

Chapter 2

Television and everyday life

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In this chapter we will consider the ways in which television fits in and around the activities of everyday life. The relationship between television and daily living is a complex one, and it is important to remember that although TV has a significant role to play in the household, it is not necessarily the determining factor in the planning of day-to-day activities. When we look at television in the household, we have to consider a variety of different types of household forms and arrangements. The household is not synonymous with the nuclear family, and in this study households consisted of students, single-parent families, the elderly and people living alone, as well as married couples with children. It follows that if British households take a variety of forms, then these people must also conduct their lives in a range of different ways. Television can be part of domestic routine, but what constitutes routine for an elderly couple living in a rural cottage will be quite different from that of a single working woman living in a city bedsit. In this chapter we will focus on how television is part of the domestic space, but we should emphasise that TV fits into and around everyday life, and other factors such as children, work, friends and leisure activities can be as important as, if not more important than, television.

In the many different kinds of household covered by this study, there were a wide range of ways in which TV viewing would be incorporated into the other activities and routines of daily living. In her work on time and family structure, Jennifer Bryce (1987) focused on the way in which the family's organisation of time has a significant effect on the role of television in the home. Her work drew upon Edward Hall's distinction between monochromatic time and polychromatic time (1973), which sees a difference between the structure of schedules and portions of time, and a temporality that is concerned with more than one thing happening at the same time. Bryce writes: 'The sequencing of viewing, its place in the mesh of family activities, reflects a choice, an organisation, a negotiation process which very little is known about' (1987: 123). Paddy Scannell similarly discusses the relationship between what he calls 'clock time' and 'life time', which are the 'continuous flow of day-to-day life' and the 'temporality of the life cycle of living organisms' (1988: 15). For Scannell, each of these events is part of the daily experience of broadcasting, which he sees as a

'slow, glacial movement of institutional time' (ibid.) that long outlasts our own lifetime. In this chapter we shall see how everyday life is structured by a clearly organised schedule, a schedule for domestic activities and for entertainment activities, which combines what Scannell calls 'clock time' and 'institutional' or 'calendrical time'. However, this schedule is not fixed, and we can see how different types of households, such as single parents, students living in shared accommodation, retired people, and parents with children, negotiate changes to this schedule, changes that can be seen to be part of what Scannell calls 'life time'.

The BBC conducted a survey in 1979 that looked at the way in which people organise their daily routines in the household. Nearly 1,400 people kept diaries which recorded the primary and secondary activities for everyone in the household, for every half-hour from five in the morning to two o'clock the next day. Thus, the research showed what people were doing at all times of the day, and whether they categorised listening to the radio and watching television as primary activities. Scannell discusses the implications of this project:

The overall implication to be drawn...is that the axes of difference both for daily activities and the proportion of time spent on them are determined primarily by age and gender, with occupation and marital status as major determining differences between adults before the age of retirement...what emerges from the study is the interlocking of lifetime with the time structures of the day.

(1988: 26)

Thus this BBC study of daily life found that how old you are and what sex you are can be quite significant to the way in which everyday activities are organised in relation to the time of day.

Rogge and Jensen (1988) and Rogge (1991), in their research on West German families and media use, found that everyday family life is built upon a daily and weekly schedule that incorporates routine and change. Rogge identifies two levels of reality, an 'objective media reality, i.e. the significance the media have in everyday family life', and on a different level, 'subjective media reality, i.e. the fact that families structure their everyday lives on the basis of greatly varying ideas' (1991: 178). This research shows that media activities are part of a family routine, and that this can help us to understand people's lifestyle choices, even though different family members perceive the routine differently. According to Rogge, the way that the media can be part of family routine 'defines interpersonal relationships and the emotional and communicative climate in a family' (1991: 179). Certainly, we shall see in this chapter that routine and the management of time can illuminate sites of interaction and family conflict in the household.

An American study of television and everyday life by Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi (1990) used quantitative research methods to ascertain whether

television viewing was an active or passive activity in the home. They considered when people watch television, who they watch television with, and what they choose to do whilst watching television. They found that '63.5 per cent of the time television was being viewed, people reported doing something else as well' (1990: 75), showing that television is part of the domestic space and is often incorporated into other household activities. However, despite this claim, the authors conclude that television viewing is a passive activity and that many people are affected by television in similar ways (1990: 174). They also claim that television viewing is unchallenging and does not involve a great deal of concentration.

It is certainly the case that in this chapter people talk about relaxing in front of the television, particularly at mealtimes, or late evening. However, this study, and other research on television and everyday life, quite clearly show that the way in which television viewing is part of everyday life varies from household to household. Single parents, students living in rented accommodation, people living alone, all report highly individual accounts of how television is part of their daily routine. Therefore, in this chapter we shall show that television viewing patterns are not standardised, and that watching television is not a passive activity.

TELEVISION AND THE ORGANISATION OF TIME

In this study, every diary contained a question asking respondents to write about their typical day. Answers to these questions invariably led to discussion about breakfast, lunch and evening meal times in the household, and to the way in which the family organised their time in relation to work, school, hobbies and television viewing. In this section we will look at how television is fitted around other routine activities, with certain programmes becoming marker points in the day.

It comes as no surprise to find that television is heavily integrated into people's lives and routines. And because broadcast TV has set timetables, and so is the inflexible party in the TV-viewer relationship – leaving video time-shifting aside for the moment – people's everyday activities are shifted, elongated or cut short to accommodate the programmes that they want to watch. This young woman is typical:

Television is an important part of my life. I rarely have it on if there is nothing I want to watch, but if there is a good programme on I love sitting down to watch it with a cup of coffee and a bar of chocolate. Often I time my meals to coincide with something good. I like eating and watching television. I also often iron whilst watching. When I clean I prefer listening to music.

(24-year-old female electronic engineer)

The same diarist would switch on her bedroom TV in the morning for the weather forecast, 'to help me decide what to wear'; this would also, of course, mean that she saw an amount of breakfast TV before and after the nugget of information which she sought.

In some households, some people actually woke up to the sound of the TV: 'On a typical day my brother is woken up by an ITV morning programme which is connected by a time switch. The lodger also watches breakfast TV too' (10-year-old schoolboy). One student described her typical morning as follows:

My mum is normally the first one up as she has to get my sister out of bed. Then the rest of the family appear one by one. We never eat breakfast together as we go off at different times. I like to read the newspaper while I'm eating my breakfast and also watch the television. My mum is around at this time and my Dad is normally doing the breakfast things. My sister has gone off to work and my brother off to school. Television is not so important in the mornings as we never have the time we would like to watch and enjoy it.

(21-year-old female learning support assistant)

Breakfast time is usually very busy for most diarists, and if they do watch TV, it is only for brief periods, or used as background noise whilst other chores are done. In general, 61 per cent of respondents claimed that they did not organise their household chores to fit in with television programmes, compared to 25 per cent who said that they occasionally did this, and only just over 10 per cent who said that they often did this. Afternoons appear to offer slightly more time for relaxation, although this is of course dependent on work, family needs and hobbies. This mother, for example, described the afternoon and early evening as a time when the television would be on, but not necessarily being watched by the family:

I like quiz programmes so I watch *Turnabout* whilst tidying the house. After the children come home from school they sometimes watch TV. If the weather is good they will play in the garden until tea time. They know the characters in *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* but don't really follow the plot. After tea we watch *Emmerdale* or *Coronation Street* depending on the day of the week. We don't watch *EastEnders* as it is so depressing. The children play together running in and out of the front room. If there is a sitcom on before their bedtime they will sit still and watch it. The TV is on early evening, but often just as 'background' when no-one is really watching it.

