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David Gauntlett: Moving Experiences – Understanding television's influences and effects

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**David Gauntlett: Moving Experiences –
Understanding television's influences and effects**

London: John Libbey 1995, 148 S., ISBN 0-86196-515-9, £15.00, \$ 24,-

Research into the effects of television has been conducted for several decades. Despite a massive exertion of research energy, however, confusion still reigns over what the findings show, with opinions ranging from the claim that television has a dangerously detrimental effect on young minds, to the view that the research has failed to show anything specific at all. The central position of this monograph is that the work of effects researchers is complete. Therefore this volume examines

major studies in the effect-research. The findings of these studies are discussed through their methodologies and assumptions. The results of laboratory experiments, correlation studies and natural or 'found' experiments tend to reflect a correlation between viewing television violence and aggressive behaviour, but are methodologically doubtful or they do not provide any evidence for a causal link. Pro-social research of television concludes that the mass media may be effective for providing information and creating awareness, but face-to-face channels are essential for changes of behaviour. The history and persistence of effects research can be more easily traced back to the recurrent moral panic and associated political interest about television, than to any more intelligible process of thoughtful research development based on a growing body of knowledge. These fears predate even the film medium, back to the late nineteenth century's 'cheap' literature and melodrama. It is irresponsible to blame the small screen for important social problems such as crime and violence. The moral panic outside and all too often within the research arena has ensured that the most terrifying and apocalyptic possible effects of television viewing have been envisioned and claimed, not helped by many researcher's too-often apparent lack of awareness of actual contemporary television content. Media and communications research surely has a place in recording, analysing and transforming the ways in which we share and develop understandings about the world through the powerful medium of television, but such complex and sophisticated processes will only ever be understood by correspondingly subtle and carefully-handled research. According to Gauntlett the longitudinal panel studies are those most likely to reflect effects as they might occur in the real world, since they study natural behaviours over a period of time. Various longitudinal panel studies concluded that the exposure to television violence had no effect on aggressive behaviour. This book certainly offers the arguments for its claims. New directions in research of influence, rather than effects, are needed, particularly longitudinal studies which involve natural viewing habits and qualitative research methods. Gauntlett argues that research can only be conducted with a conception that places television firmly within its cultural context. Unfortunately there are no references to cultural studies or ways in which these studies can contribute to a theoretical frame for the longitudinal research, a task taken up by David Morley in his book *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*.

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