblage to new forms of production and new forms of engagement. By understanding television as a medium that is prone to change and transformation, as well as having periods of stability, it is not difficult to situate LetsPlay channels and Foxtel Go as two changes amongst many

in the history of television. LetsPlay channels reinvent television aesthetics by forming connections with new entities such as video games, the video gamer as presenter, and YouTube. LetsPlay channels can be see as one manifestation of these new links, as they make little pretence at behaving like broadcast/network television. The Foxtel Go enables different devices to become televisions, and viewers to become schedulers. The examples of Foxtel Go and the LetsPlay channels demonstrate how new television can be thought of as an assemblage of heterogeneous elements that has moments of stability and moments of transformation depending on the kinds of connections that are formed. They also demonstrate how the social is refigured through the new productions and viewing practices they engender.

Section Three:
Reassembling Television: possibilities and limitations

Thinking about the recent changes in television through the concept of assemblages offers new insights into how transformations in television occur in complex and often unpredictable ways. The concept of assemblage is useful for understanding the implications of the shift from broadcast television to multiplatform television as it takes into account the way a social and cultural formation is assembled and reassembled in different periods and in different contexts. It enables us to not only to consider current television formations, but to contemplate how these connect and relate to past formations, and possible future formations. Such a focus would help us better understand the new cultural formations that are emerging in relation to multiplatform television. Particularly, relevant within an assemblage approach is how the social is assembled and reassembled through shifting associations and connections.

In concluding, I would like to return to the distinction between the virtual or the plane of consistency and the actual or the plane of stratification in order to briefly consider some possibilities and limitations of both in relation to television. The distinction between fixed stratified assemblages and rhizomatic assemblages should not simply be thought of in terms of good or bad; as by enabling and inhibiting different things both processes have their advantages and disadvantages. As a stable structure, broadcast television may not offer the personalisation and customisation features that digital television does, however it possesses some very important functions. By addressing a mass audience, it facilitates a sense of nationhood and enables the spread of important information. For Jostein Gripsrud, broadcast television plays an important role in society because it is the 'central institution within the public sphere, making essential information, knowledge and cultural experience available at the same time to all members of a particular society' (Gripsrud,

2004: 212). This unique function addresses a society as a whole and reinforces a sense of nationhood and citizenship. As a form of television that disperses its content across a number of devices and platforms, multiplatform television does not have this unifying capacity. Furthermore, Bennett and Strange point out that customisation and personalisation technologies that enable viewers to select programmes according to personal taste can limit their exposure to different kinds of programmes and different perspectives (Bennett and Strange, 2008: 111). For example, a viewer who personalises their news to receive only business news or entertainment news misses out on hard news and is not exposed to a mixed diet of news sub-genres (Bennett & Strange, 2008: 212). If one of the functions of broadcast television is to expose viewers to a variety of programmes and perspectives and for public broadcasting to enlighten and educate through a range of different programmes, then television technologies that encourage customisation and personalisation endanger these functions.

However, like the plane of stratification or actualisation and the plane of consistency or virtuality, broadcast/network television and multiplatform television should not be understood as opposites. Rather they exist in a relation of reciprocal determination where change reverberates across both planes. For example, while broadcast television continues to maintain a national presence through scheduled programmes such as evening news programmes, it is also becoming increasingly multiplatform by spreading its content across different devices and platforms that encourage viewer participation. For Deleuze and Guattari, processes of deterritorialisation are always accompanied by processes of reterritorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 31). Problems only tend to arise at the extreme end of either of these processes. Absolute deterritorialisation can be problematic because 'instead of connecting with other lines and each time augmenting its valence' it becomes destructive abolishing the assemblage all together (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 229). On the other hand, problems also arise when an assemblage is captured and over-coded in such a way that it becomes fixed, oppressive, highly restrictive and structures power around a central point. We might think about this in terms of some aspects of YouTube. For example, José van Dijck challenges the idea that online platforms like YouTube signal any shift in media power because they mine the metadata of users in order to target advertising to individuals (van Dijck, 2013).

Expressing similar concerns in relation to online user-generated content, Elizabeth Bird argues that 'there seems to be increasing evidence that the surveillance and disciplinary functions of those controlling the online environment may be outweighing its liberatory potential' (Bird, 2011: 508). Thinking about these problems in terms of assemblage theory, we could say that in these instances YouTube is captured and over-coded by molar ordering that reinstitutes a hierarchical structure and a central agent of power. Another example of the dangers of over-coding the assemblage relates to LetsPlay channels. While on the one hand LetsPlay channels disrupt a broadcast model of television and introduce new decentralised production and viewing practices, they are also under the constant threat of being reterritorialised. Nintendo, for example, has used

the threat of copyright laws to enforce the inclusion of their advertisements at the start and end of LetsPlay videos. In this way, not only do they advertise their product for free, but they also collect revenue through these advertisements (IGN News, 16 May, 2013).

Empowerment and the agency of audiences has been a contested aspect of digital media. Van Dijck, for example, questions the notion of the active viewer when she writes that 'only a small percentage of users actually create content whereas the large majority consists of spectators or passive viewers' (van Dijck, 2013: 47). She argues that 'it's a great leap to presume that the availability of digital networked technologies turns everyone into active participants'. However, viewer participation and agency should not be primarily aligned with the creation of content and spectatorship with passivity. In a multiplatform environment participation and agency can happen in more subtle ubiquitous ways; it happens through practices like using the Foxtel Go that transforms computers, tablets and phones into television sets. The Go app also behaves as an actant that modifies human capacity by enabling viewers to take control of programming and scheduling and thereby offering a certain amount of agency. Assemblage theory does not treat agency as something that belongs to or stems solely from humans or from technology alone but from the interaction of a number of heterogeneous tendencies that together produce emergent properties that enable new capacities. In addition, every assemblage contains actants, like Go, that can modify other entities giving them new functions and abilities. Without new associations or without continually forming new connections this process cannot take place and agency cannot occur. As Callon explains:

> *Agency as a capacity to act and to give meaning to action can neither be contained in a human being nor localized in the institutions, norms, values, and discursive or symbolic systems assumed to produce effects on individuals. Action, including its reflexive dimension that produces meaning, takes place in hybrid collectives comprising human beings as well as material and technical devices, texts, etc. (Callon, 2005: 4).*

Within assemblage theory, agency is dependent on the kinds of relationships that are formed between different elements. According to Callon 'This is why Deleuze and Guattari proposed the notion of *agencement*. *Agencement* has the same root as agency: *agencements* are arrangements endowed with the capacity of acting in different ways depending on their configuration' (Callon, 2007: 320). The current transformations in television signal a process of reassembling that enables viewers to become productive agents through apps like the Foxtel Go and new forms of television like LetsPlay channels. Fixed social structures produce an impoverished form of agency because agency always

belongs to the same components or groups. However, as an interactive medium that continually forms new connections, multiplatform television is an open rhizomatic system that offers possibilities and new forms of agency that are multi-determinate and inclusive.

Biographical Note

Teresa Rizzo is the author of *Deleuze and Film: A Feminist Introduction* (Continuum Publishing London, 2012). She is an Honorary Associate in the Department of Media and Communications at the University of Sydney. For 5 years she lectured at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. She has published in the areas of film and television in international refereed journals. For over a decade Teresa worked as a television producer in the Australian pay television industry.

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