(30-year-old housewife)

We can see a very similar account being given for early evening schedules from this young woman, who uses TV as a means to relax after she comes in from work:

The first thing I usually do when I get in from work is switch on the TV, this means I catch some of the *6 O'clock News*. Tonight I was home in time to catch all of it. One of the presenters was Anna Ford, my brother and I have got this on-going argument about her – I think her hair is a right state and is getting worse, while he thinks she looks quite good! During *Jonathan Ross* I was cooking my dinner, when I came back into the room my brother had now come in and had switched over to ITV to watch the local news. *Cluedo* was just coming on as I sat down, I'd never seen this programme before. I found it compelling viewing, it was cheap and nasty but I couldn't stop watching it. My brother was complaining all the way through it, but I didn't see him turning over either! At 7.30 it's *Coronation Street* time, it always has been and always will be. I've watched this programme since as long as I can remember. My whole family does. If I know I'm going to be out I ring up my mum and dad to tape it.

(20-year-old female secretary)

Although the television is on for the early evening news and the programmes that follow, this diarist is not really giving the TV her full attention until the essential dose of *Coronation Street*.

Many diarists record eating an evening meal whilst having the TV on. This is an important function of early evening television; it provides a focus point, a marker, for the family evening meal, which often coincides with watching the news, or soaps. Fifteen per cent of diarists claimed that they often made sure their meal time was the same time as a favourite programme, and as many as a further 31 per cent said that they occasionally did this. In terms of watching television (but not a favourite programme) whilst eating a meal, 15 per cent said that they often did this, 17 per cent claimed they did this fairly often, and 28 per cent said they occasionally did this.

This mother uses evening television as a means to relax after a hard day at work:

At 7.30pm the children go to bed and my husband reads them some bedtime stories. At about 8.00pm we sit down, in front of the box and eat our evening meal. This is the first time I relax all day. I really just collapse at this point. During the week we do just tend to watch television in the evenings.

(34-year-old female secretary)

What we can see from these accounts is how families have very busy, structured days, and television has a part to play in this structure. In many ways, the family schedule is a record of the routine of everyday life, and respondents are

quite clear about how regimented this schedule can be. Many diarists chose to write about their schedule in the form of bullet points, giving precise and detailed accounts of what happens where at what time of the day. This schoolboy wrote about his family schedule as follows:

A typical day would be:

6.30 am Mum and Dad get up, and get ready for work. Mum makes everyone's lunches.

7.00 am Dad goes to work and my sister gets up.

8.15 am Mum goes to work.

8.30 am My sister goes to school and I get up.

8.55 am I go to school.

12.05 pm My sister and I arrive home from lunch, with friends.

12.55 pm We go back to school.

3.45 pm I get home, get changed and go out and do my paper-round.

3.50 pm My sister arrives home.

4.30 pm I finish my papers and come back home.

5.10 pm We watch *Home and Away*.

5.30 pm Mum comes home and prepares tea.

6.00 pm We eat our tea.

6.30 pm My sister and I go off into our bedrooms.

7.00 pm Dad arrives home and eats his tea.

9.00 pm We watch the news.

9.30 pm My sister, and usually Mum and Dad go to bed.

10.30 pm I go to bed.

(14-year-old schoolboy)

In this schedule, which is so familiar to the respondent that he finds it the most convenient way to describe his day, particular TV programmes such as the news and *Home and Away* provide fixed marker points in the day, reliable parts of the routine which will be watched, of course, for their own value, but which also mark transitions from one stage of the day to the next – the Australian soap, for example, confirming that the long, busy phase of school and a newspaper delivery round have come to a close, and the more relaxing early evening period had begun. A similar theme is illustrated in the following extract by a working man who records the family's daily schedule from breakfast to bedtime:

I work. I leave home at 7.30am, return at 4.15pm. My two sons go to school at 10 to 9 and return at 3.30pm. Their mother takes them to and from school. She and the boys have *TV AM* on while getting ready for school and having breakfast, it goes on at about 7am. *This Morning* is usually on while housework and other things are done; and attention is paid to interesting items. *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are watched by her on their first showing of the day [lunchtime]. *Country Practice* is videoed for her and I to watch in the evening. If she goes shopping in the morning then *This Morning* will be videoed and scanned for interesting items later. Washing and ironing may be done in the evenings, especially if my wife has been shopping, visiting or gardening. So although *Emmerdale* and *Coronation Street* will be on, no great attention need be paid to them. I am an Open University student so I study from 6.30pm to 9pm virtually every evening. Most of my viewing is programmes recorded earlier or from previous days. *Brookside* is about the only 'live' transmission I watch during the evening. I watch my recordings from 9pm. I do watch *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, though at their second showings during the evening meal with the rest of the family. Any videoed programmes will be seen between 9pm and 10.30pm when we go to bed.

(34-year-old male bank clerk)

Although this diarist was at work and therefore would not witness his wife's activities at first hand, he still felt able to give a detailed breakdown of her daily routine. In many ways, certain television programmes helped him to do this. *This Morning* is a case in point: this diarist could tell whether his wife had stayed at home, or gone out by her *This Morning* consumption pattern. The way in which soaps feature as part of a family routine is something that is discussed later on in this chapter. What is interesting here is that families are engaged in a pattern of work and leisure time that is very regimented – albeit in an unwritten and unenforced way – and it is news and soaps, in particular, that punctuate that day.

This woman, aged 69, provides a typical example of the way an elderly single person's day can also be punctuated and in some ways shaped by media 'events':

I am a pensioner and I live alone so I find my TV set is a vital piece of household equipment, although my radio is a close second. Wednesday (today) has been a typical day in my life. In the morning I went out and purchased my morning newspaper (*Daily Mirror*), read it over breakfast and did both crosswords. Then switched on TV, watched *Gloria Live* then switched over to ITV for *The Time and the Place*. Then switched off and did housework until lunchtime. Over lunch I listened to Radio City for phone in programme. Went out shopping in the afternoon, came back late afternoon and watched Parliament and then *Fifteen to One* whilst having a cup of tea. Then I prepared evening meal which I had whilst I read local evening newspaper. After washing up I settled down to evening viewing and knitting. Made a few phone calls in mid evening and read a few chapters of library book during slack period on TV.

(69-year-old retired female football pools clerk)

The way in which other activities – reading and phone calls, here – are brought into play *only because* TV output has fallen below a certain appeal threshold reflects the power of TV schedules to alter the character of an evening – when fed, of course, through the audience member's own perceptions and choices as to what they think will be worth watching. Whilst good TV cannot *really* hold viewers hostage, there is a balancing act that takes place between domestic activities and watching television, with different viewers being more or less likely to let the balance swing in favour of TV.

Individual and family schedules are not fixed, and vary according to the time of day, week and season. This mother summed it up when she wrote:

I'm a single parent so I spend most evenings watching television. We always watch *TV AM* in the morning, then the boys go off to school and the childminder whilst I go to college. I don't usually watch TV during the day except weekends and holidays. We all watch TV more in the winter than the light summer nights because we would all rather do other things like gardening, visiting, playing and socialising.

(32-year-old mother)

At the weekend, television can be used as a babysitter and as an excuse for staying in bed a little longer:

Saturday and Sunday morning children's TV keeps daughter happy while I stay in bed an hour or so longer than weekdays, though she usually draws or paints while it's on. Husband sleeps all morning (lucky sod) while I do housework.

