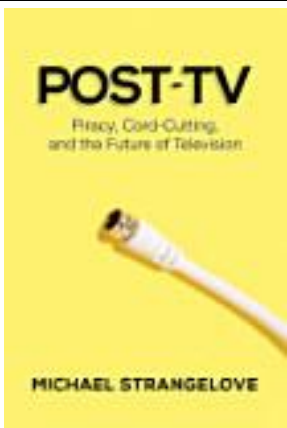


Book Review: *Post-TV: Piracy, Cord-Cutting, and the Future of Television* by Michael Strangelove

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Michael Strangelove's *Post-TV* carries the concerns of his earlier books on digital piracy (Strangelove, 2005) and amateur online video (Strangelove, 2010) to the medium that once seemed safest from the internet: television. Its wager is that piracy, cord-cutting, new online competitors, and amateur production are together making content and audiences steadily harder to control. The "post" in the title, Strangelove insists, signals not television's demise but the passing of broadcasting's way of organizing viewing (p. 6).

The economic argument is boiled down to a simple claim: the internet "turns fee into free" (p. 10). The analytical one is that television's basic business model depends on controlling content, time and place, and that all three of those controls are now slipping (p. 143). The book insists it isn't making predictions and sticks to over-the-top delivery in the United States and Canada (pp. 9, 19), yet it still pushes fairly hard toward one particular future.

Chapter 1 treats the music industry's collapse under file-sharing as a dry run for television and pulls five lessons from it. The boldest is that an entire industry can watch its online content escape its grasp (p. 46). Chapter 2 frames film and television piracy as simply the most convenient option on offer and uses *Battlestar Galactica* to show that piracy can sometimes function as free promotion (p. 57). Chapter 3 looks at sport, long treated as cable's last firewall, and tracks the VPN workarounds that appeared during the London 2012 Olympics along with the rise of do-it-yourself live rebroadcasting. Chapters 4 and 5 turn to the cord-cutters and "cord nevers" of what the book calls "television's scariest generation," mapping their on-demand, distracted, mobile and social habits. Chapter 6 surveys the new streaming rivals. Chapter 7 outlines a political economy of disintermediation-TV Everywhere, geo-blocking, windowing, bundling. Chapter 8 takes up questions of diversity, national identity, news and global conflict. The conclusion is more polemical than anything that precedes it: it casts television as the promotional machinery of consumer capitalism and greets its disruption with open arms (pp. 229-236).

The book's principal achievement is to move piracy from the margins of television studies, where it had mostly figured as a copyright problem, to the center of an account of how viewing actually changed. Its Canadian vantage point is a genuine asset. The accounts of geo-blocked Hulu, a thin Netflix Canada catalogue, and costly Bell and Rogers bundles show how circumvention and legal services worked as complements rather than rivals, with subscribers using VPNs to reach the richer US Netflix library (pp. 13, 58, 148).

The sports chapter is the most original. Drawing on David and Millward's (2012) study of English pubs screening pirated Premier League streams, Strangelove argues that piracy reterritorializes viewing rather than dissolving place (pp. 87-88, 93), a useful corrective to the placeless audience imagined elsewhere in the book. The book's

discussion of surveillance in connected viewing (pp. 168-171) also anticipated the data-driven models that now define streaming.

The weaknesses begin with method. The evidence combines trade journalism, consultancy surveys, analyst quotations, and, most distinctively, reader comments beneath news stories and blog posts, which Strangelove treats as the raw material of a post-television cultural studies (p. 15). Dozens of endnotes cite individual online commenters, many of them pseudonymous. In Chapter 4 these voices are sorted into eighteen short thematic subsections, from “Freedom” and “Payback” to “Moral Justification” and “No Regrets” (pp. 107-119). This is the skeleton of a thematic analysis without its disclosures: readers are not told how comments were collected, how many were read, how themes were derived, or how representative commenters on cord-cutting stories might be.

Comment sections over-represent the aggrieved and the articulate; they can illustrate a sensibility, but they cannot show that a generation has stepped outside market exchange (p. 122). Even a modest systematic content analysis of this material would have made the book’s boldest claims far more defensible.

A second difficulty is theoretical. The conclusion faults cultural studies for overrating the resistant viewer, reminding readers that resistant decoding has never kept anyone out of the shopping mall (p. 232). A few pages later, however, Strangelove rebukes critics of digital enclosure for underrating that same audience (pp. 240-241). The bridge is the claim that piracy and cord-cutting are anti-market behavior, but the book’s own evidence strains it. What gets pirated is overwhelmingly premium commercial fare (*Game of Thrones*, *Dexter*, Premier League football), and what cord cutters adopt, piracy aside, is Netflix, Hulu, iTunes, and YouTube (pp. 49, 94).

The author’s own test for a post-television culture, audiences immersed in self-made content that contests the economic and political status quo (p. 239), is not met by what the book documents, which is closer to a change of intermediaries. The treatment of Innocence of Muslims is similarly uneven: the clip gained prominence in Egypt when a religious television channel aired it (p. 225), a reminder that broadcasting remained a decisive amplifier, while its sweeping West–East contrast on rights (p. 226) sits uneasily with the book’s emphasis on audience agency.

The North American framing is something the book admits right up front (p. 19), and it quietly decides what counts as “piracy”. China, Cuba, Spain and Egypt show up, but mostly as places with leaky borders rather than as media systems worth examining on their own terms (pp. 218-226). Strangelove does cite the Social Science Research Council’s report on piracy in emerging economies (Karaganis, 2011), yet mainly to push back against industry numbers. The literature that treats informal circulation as the everyday infrastructure of media

access across large parts of the world (Larkin, 2008; Lobato, 2012) is simply left out. In places where licensed markets are missing, blocked or heavily censored, piracy isn't a protest against high cable bills; it is the market. Iran, with its officially banned but ubiquitous satellite dishes and dense informal networks, is the clearest example. From that vantage point, the pirate figure in *Post-TV* starts to look like a distinctly North American consumer-citizen.

Reading the book in 2026, its diagnosis has held up better than its predictions. Cord-cutting, still being waved away as a myth when Strangelove was writing (pp. 95, 179), became the dominant path for North American pay television. Live sports, supposed to be the last holdout, have partly shifted to Amazon, Apple, YouTube and Netflix. Yet the audience never really escaped control; control simply moved. Subscription platforms rebuilt scarcity through exclusives and territorial rights, cracked down on password sharing, introduced advertising tiers (undercutting the book's tentative suggestion that viewers were heading toward ad-free preferences; p. 172), and started re-bundling themselves. Piracy, as the book anticipated, has continued amid the fragmentation. The music analogy has also changed: recorded music began growing again from the mid-2010s thanks to paid streaming, with the major labels remaining firmly in charge. National regulation turned out to be less residual than Chapter 8 suggested (p. 217). Canada's Online Streaming Act (2023) pulled streaming services under the Broadcasting Act, and geography still shapes digital distribution (Lobato, 2019). Strangelove did catch a glimpse of this future, noting that a new oligopoly might simply replace the old one (pp. 19, 231, 236-237), but he gave far more weight to the idea of the audience breaking free.

Post-TV is therefore best read less as a map of the future than as a vivid, well-documented record of the transition years around 2010-2014 and of the hopes that attended them. Its energy, its Canadian specificity, and its insistence on taking piracy seriously make it a lively teaching text and a valuable primary source on the period's discourse. Readers should bring their own skepticism about the durability of disruption, the skepticism this book, for all its virtues, too often sets aside.

Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

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