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**'Introduction', Trans TV Dossier 3, Trans TV Re-evaluated (Part 1)  
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This is a copy of the accepted author manuscript of the following article: Goddard, M. and Hogg, C. (2020) 'Introduction', Trans TV Dossier 3, Trans TV Re-evaluated (Part 1). *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies*, 15 (2), pp. 162-164. doi:10.1177/1749602020918957. The final definitive version is available from the publisher Sage at:

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1749602020918957>

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**Trans TV dossier, III: Trans TV Re-Evaluated, part 1**

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When we organised the conference on Trans TV at the University of Westminster in 2017, our aims were both to bridge frequently fragmented discussions of contemporary televisual industries, audiences, fandom, representation and content, and to probe whether in the age of internet-distributed streaming television there were more spaces for expressions of diversity than had previously been the case during the network television era, or even in the still recent but already surpassed rise of cable channels like HBO and AMC as producers of original content. Had we, in fact, passed from the age of ‘Difficult Men’ (Martin, 2014)--to use Brett Martin’s term to capture both cable antiheroes and showrunners associated with the rise of cable TV original programming--to a much more diverse set of difficulties traversing multiple ethnic, gender and sexual identities. Certainly this is not a question of leaving behind the troubling or problematic questions, as numerous critiques of these shows have indicated, including in previous dossiers; it is rather a question of going beyond the normative, both in terms of models and concepts of broadcast television and in the sense of heteronormative narratives and characters.

For our final special issue, split across two issues of *Critical Studies in Television*, 15(2) and 15(3), we encouraged authors to reflect on how these rapidly changing dynamics had evolved from the perspective of 2020, where even the image and concept of Trans TV as

we saw it in 2017 has undergone some significant shifts in terms of both technologies, industries, viewing practices and modes of representation. We will engage with these contemporary shifts in more detail in our introduction to the next issue of the journal, but we start with two articles which encapsulate in different ways these transformations of Trans TV.

Catherine Johnson's article examines the significance of apps in transforming the television landscape, mapping the complex connections between viewers, content providers and digital mechanisms of delivery. Johnson effectively extends the work of Amanda Lotz (2018) and Michael Wayne (2018) in our first dossier, approaching 'trans TV' from an industrial perspective to propose necessary re-conceptualisations of television technology, branding and international flow. Through a nuanced consideration of the technological systems and industrial strategies behind television apps, Johnson adds to a growing body of research addressing the online distribution of television, further delineating the ways in which the contemporary viewing experience is being shaped by the interplay of software, platforms and devices. Driving this interplay, Johnson recognises, is the commercial politics of controlling access to content in a global arena. As such, the article stresses the importance of prominence and discoverability as fundamental competitive tools in a market saturated with choice. Moreover, Johnson underlines the unequal playing field for smaller niche and national content apps versus larger and more powerful international platforms, device manufacturers and app providers, with those larger players channelling consumer attention and therefore determining the 'app-isation' of television.

Stéfany Boisvert, in contrast, focuses on audience reception of shifts in the representation of LGBT+ characters, using the examples of *Sense8* (2015-2018) and *Billions* (2016-) as case studies. This is framed by a queer TV studies approach characterised by an anti-essentialism in relation to gender, sexuality and identity. For Boisvert, it is therefore not sufficient to merely reveal how LGBTQ+ audiences appreciate these characters and shows,

but to examine to what extent their narratives incite audiences to problematise normalising discourses that seek to circumscribe identities and sexualities. In the reception of these two series, Boisvert tracks markedly different types of responses, so while responses to *Sense 8* are more open to progressive narratives of sexual diversity, they are more narrow and defensive in terms of policing responses to the show; whereas while responses to *Billions* are less clearly marked as progressive, they nevertheless result in a more profound questioning of identities, aggressive debates and attempts to ‘solve’ gender ambiguities. While these differences are not reducible to the different orientations of their respective cable and SVOD content providers, Boisvert argues that these different audience readings are framed but not determined by these different industrial strategies and orientations.

In the next part of this special issue we will discuss the approaches of these articles in more depth, alongside a further two, which are reconsiderations of the areas of binge viewing scholarship, and LGBTQ+ representation and questions of migration and mobility. We will also present an interview with the actress Julie Hesmondhalgh whose appearances on programmes ranging from *Coronation Street* (1960-) and the Russell T. Davies created shows *Cucumber* (2015) and *Banana* (2015) raise important questions about the intersections between class, gender and sexual identities and the limits of these representations within, in this case, the UK television landscape. Taken together these four articles and the interview further extend the concept of Trans TV into the televisual landscape of 2020, but also perhaps suggest some of its limits; while contemporary television certainly continues to be in a radical process of transformation of its technological, institutional, audience and aesthetic aspects, perhaps our project as we framed it in 2017 was overly optimistic given the developments some of these articles have tracked over recent years. We will address these problematics through an extended introduction that, through its own case studies, will re-assess the Trans TV paradigm which we proposed and have been developing over the last three years.

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## Authors biographies

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**Christopher Hogg** is Senior Lecturer in Television Theory at the University of Westminster.

His book, *Acting in British Television* (2017, co-authored with Tom Cantrell), is the first book-length study of acting processes in contemporary television drama production. He has also co-edited (with Cantrell) a collection, *Exploring Television Acting* (2018), and has published a wide range of chapters and articles in journals such as *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, *Critical Studies in Television*, *Media International Australia* and *Senses of Cinema*.