(36-year-old female archaeozoologist)

As we will see in chapter eight, employed men do generally get away with avoiding housework even when their female partners are employed too – this woman's husband clearly manages to have more relaxing weekends than she does. Weekends generally are seen as a less pressured time, when the respondents felt able to watch programmes which they would not watch on their more time-conscious weekdays:

During the week, the television is only put on when someone is definitely going to sit and watch a programme. Whilst this is also true at weekends, the set is more likely to be left on for longer and [the family] all watch programmes which we would probably not watch if they were shown in the week.

(18-year-old female student)

Some of our diarists might argue that broadcasters have taken advantage of this weekend audience leniency, as they considered Saturday TV schedules to be less than classy: 'Faced with the dreaded prospect of being in on a Saturday night I usually get in a video, a bottle of wine and a friend!' (18-year-old female administrative assistant). Some people took the precaution of ensuring they would be too busy to have to face this torment: 'Most weekends we are all out, so Saturday TV is not usually watched – probably not a bad thing, since it always seems to be inconsequential drivel' (19-year-old male personnel assistant).

Without wanting to contribute to stereotypes of 'British' concerns, it is worth remembering that a whole range of everyday factors – such as the activity of partners and friends, and time needed for voluntary work or hobbies – are linked in with the *weather*, which is an important factor in deciding how to spend leisure time. These diarists explain:

Generally, we do not watch television during the day, except on really miserable winter afternoons, when we might run one of the stored videos.

(70-year-old retired male company director)

You chose a bad day for TV watching. At 8 am the sun was warm, the sky blue and the sea turquoise, the most summery morning of the year, and not one to keep us glued to the box.

(68-year-old retired man)

Summer evenings are spent gardening mainly as we have a very large garden growing all our vegetables. With the excess veg and fruit make jams, chutneys, sauces and of course freeze lots for the winter. Winter evenings we spend watching TV – we watch a great deal then. I love having the TV in the kitchen, as I can watch and listen while preparing meals etc. and I never listen to the radio now.

(38-year-old housewife)

Whilst some diarists across the whole age spectrum indicated that they might do other things at the same time as watching TV, it was working-age adults in particular who would find other things to do whilst the television was on, particularly in the winter months. As the previous diarist indicates, for some homemakers, the set was switched on as an accompaniment to household chores, such as cooking, which were the main priority. Other working people, such as this teacher, also seemed to feel that they should simultaneously do something more like work whilst also enjoying TV for leisure: 'All of us are likely to do something else while watching, e.g. read, do homework, mark books, sleep, eat, etc' (42-year-old male teacher).

We have seen in this section that people organise their time according to a variety of different factors. However, the way in which diarists describe their day-to-day activities suggests that some points in the day, such as breakfast, or evening meals, are closely bound up with certain television programmes. The repetition of phrases such as 'I eat my tea whilst watching *Neighbours*', or 'we watch the news before going to bed', suggests that family schedules are often organised around television schedules. Indeed, in the following section, we see how *Neighbours* has often installed itself as a regular feature of the day for the whole family.

Everyday routines and *Neighbours* 'addiction'

For many diarists – and a great proportion of those who were at home at the right time(s) of day – the Australian daily soap *Neighbours* was a fixed marker-point in their daily routine. It could be an inescapable accompaniment to lunch, or the juncture at which afternoon slipped into early evening. Partly as a consequence of canny scheduling by the broadcaster (BBC1), *Neighbours* had become an integral part of the day. *Home and Away*, ITV's matching (but mildly more 'realistic') serial, was watched just as avidly by some, but was ignored by others.

A very noticeable aspect of diarists' writings about *Neighbours* was that, wholly unprompted, many would say that they were 'addicted' to it. This was taken seriously by some, and mentioned quite casually by others. It stands out in particular because, across the whole study, respondents did not say they were 'addicted' to anything else, and the language of 'addiction' was quite absent elsewhere (leaving aside a sparse handful of references showing no pattern).¹

This respondent, whilst self-consciously using a clutch of addiction terms and metaphors, makes clear the concern:

When I did get home I walked straight into the living room, collapsed into the nearest chair and watched the last few minutes of *Neighbours*. This was as badly acted, stereotyped and predictable as ever, but unfortunately still as addictive. I have to admit, I'm hooked! It's a serious habit but not as bad as it could be: I'm only on one a day at the moment! I stopped once, I got

really annoyed with Beverley and went cold turkey, but I couldn't keep it up and I'm hooked again now as I ever was. Maybe one day they'll start up rehabilitation centres to get people off soap operas!!!

(17-year-old female student)

Another young woman had similar symptoms:

It would be boring and repetitive to explain why I watch *Neighbours* except to say it is an infectious disease that has affected a large proportion of the population.

(18-year-old female administrative assistant)

Even those who had managed to shake off their compulsion could become trapped again by just a sniff of the stuff:

You could say I was addicted to [*Neighbours*], but I can't explain why! I did stop watching it for a while when I came down to London, but I saw a clip of one programme one night and I became hooked again!

(20-year-old female secretary)

Another student described teatime *Neighbours* as 'an unfortunate habit'. One 29-year-old office clerk had become 'addicted' during maternity leave and was missing the show now that her son was older and she was back at work. A 16-year-old school pupil tried to excuse her compulsion by emphasising the ironic distance between herself and the text: 'It is a little escape from reality and I find *Neighbours* funny in a kind of stupid way, i.e. I laugh at it'. A 12-year-old girl also explained that the show 'seems familiar to me, and I want to know what happens next'. Although she felt that the predictability of the plot could be both laughable and annoying, 'the good thing about *Neighbours* is that it's not depressing and I hate depressing programmes'.

But the serial's appeal was not limited to young people. Perhaps surprisingly, older viewers did not worry about its 'addictive' qualities and would list it as one of their favourite programmes, whereas younger viewers, whilst lapping it up, would not actually count it as a favourite show. Some diarists, such as this retired school head, would nevertheless feel compelled to indicate that they were well aware of the drama's failings:

Neighbours: Ramsey Street where people do not die, they go to Adelaide or Perth or Brisbane, New Zealand even. Family members are disappeared, but diverse orphans and drop-outs arrive to fill the gaps. The only 'plot' line is trust, or lack of it, between couples, and farewells to the folk opting out and welcomes to the adopted...Dross – but addictive.

(58-year-old retired female headteacher)

This man, however, was appalled by his teenage offsprings' interest in the soap, again equating it with a drug:

They insist on watching *Neighbours*. I *ignore* it. I could not tell you the name of one character. I think viewers absorb it like valium. A sort of tranquiliser.

(53-year-old male single parent)

So why was *Neighbours* singled out as an addictive product – something so alluring that having a negative view of the show didn't seem to stop people watching it? Its *regularity* was certainly important – addicts could get a 'hit' (or two) every day; coupled with the *timing* and the *cliffhanger*, which meant that if you'd watched one episode with a meal or having just come back from school or work, you would be likely to watch it the next day just to 'see what happened' (...and the next day, and so on). The 12-year-old diarist quoted above identifies two other important elements. First is the *familiarity* and *security* of the world which the characters inhabit – a generally moral universe where no good comes of bad deeds, and threats to happy living are normally minor and quickly resolved. Second is the simply-put view that the show is 'not depressing'; rather, it offers *attractive* characters in a setting where the sun always shines, where everyone is (suspiciously) white and middle class, and there is no crime except for speedily sorted plot-related incidents. (The London-based *EastEnders*, in contrast, was the soap most often seen as 'depressing'.) The regular weekday delivery of the happy *Neighbours* package in 22-minute chunks kept the attention of many diarists throughout the five years of this study.

