

## **European Television History Network**

Results Workshop/Expert meeting 28 and 29 April, Utrecht University (AF/SdL)

### Introduction

The workshop aimed to bring together a core group of academics that work within the field of television history in Europe and to provide the space for developing integrative and comparative research plans on the history of TV in Europe. It was seen to be a first step in order to develop a European Television History Network (ETHN). This Network will provide a platform for individuals and institutions for the exchange of experiences and research data. The goal of the Network is to cluster and integrate European research activities in the field of television history and to develop new research plans. A first preparatory meeting took place during the FIAT/IFTA (International Federation for Television Archives) conference in Paris last October, where the Network was launched by Utrecht University (SdL/ AF) who act as coordinator of the Network). The workshop was the first meeting that offered the participants the possibility of discussing the actual state of art in television history and to define future research activities. The central aim of the Network is to discuss possible contents, approaches and to develop projects that help to explore a comparative approach to television history in Europe. The European Television History Network is associated with the BIRTH-Project. BIRTH is a web portal that aims at building up a multimedia and multilingual pool of archive material from the early days of television broadcasting for diverse user-groups. For more information see [www.birth-of-tv.org](http://www.birth-of-tv.org)

### Context

Some context has been provided in a presentation by the convenors: First a general overview on the historiography and state of the art in television history (Andreas Fickers) and about the relevant topics considering the European Research Area (Sonja de Leeuw). The power-point presentation of this opening session has already been sent around.

### Birth

The explanation and demonstration of the BIRTH-portal has underlined the necessity of cooperation between archives and academics; as we know, the archival situation and their accessibility for researchers vary considerably in the different European countries. We think that the ETHN has the task to articulate the need for close cooperation between academics and archives as successfully realized within BIRTH. We hope that BIRTH is able to attract other countries to participate. The presentation of audiovisual material from the Institute for Sound and Vision about the royal family has illustrated the relationship between TV and the construction of nationality and identity if in a playful way.

### Discussing blind spots

One of the main topics of our workshop-agenda was the discussion of the national blind spots in television history. The list of these topics has already been sent to you. Furthermore we discussed possible ways to realize the tricky business to do comparative studies on television history. Three general remarks can be traced from this discussion: 1. we have to identify comparable topics; 2. we need to discuss the relevance of these case studies in a broader historical perspective; 3. there is a need for theoretical and methodological reflection on comparative historical research.

After having defined comparable topics, different approaches can be chosen while studying the case studies. Television deserves it to be studied from different perspectives such as aesthetics, institutions, culture, audiences; production; politics; technology. It turns out that, obviously, there are different traditions in different countries. However there is a case for a comparative historical study of television with relevance for present day issues, as television culture now is both national and transnational.

This poses the question as to how we see ourselves as TV historians: as a group of people working on a well-defined research agenda or as individual researchers who just share television as their research topic. The feeling is that we have to build a group (and the ETHN is an important instrument) and that we consider research topics arising from us as a group (see below). The next step would be to put these in a broader context. Therefore the idea was to focus on national issues that have a comparative potential. National topics are interesting for comparative research if they address somehow historical forces at work in each country in defining TV (in all its relevant aspects). This requires a consciousness of moments in the history of TV, which illustrate the role of television in processes of cultural transformation and identities. Such a view on the history of TV that links up with present-day issues could be elaborated in different ways.

### Approach and methodology

By way of the research project of Andreas ("Television as a conservative revolution? A comparative study in the history of media in Europe (1945-1975)") we discussed the role of TV in the construction of imagined identities in both a geographical and intermedial comparison. His interdisciplinary approach gave us lots to discuss, exploring the possibilities and problems of comparative studies.

Five topics could be defined in the end to be discussed in the workshop rounds.

### Discussion rounds of workshop

In smaller groups we discussed the following topics:

1. Television events (which may indicate the political, social and cultural meaning of television);
2. Historical events (which may indicate to what extent televisual coverage reproduces a nationalist discourse);
3. Programmes (e.g. cultural transfer and national appropriation of genres and formats);
4. Audience patterns (appropriation of television);
5. Mediatization of political culture (the intersection of the political discourse and the media discourse).