Planning viewing

The extent to which people's TV viewing is planned, rather than random or based on spontaneous channel-hopping, has traditionally been somewhat difficult for research to pick up correctly – because a lot of people know what is going to be on, *without* having to carefully scan through listings magazines with a highlighter pen, which is the kind of more obvious behaviour that research is able to pick up. In this study, respondents reported that around half of the time, the television would be on because they had read or heard about a programme in advance (58 per cent of respondents said that this was often or fairly often the case, with only 2 per cent saying that they never had a show on because they had read or heard about it). Two-thirds of the time the TV would be on for an already-familiar programme. Word of mouth, trailers, mentions of TV highlights in magazines and newspapers, and in particular what they had seen on the same day of the previous week, all helped people to have quite firm ideas of what they wanted to watch, even where their more obvious behaviour might have led researchers to assume that they hadn't got a clue.

Some people, of course, *don't* have a clue, as this diarist living in a student household was happy to admit:

As we often do not buy a newspaper we don't know what will be on TV in the evening. We never plan our evening around TV, most of us try and watch *Neighbours* either at lunch or tea-time. One girl watches *Twin Peaks* and makes a conscious attempt to. Otherwise the TV is only turned on when we have nothing better to do. It is not such a focal point in the house as the fridge!

(21-year-old female student)

Clearly, the lack of knowledge as to what would be on television here is linked to a lack of interest in TV-viewing as a leisure activity anyway. Other people could be much more conscientious, such as this man who, having lost his job as a college computer technician, had come to rely on television for daily diversion:

In the last 2 years I've bought a listing magazine religiously every week and use it, normally the night before, to plan a day's viewing. The programmes I circle, in black ink, I usually watch. This guide lives next to my bed and is an aide-memoire but sometimes gets forgotten – and so I might miss an item. The video recorder sometimes helps but I'll go out and forget. Also, I still have the occasional lapse with 24 hour clock and mess up a recording.

(34-year-old unemployed man)

The TV listings, kept by the bed, are clearly important in this man's everyday life, although the fact that he uses them to watch or set the video for *specific* programmes – and the fact that he sometimes forgets – shows that he doesn't have a wholly TV-dominated life. Quite a number of others 'scoured' the listings just as carefully, and were often also the unemployed diarists.

None of all this [becoming a grandfather, losing a step-son] has had any effect upon the manner in which I watch television. I preplan for the week using the *Radio Times*, ringing in pen each days' programmes that might interest me when the time comes.

(59-year-old retired male firefighter)

Some had particular psychological reasons for being fastidious about their TV planning. The following respondent, for example, managed to ward off feelings of guilt for watching quite an amount of TV, as he was able to reassure himself that he was only watching shows which he had carefully marked in the listings in advance. As his viewing decisions were therefore documented as the

products of prior research and planning, he would not feel that he was watching too much, or too casually:

By careful programme planning marking paper (*S[unday] Times* weekly TV prog guide) as a 'must' or 'want to see' I avoid guilt. For example we have much enjoyed the repeat screening of *The Village* (Tuesdays at 5.30 on BBC2) having completely missed it on the first showing – although unless it's a particular old film we avoid TV till 6pm.

(68-year-old semi-retired male social work adviser)

(The latter part of this quote, of course, also reflects this man's anxiety about not being seen to have allowed television to 'take over'.) In a similar vein, this woman used the 'family viewing' orientation of the programme descriptions in *Radio Times* to weed out programmes which she feared might potentially offend her, as she mentioned when asked about 'bad language' on TV:

I don't seem to hear bad language in the programmes I see, but I am very choosy in what I watch. I go through the *Radio Times* with a 'fine tooth comb' as soon as I buy it. I mark everything I want and read the resume of the programmes very carefully, and then decide if I shall be watching them.

(66-year-old retired female nurse)

Others, unsurprisingly, used newspaper TV pages to make their choices, and for some the very act of *reading the listings* in the morning was itself part of their daily routine. Here, for example, the morning newspaper would provide the basis of preliminary discussions which would subsequently be acted upon or rejected at the critical points much later in the day.

When my husband and I get the newspaper each morning we decide what we really want to watch, what we will video and programmes that we might like if we have time. I am 67 and my husband is 73. Sometimes we are prejudiced and miss a good programme which others tell us about. Therefore one of the many things I like about the BBC is they do repeat programmes – even ad infinitum.

(67-year-old retired female deputy manager)

Others took things a bit more casually – although reading in the *morning* what would be on in the *evening* was usual.

Second mug of tea [in the morning] is time to sit down and look at *Daily Mail* TV programme page for quick glance to see what's on today – I don't get weekly magazine and don't look ahead – and do the crossword.

(65-year-old retired male GP)

As may be apparent from these examples, those who planned their viewing most carefully were the retired. Those who were working, or young, had a necessarily more hurried approach to culling as much information as they needed from TV listings, combined with the acquired knowledge referred to at the beginning of this section: people would 'just know' that their favourite soap was in its regular slot, that *NYPD Blue* was Mondays at 10.00, or that the decent comedy was on a particular channel on Friday evening. Some were prompted to grab the listings page, supplement or magazine only when an anticipated show failed to appear.

HOUSEHOLD LIFE AND TELEVISION

As well as being built into the lives of individuals, television is integrated into the households in which they live – physically, as a point of focus in the arrangement of one or more rooms, but more importantly, *socially*, as a locus of attention and social interaction. Ninety per cent of respondents had a TV in the living area, 8 per cent had a TV in the dining room, and 19 per cent had a TV in the kitchen. In bedrooms, 36 per cent of adult respondents (aged 18-plus) had one bedroom TV, and in a further 10 per cent of households two adult bedrooms included a TV (mainly students, and people with a lot of TVs). Seven per cent of homes had one TV set in a child or teenager's bedroom, and a further 4 per cent of households had two TVs in such bedrooms. Overall, then, the majority of respondents in this study watched TV in the main living area, whilst the number of TVs in children and teenager's bedrooms was relatively small.²

Television is often assigned a kind of everyday priority which means that other interactions take place around and through the watching of it. This idea is illustrated very succinctly here:

I quite enjoyed the film *Dragonslayer*, despite its predictability. It's the sort of film you can argue with your father through and still keep up with the storyline.

(18-year-old female clerical assistant)

The centrality of television to her family's social life is considered in a little more depth by this young woman studying for A-Levels:

Recently *Family Matters* spent their programme discussing the influence of TV on family life. They took a TV away from a family who generally watched it all the time, and gave it to a family without a TV. This was interesting in that the family who had never had a TV found that it disrupted the activities they used to do together, and there was a loss of communication between family members. The family who were addicted to

TV had problems adjusting, but eventually found they became closer and spent more time together.

This programme...made me consider the effect no TV would have in my family. At the moment we generally get on well together, probably due to the fact that we spend a lot of time watching TV and not talking. Although the TV isn't on all day I think that it is a distraction that stops people from making an effort to find things to amuse themselves with.

(17-year-old female sixth-form student)

Whilst the collective focus on TV is seen as a problem here, others, such as this middle-aged parent, would see their family's joint viewing as an impressive show of unity:

The two boys go out more often than we do as parents but we all enjoy to sit down and watch some television together in the evenings especially after our meals.

(49-year-old male management lecturer)

In other households, less happy domestic relationships were intertwined with media use in more complex ways.

My husband is manic depressive and has been for 30 years. However he hit a period of very severe stress last year and his mania shot off the 'Richter' scale. So much so that I moved out for 3 months. He is now at the bottom end and suicidal. These events inevitably affect TV viewing. The grandchildren have introduced me to videos I would not have otherwise found such as *Pingu* (delightful!). The period away from home caused me to rely heavily on TV as a companion and shock absorber. Periods of mania usually mean I am running around picking up the pieces with no time for TV. Periods of depression mean he sits at home slumped in front of hours of TV – mainly sport. However, we have managed to watch several drama series together and become involved with the story lines, e.g. *Band of Gold*, *She's Out*, *Peak Practice*, *Casualty* etc.

(58-year-old female administrator)

In this situation, both adults at certain times sought refuge and comfort in TV-viewing, whilst at others their domestic chaos meant that television was cut out entirely. Naturally, the households in this study do not divide simply into the conventional and the troubled; this diarist, for example, had also written elsewhere, 'I try to take in the news headlines and weather forecast to know if I need to bring in my plants against a frost', which is remarkable only because it sounds so everyday, routine and 'settled'.

As well as negotiations with partners – of which more later – other relatives could have an impact on the household and its viewing choices.

Over the past nine months I have had my sister and brother-in-law living with me. This has altered the programmes I've watched as my sister does not like sitcoms as I do; she likes chat shows which I don't and she doesn't like sports programmes which her husband and I do. There has obviously been compromise all round. As a result of 9 months conditioning I have become interested in *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*. I still avoid the *Oprah Winfrey Show* etc and still watch any sport apart from wrestling.

(69-year-old retired female headteacher)

It is also worth mentioning that it was not only youngsters who had their viewing sometimes limited by parental censure:

No line drawn for our viewing [sex or violence or swearing], excepting the visits of my elderly mother-in-law (religious and moralistic) – so we have no problems about this most times.

(63-year-old retired male university teacher)

It should be remembered that households today take a variety of forms. As well as 'conventional' families there are heterosexual and homosexual couples, single parents, people living alone, and groups of friends living together. The latter form is becoming increasingly common as, with the expansion of further and higher education in Britain, there are more student households. (In 1982, there were 555,000 full-time students in UK higher education; by 1991 this figure was 747,000, and by 1996 it had risen to 1,182,000 (*Social Trends* 1998).) Unsurprisingly, the students in this study generally had a quite different relationship with television from those with more 'settled' lives at school, work or in retirement. Students' TV-watching could often be less directed, as they did not always have newspapers or TV guides, and viewing had to be taken less seriously since it would often be cast aside in favour of a trip to the pub or, to be fair, study. At the same time, *particular* programmes (such as soaps, or *The Simpsons* or, in the early 1990s, *Twin Peaks*) or groups of shows (such as the channel-hop between Channel Four and BBC2 on Friday evening for comedies) could become the focus of communal viewing events, coordinated with meals, drinks or snacks. This student, for example, in her third year of study at Manchester University in 1995, here recalls her first year:

There were eight of us altogether in the house, and we had one TV in the lounge, and so this involved some degree of compromise in who watched what and when, but in general we had similar taste and especially for *Coronation Street* and *Brookside*, and we made sure our dinner was ready at about 7.25pm so we were all watching together. Thursday nights were also a big house TV night as we watched *Absolutely Fabulous* and Ben Elton with a few bottles of wine and crisps/choc etc. During this year, I would say that TV became a 'social event'!

(22-year-old female student)

Another example of a mixed household, where the student diarist is a lodger, provides some insight into other ways in which television gets used in and around everyday living:

I share a house with a landlady, who is a teacher and watches very little television herself. She will pop her head round the door and see if I am watching anything literary or interesting and to keep up generally at school. Thus her tutor group was amazed when she knew all about *Twin Peaks* although she won't watch it with me. My claims to the telly are recognised as sacrosanct on Tuesday evenings for *Twin Peaks* plus *Jeeves and Wooster* on Sunday nights, both of which S. will watch with me if she is in. S. is a Spanish assistant and the third member of the household....The television is important to unwind with, but all of us use books, tapes, radio and going out to stave off the onset of couch potato type malaises. [...The landlady] never checks the television listings thus the news is the only programme she can be sure of seeing.

(19-year-old female student)

Here we see TV being used to make links between people – the teacher gaining credibility with her pupils, and giving her an excuse to 'check in' with her lodger, and the diarist getting to spend time with her Spanish housemate – and imposing demands on the household, with the lounge becoming protected space on Sundays and Tuesdays. At the same time, like many across the age spectrum, these people make some effort to keep TV and its associated 'couch potato type malaises' at bay – although this may often be half-hearted.

Household TV arrangements and arguments

As we have established that television is, at the very least, a *catalyst* for forms of domestic organisation of time and space – or, to be more emphatic, often a *primary determining factor* in how households organise their internal geography and everyday timetables – it is no surprise to find cases where conflict occurs between the participants in these delicately organised social worlds. Disagreements may concern choices of broadcast *content*, or just sheer *quantity* of viewing and differences of opinion as to whether the set should be on or not in shared living spaces.

The Audience Tracking Study very clearly suggests, depressingly perhaps, that once couples have got through an all-forgiving 'honeymoon' period, they cannot help but get annoyed with their partner's mystifying or ill-timed TV choices. For some, these discrepancies did not develop into confrontation, but were forcefully breezed through with the attitude that others could 'like it or lump it':

As to TV I don't really watch as much as I used to do. When daytime TV started I used to watch a lot more but now I don't bother to find out if it is any good. I do still watch a lot of news and current affairs programmes, this annoys my husband unfortunately, but he doesn't have to stay in the same room.

(61-year-old farmer's wife)

Television content, perhaps by virtue of being temporary, fleeting, up to date and glamorously packaged, can seem to take priority, for some, over other more dependably unchanging aspects of a household – like a spouse. In another relatively mild, everyday example, the suppressed conflict has little to do with what is *on* television, but is about end-of-the-day chores versus the luxury of television:

Late Show BBC2: watched this with only half attention, as I was writing this diary. Found the main interview...a bit long winded/boring. (Husband dozed off.) Something on psychotherapy...would have interested me – but husband was 'going on' about clearing up and going to bed. Something about Wren's churches, with some pleasant choral music was interrupted by husband, wanting me to call cat in (we have to do this or they get into fights). Felt pressurised – didn't watch anymore, switched off at close-down.

(47-year-old female part-time lecturer)

In other households, the arguments about TV could be more fraught. This retired couple had to purchase a second set to avoid regular quarrels – although the female diarist feels some (more subdued) resentment about being the one who has to leave the comfortable lounge to watch the small monochrome set, a tension which runs through her diaries.

During the winter we sometimes watch TV in the afternoons, he watches sport, I occasionally watch an old film. We used to argue about which programmes we wanted, especially since we both retired but now that we have two sets we agree to differ, although one is only a small black and white.

(62-year-old retired female teacher)

For the same couple, their different views of TV could produce other irritations too – for example, 'If we have visitors I prefer to switch it off, but am overruled'. Here, the diarist's feeling that TV could detract from a social situation was rejected by her husband – it is not that this woman did not like television. Indeed, two years later, in 1993, she admitted, 'I don't let it rule my life, but I do miss it on holiday'. In 1995, she wrote, 'There is much to be said for TV...but I think it has ruined my social life'.

Other couples in the study would argue about television, particularly those at home a lot, for whom television had become more important – such as the 72-year-old retired woman whose husband ‘hates snooker, racing [and] tennis’, ‘which caused disputes, although she had limited scope for revenge, as ‘I like most of his tastes’. But in one household, one woman’s substantial diet of TV shows had led to more serious consequences – her love of television had had a substantial impact upon her marriage, apparently, with the TV set being named as a third party in their divorce proceedings:

Apart from my college course, I watch less TV (particularly soaps) due to the collapse of my marriage in ‘94. I lost interest in TV, in general, and spent most of my time visiting friends or talking to them on the ‘phone. One of the reasons for the collapse was cited as my TV addiction, so once we decided to ‘have another go’, this was one area I had to make a positive effort in.

(37-year-old female school catering assistant)

A case of formally identified ‘TV addiction’ is worthy of closer inspection, and the Audience Tracking Study diaries, which start in 1991, provide relevant ‘evidence’ on this case. There are, certainly, some elements which could cheekily be used here – this woman would run home from work in order to catch all of *Knots Landing*, for example, and was concerned about her kids watching all of *Children’s BBC* every day only because that meant they were neglecting the delights of the commercial channel, ITV. However, this busy part-time working mother of two near-teenage children did not truly have *time* to be a proper TV ‘addict’. Housework or shopping would precede the two-and-a-half hours of non-stop ‘hard manual work’ in a school kitchen; then there would not be much afternoon left – for chores or TV – before the children came home from school, on some days needing travel and support to go swimming, horse-riding or to Brownies. After early evening, ‘taken-up with preparing tea, cooking it, eating it and then clearing up’, there would not be that much time left for TV. Because of shift-work, her husband certainly watched *less* television, although the diarist would ‘sometimes have to tape episodes of a series or a film he particularly wants to see, or a boxing match’. The family did not have much disposable income and this meant that the woman of the household, in particular, was left at home for many long evenings.

I would say that the television is very important in our family for entertainment and relaxation, even if there is nothing on the 4 channels we wanted to see we would probably watch a video – either rented or bought. I go out very rarely and when I do it is usually to see a film either with my husband or a friend. My husband goes out to the pub at least once a week, but it’s very difficult to get a baby-sitter, so we tend to go out together only on special occasions e.g. birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

(as above, aged 33 in 1991)

Given this context, the accusation of TV addiction seems rather an extreme interpretation. In any case, over the five years of the study, major changes would occur. After the marriage came to an end, as mentioned above, the diarist became a full-time student:

I now watch far less TV due to college assignments. I have also taken on voluntary work, which has reduced the amount of TV I can see. I still watch TV at the same time, from early evening onwards, but I am more discerning in my viewing habits. Due to the course I am undertaking and my volunteer work, I now watch different programmes, usually to do with sociological programmes.

(as above, aged 37 in 1995)

She still found all types of television valuable, however – not least as a babysitter for the children, as she struggled to complete her studies.

TV is less important to me, but it brings in cheap entertainment...I quite often gain information from it and I am also grateful because it occupies my children.

(as above, aged 38 in 1996)

This diarist *was* careful about what she let her children see on TV, but did not generally find this to be a problem. Other respondents, as we will see below, had less happy experiences of television in the family household.

You just don’t understand: parents versus children, mum versus dad

Television could be the source of conflicts between children and their parents, and between one parent and the other as they disagreed over what their offspring could watch. Whilst we might expect the basis of both types of conflict to be ‘moral’ issues of what the kids might be ‘allowed’ to watch, they were just as frequently timetabling issues or questions of whether the children ‘deserved’ to watch a certain amount of TV, depending on whether homework and/or chores had been completed.

In this example, there was little problem getting the children to do their homework, but this seemed to strengthen their hand as they demanded particular programmes:

My two children go to school. They go out occasionally with friends but are not great mixers. Our lack of social life probably affects them and, arguably, there is a genetic factor involved also. They like working on homework and listening to ‘pop’ in their own rooms. They get home about 4pm. Programmes they do like they ‘must’ watch and arguments

occur which aren't always resolved by having a spare TV. Sometimes bargains have to be struck beforehand in order to avoid arguments which, sometimes, are very heated.

(57-year-old retired man)

This diarist, permanently disabled, resented having bad TV imposed on him by his children – although he was, to an extent, resigned to it. Being 'not able to get around much', escape was a little more difficult. For example, in the same diary he wrote: 'The rest of the family watch *Home and Away* at 6.15pm. It's on at the moment. I hate it but find myself involved in spite of myself sometimes.' Once his son had left home for university in 1992, the diarist found himself the only man in the household – leading to another potential problem in the family home:

I feel I should not watch programmes containing nude or semi-nude young females. I'm too old for a start. My wife and daughter don't like me watching, so I don't or rarely do, eg *Baywatch*, *The Clothes Show*, films containing sexuality and nudity.

(as above, aged 62, 1996)

In any case, this man preferred serious, factual programmes and current affairs shows (although he was suspicious of them). He writes: 'Paradoxically, TV both helps me to take my mind off depressing issues of the day both in my private life and generally; and provides much of the information which depresses me.'

Conflict would develop *between* parents where one of them was more concerned than the other about the effects of television on their children, or their exposure to certain kinds of programme.

Their father is far more relaxed than me about what they [children aged 13 and 10] watch and how much (causing friction between us, I have to admit!) so they're often in front of the box once homework and music practice is done – or before they start, depending on negotiations.

(45-year-old female teacher)

A bedroom TV for the offspring would naturally ease these tensions, as long as parents were willing to surrender their direct control over what would be seen. It was certainly a happy solution for this teenager:

Having my own TV means that I generally don't watch with the rest of my family, especially since my parents have a totally opposite opinion of what 'good' TV is.

(17-year-old female sixth-form student)

The much-voiced public concern about young people having television sets in their own rooms is, of course, that they may see unsavoury 'late-night' material without parental supervision. This fear was reflected quite strongly in this study, but amongst the over-60s only – it would seem that the generation of grandparents are more troubled by this (somewhat mythic) prospect than are the parents of today's teenagers. 'Teenagers have television sets in their bedrooms now – so who knows what they are watching', a 75-year-old retired supermarket manager complained, typically, whilst an ex-nurse aged 66 noted that 'Parents don't seem aware of when [their children] are watching regrettably' – although it is unclear how she 'knew' this. In fact, those diarists' children who had bedroom TVs were of the kind of mid-teen age where their parents had become more relaxed about viewing restrictions anyway, and some, furthermore, were not allowed to have their sets on beyond their official 'bed-time'.

Whilst the older respondents seemed to believe that *most* children have a TV in their bedroom – 'How many kids don't have TV in their bedroom these days?', a 72-year-old man asked rhetorically – in fact, as we have already seen in this study, it was a minority who did. More importantly, perhaps, the whole idea that TV programmes shown after 11pm are the particularly violent or pornographic ones is, of course, mistaken. The small audiences at these times are usually treated to the more 'serious' programming which populist broadcasters have shunted back in the schedules to make way for something more 'sexy' in the 9–11pm slot, or, later still, to cheap airwave-fillers of limited appeal. As the 17 year old quoted above notes:

Apart from *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* I generally watch a lot of TV late evenings, and being a near-insomniac I do see a lot of the late programmes, which I'm generally not too impressed with. Apart from the music programmes there isn't really any compelling viewing post 1a.m.

(17-year-old female sixth-form student, as above)

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there were some situations where parents would quite deliberately seek harmony with their children by using communal TV viewing as a 'bonding' exercise. This separated academic father, for example, has his own viewing patterns determined by whether his children are visiting or not.

Actually, I read a lot! And, to be fair, I watch more TV than before – mainly to be sociable with my daughter. I watch a lot less when the children are with their mother.

(45-year-old male lecturer)

Some families, indeed, were drawn together by their collective enjoyment of an evening's viewing, as this young man, who lived with his parents, notes:

I think we watch TV in quite a 'healthy' way – often talking about it and discussing after watching it. We bounce ideas off each other. It's a nice way to watch TV...We're a close family and we tend to muck in together – that includes watching TV.

(18-year-old male sixth-form student)

Although this diarist later admits 'I sometimes prefer to watch the box in solitude and silence...without any distractions', most of the evidence about the role of TV in parent-child interactions, to be fair, involved more pleasure than pain. Indeed, parents whose children left home during the course of this study noted that, although they had 'regained' control over what was watched, they missed watching programmes aimed at a younger generation in the company of their children.

Other everyday activities

In a study which focuses on the role of television in everyday life, it is important not to forget that people have a range of other ways of spending time. Our diarists spent a lot of time with friends, and talking with their partners and families – not the kind of activity which is necessarily defined as 'doing' anything in particular, but which is an extremely important part of everyday life nonetheless. To give a flavour of the wide variety of activities which people engaged in rather than watching TV, we compiled some quotes about our diarists' hobbies – although this can actually be seen as a mistake, since the notion of having a 'hobby' is rather dated, and tends to exclude popular contemporary leisure activities such as going to pubs and clubs. As one respondent in his twenties commented,

I don't have 'hobbies' as such. I think of them as something a bit boring that you do on your own. At school you had to make up that you had a hobby, like stamp collecting, because teachers would always ask about it. I just work, sleep, eat, see my friends, talk...and, yes, watch TV.

Despite this, our sample were not short of hobbies, and these are worth detailing since they show the variety of how people choose to spend their time in and around the household. Indoor hobbyists included the unemployed 19-year-old woman who spent hours on entering competitions ('a lot of spare time is spent researching and inventing slogans'); two different retired people who had taken up painting as a consequence of 'learn to paint' shows on daytime TV (one woman clearly delighted that she'd bought the 'artist's kit' and the book related to The Learning Channel's *Joy of Painting*); a 66-year-old woman who had become fascinated by rubber stamping ('It is gaining interest...You can make lovely personalised cards'); and a man in his early sixties who had read 340 books on 'the lives and histories of American presidents'.

Some retired people were happy to take up quite unsterotypical hobbies – such as this retired man:

Yes, looking round a supermarket book and paper shop picked up a freebie cross stitch rabbit bookmark to do. Since doing it I have got into it in a big way. I have done some big cross stitch pictures. As one just 9' × 6' can take up to 3 months to do.

(61-year-old retired male repair mason)

Rather more active hobbyists included the woman in her mid-thirties who took her mind off her fish filleting job by swimming with a disabled child as his helper ('I enjoy that very much'), and the 71-year-old retired man whose hobbies included 'dinghy fishing, mountain walking, golf, gardening, photography and the wretched *Telegraph* crossword'. Another older man, who had been forced into a more active lifestyle by his doctor, had found a way to make it more interesting:

Three years ago I contracted circulation problems which necessitated my having to walk a great deal. Since then I have walked more than 300 miles around [a large local] park. To give myself something to think about I bought myself a camera and spent a deal of money and effort learning how not to waste film. I now watch camera programmes and have made some happy snaps looking for subjects which before I never saw as subjects for photography such as the November sun through fog, spiders' webs in the weather, and raindrops hanging on bare branches.

(78-year-old retired male engineer)

Other diverse hobbies included editing the quarterly church magazine (76-year-old retired male chemist), recording books and articles 'onto tape for blind friends overseas' (76-year-old retired male airline official), and making camcorder videos (three retired men – see chapter six). Many diarists enjoyed gardening, and some others who couldn't – or could no longer – do gardening enjoyed seeing gardens on TV:

Exactly 12 months ago I took an allotment and the extra digging and cultivating has radically changed my TV viewing.

(59-year-old retired male industrial chemist)

I like to watch the gardening programmes, especially when they are about a specific garden. As I am unable to walk far or in fact go out alone I am not able to visit any of these lovely gardens nor can I drive. But there's a lot of pleasure to be had from looking at gardens on TV.

(65-year-old housewife)

Equally, the loss of gardening opportunities could lead to a greater interest in TV.

When I wrote my first diary in May 1991 [four years ago], we had just moved to our flat from a large house. TV has become more important to me because we no longer have a garden so now the time I spent in the garden is used watching TV. In the winter I do not find any difference but in the Spring and Summer I do.

(52-year-old female finance collector)

Three or four per cent of the diarists were trying to write other texts; indeed, taking part in this study may have created or reinforced writing ambitions. These ranged from a 71-year-old retired engineer, and two other retired people of a similar age, writing their autobiographies ('mainly for the benefit of my family', as the former says), to a man in his late forties, disabled with severe arthritis and so unable to work, who hoped for wider recognition ('I am yet unpublished, but I live in hope. I took up writing when forced to leave work, and feel I have a good chance of earning something at it'). A retired accountant, aged 70, was trying to improve his poetry-writing ('I sometimes enter poetry competitions but as you will guess have never won anything').

One retired businessman, when aged 70 in 1991, started a short story correspondence course, and between 1993 and 1995 produced two novels and his autobiography.

This has meant getting up at 6.30am most mornings and getting down to two hours work of 600 words a day before breakfast (ie composing on my electric typewriter editing and printing two pages of typescript). This is enough work at my age plus of course thinking time, research time...

I have entered one of my books into [an] awards competition in America over a year ago, if I am a successful entrant, I should hear something this month, fame and fortune is assured to the winner of 500,000 dollars, with four 50,000 dollar awards for works of literary merit. My book is the special theme of the survival of the planet in the future, was already written before the competition was even announced and is a work of fiction.

If I should have any work published in the future or get any literary success, I could 'go like a train', otherwise I might put everything on the shelf because 'hitting one's head against a brick wall' is pointless, tiring and very painful.

(74-year-old retired male small business owner, 1995)

Two respondents had seen their work in print. The first, a retired civil servant, spent much of his time on a book detailing a complete history of the engines of the London & Birmingham Railway; in 1993, aged 59, he had a reply from a publisher – to his considerable delight: 'I've been tinkering with it

for 30 years, but it really is going to be published!' The second, also a retired civil servant, had self-published his own work, the sales and marketing of which then took over his life:

[Spring 1991] I have just finished writing and publishing a book, 'Tower Above All' about my holidays at Blackpool since 1946, and much time is spent replying to enquiries about it and trying to sell copies, going out to people and bookshops where copies may be offered, so in any case I have very little spare time for things like watching TV.

[Spring 1995] After nearly four years since 'Tower Above All' was published, and a 24 page supplement booklet, 'What's Different About Tower Above All?' which I wrote and the first 1,000 copies ordered were obtained from a printer at Blackpool last May. I have enjoyed selling copies whenever possible, which has taken up a good deal of my spare time, and left little to spare for actually watching television, which has always been a low priority anyway.

[Autumn 1995] There is one film from Blackpool which I would like to see, called *Funny Bones*...but it has not yet been shown in Cinemas in the Chester and North Wales area. I would like to get in touch with Mr Peter Chelsom, Producer/Director of this film, as I am wondering whether my book could be adapted for a film about Blackpool (see 'The Tower That Turned To Gold' enclosed).

(retired male civil servant, aged 64 in 1991)

Many of the 'hobbies' reported above, it could be noted, are the activities of respondents who have a lot of 'spare' time and are eager to do things other than watching TV – and to be *seen* to be doing things other than watching TV. Their hobbies are genuine spare-time interests, of course, but also help the diarists to feel that they are 'doing something'.

We should also point out that pets played an important part in the life of many households. Dogs, for example, were dearly loved, and brought structure to their owners' days, with 'walking the dog' being a key part of everyday routine, and the dog's demands affecting the shape and nature of other activities.

Being mostly alone, after breakfast and taking my dog out, washing up, making my bed and always on Wednesdays mornings I attend Holy Eucharist (with my dog – who is wonderful).

(70-year-old housewife)

Cats, like dogs, were seen as good company, particularly for people living on their own.

I like living alone, although I hate housework. I'm a very independent person, and I have my beloved cat, Patch, for company. Mind you, she's almost sixteen, so perhaps won't be with me much longer. I suppose it's selfish, but I enjoy pleasing myself – no arguments about what to watch on television, what to eat, who does what. I'm middle aged, do a boring job that's not very well paid (but I like most of my colleagues), don't go out much – but I'm not a boring or bored person, I appreciate the beauties of life, and a lot goes on in my head. That's the important thing, after all.

(49-year-old female local government clerk)

Many pet-owning respondents commented on the pleasure they got from the BBC's *Animal Hospital* presented by Rolf Harris, and other natural history programmes. Indeed, these were not, apparently, always selected by the human members of the household:

I switch on 'Nature' programmes as one of our Siamese cats thoroughly enjoys them. We don't like the killing which always seems emphasised.

(66-year-old retired male schoolteacher)

For some, the needs of their pets were enough to affect major household decisions, such as whether to move house.

Recently a year old black and white girl-puss [was] dumped on us – now totally adored, [she] rules us and our three elderly rescued puss-cats. So much for 'Never, no more, not never'. Because of increasing severe nerve and joint pains we applied for old folks bungalow in a local complex. We are eligible, but will put 'on hold' because little Tiger Lily puss enjoys the garden here (only one cat permitted in OAPs complex). We decided to stay put!

(67-year-old retired housewife)

It is correspondingly unsurprising to find that the deaths of beloved pets were not only very upsetting, but also changed daily routines. For example, a retired male police chief aged 69 said: 'The terrible death of our 14 year old family dog on Christmas Eve has altered our daily way of life – no 'walkies', etc. Very depressing.' Another retired man, whose wife had taken in an injured stray cat, had to admit that 'his demise, eight years later, distressed me more than I'd expected'. A nurse, whose severely ill cat Zoe 'had to be put to sleep with me holding her', had to endure several months where she 'missed her terribly'. Cats and dogs were not the only important pet members of households, either; the diaries record the sad deaths of goldfish and hamsters, too.

TELEVISION, THE HOUSEHOLD AND EVERYDAY LIFE

In *Television and Everyday Life*, Silverstone (1994) discusses the concept of 'clocking'. Clocking is the organisation of activities in terms of structure, frequency and pace (Kantor and Lehr 1975). This means 'family or household members come together or pass each other, according to a pattern which is set and engrained in their daily routines' (Silverstone 1994: 36). This organisation of activities is not without tension or conflict, but nevertheless, according to Kantor and Lehr, it can suggest 'what the family considers most important' (1975: 86). If we look at what respondents had to say about the organisation of time and daily routine, we can see that the evening schedule is the most significant space in relation to television and leisure time. Certainly breakfast time is important in terms of the family coming together and then dispersing at different times to work or school, but it is the weekday early evening schedule, when the family regularly settles down to watch the news and *Neighbours*, before or with their evening meal, that proves to be the most reliable marker point in their discussion of daily routine. The later programmes are also often the pivot around which other family interactions and activities turn. After the working day, this time is when families engage in discussion, and some conflict, about family viewing, and when household members have often finished the majority of chores and are able to relax in front of the television. If the television schedules are unable to offer satisfaction, then pre-recorded programmes are often chosen (see chapter six for further discussion of everyday video habits).

Whilst the television is clearly an important part of the household, we have also seen in this chapter that the daily life of a household often has an implicit time-schedule, and that TV usually only gets attention during the more relaxed parts of the day (or when viewing can be combined with another activity) – although some items, like the news and soaps, are part of the fixed routine anyway, and take precedence over other tasks. We have also seen how TV schedulers have a certain power over people's behaviour – because when the programmes are all unappealing, viewers are prompted to do something else; this obviously contrasts with the kind of 'media effects' that are usually speculated about.

The television is often the centre of collective attention in the living room of a household, although individuals might be conducting their own activities, focused elsewhere, at the same time. Families and households are therefore drawn together, and sometimes divided in argument, by this shared experience. But finally it is worth remembering that most people have a range of interests separate from television, social relationships more satisfying than television, and other things to do.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Most respondents' everyday lives were structured by a clearly organised schedule.
- Television programmes, particularly the news and soap operas, provide fixed marker points within the day's timetable. Some people use these points to sit down and focus on the television; others would engage in unrelated activities, and watch less closely.
- This schedule is not fixed, and would change with the differing relationships between members of a household (which could take many forms – single-parent families, students living in shared houses, and retired couples, as well as nuclear or extended families). Individual and family schedules would also vary according to the day, week, and season.
- Some people would watch evening TV until its appeal fell below a certain personal threshold, prompting them to do other activities instead.
- Weekends were often a more relaxed time, meaning that people would view programmes which they would not have watched on weekdays, when time was at more of a premium.
- Some respondents planned their viewing very carefully, marking the listings magazine or newspaper with their choices. At the other end of the spectrum, a few people didn't look at schedules at all. Nevertheless, almost all of the diarists had an idea of what would be on TV on a given night.
- Television can be a focal point around which households bond – particularly families who get on well, and households of students or friends.
- Being a focal point of household attention, however, particularly in the evening, television could also be the nub of some disputes and cause of irritation.
- Away from the television set, hobbies are important to the retired and other people with 'spare time' – who partly use these hobbies to show how busy they are. And pets, too, appeared in the study as important elements of the household.

Notes

- 1 However, this seems a good opportunity to mention another facet of the everyday experience of television-viewing which received acknowledgement – that of watching programmes which are strangely compelling, even though they're not seen as being good. For example, an 18-year-old female clerical assistant wrote:

Enjoyed *The Equalizer* too. So what if I've seen it before and I'm dog tired?
It's compulsive viewing...You feel like a hare caught in a lorry's headlights;
you know what's coming isn't good for you, but you keep watching.

Other unwilling followers of the fascinatingly sadistic Edward Woodward vehicle will recognise this feeling.

- 2 An Independent Television Commission survey conducted in 1996 gives more general national statistics, showing that our figures are rather low: it found that 24 per cent of households had a television set in a child's bedroom. Two out of every five homes with children had assigned a set to the child's room (ITC 1997: 5).