Ad 1 (chaired by Jonathan Bignell):

Media events are defined in terms of events of TV (e.g. the arrival of TV), in terms of fictional events (e.g. marriages in national soap operas); in terms of rituals (Christmas; the queen's address); in terms of historical events (the Berlin Wall coverage, 1968, 9/11); in terms of products of coverage (Eurovision Song Contest; Live Aid). Different methods are possible, ranging from the analysis of archival material, to study of live aesthetics of TV, to technology and institutions.

Ad 2 (chaired by Fritz Hausjell):

Historical events of the last five decades could be studied in the following way:

- different perspectives on the Holocaust and other topics (especially from different perspectives of 'involvement', Germany, Austria, Czech Republic)
- content analysis and reception history;
- reconstruction of history in different genres (e.g. comparing documentary and fiction on this topic)
- deficits in representations of World War II, such as in how the end of the war is represented (leaving out the victims of the allies)
- links to the history of TV reception and reflection of history programmes in other media
- finding a common understanding of European history
- transnational issues: landing on the moon; Hiroshima.

Ad 3 (chaired by Cathy Johnson):

Programmes: suggested is to put in the centre the notion and practice of 'scheduling'. Scheduling as a central notion offers the possibility of discussing and researching: programming times for specific genres; controversial programmes; patterns of every day life as framed by TV; conceptions of family in Saturday night programming; formats and their transformation across national borders; the sales of programmes and the buying (import and export).

A specific period of time could be selected in which scheduling is studied and from there the other related topics.

Ad 4 (chaired by Isabelle Veyrat-Masson):

The suggestion is to focus on a specific period, e.g. the 1950's and/or 1960s and to use material such as surveys (existing), letters, literature, newspapers. The suggested period is interesting because of: the arrival of commercial TV (at least in some countries); the arrival of regional channels; broadcasts for specific audience groups; rejection of TV by certain people; the reliability of the figures; the existence of specific spaces for watching TV, such as in France the téléclubs.

Ad 5 (chaired by Huub Wijffjes):

Mediatization of political culture: refers to the role of TV in creating new public spaces for engaging people in society. Is TV indeed a tool for democratisation?

Television seems to have changed to public-private divide and also it has accommodated political culture in popular culture.

Several relevant issues are articulated such as: the roots of the mediatization of politics process in the 1950s; forms and style of politics reporting on TV; political satire on TV; adaptation of TV forms and styles by politicians;

The next step is to relate these topics to one broader problem that links up with topics in the European Research Area. In a creative session some useful suggestions were made.

They list as follows:

\*'the role of television in the construction of (new) forms of citizenship and cultural identities in Europe'

\*'mediated citizenship and identity in Europe'

\*'transformations of television(s), transforming Europe(s)'

\*'media and the transformation of political modernity'

\*'the changing histories of TV' (how do the changing histories of TV construct and mediate knowledges, cultures and identities)

\*'televisions-Eurovisions: TV and mediated citizenship in Europe'

The broader problem could contain different chapters referring to the topics above; again a creative session yielded many suggestions, such as:

-How are events constructed and understood (topic 1)

-The role of TV in the creation of a history based European identity (topic 2)

-Scheduling Europe: the transformation of national TV cultures and the construction of European identities (topic 3)

#### Further steps

-Working on the connection with Birth; *action Birth and ETHN coordinators.*

Birth is and can be a forum for ETHN; a podium for archival material, for content-based research; it is possible to upload research articles and to give access to TV catalogues.

Besides Birth could provide discussion space where researchers can meet and exchange.

-Applying for subvention to European Science Foundation for Exploratory Workshop in February. Place could be Utrecht, Stockholm, or maybe Paris. This would be an opportunity to present research and to further discuss the topics.

*Action: Sonja de Leeuw*

-Meeting at FIAT/IFTA conference, in November 2006. Spain will host it.

*Action: Gemma Camáñez and colleagues, plus Bert Hogenkamp (vice chair TV Commission of IFTA/FIAT).*

-Publications could be carried out. The Spanish colleagues are working on one with some Italian colleagues. Also a special issue of the Historical Journal of Radio, Film and Television on European TV History could be an option.

*Action: who?*

The same is true for the planning of a Handbook of European Television History.

*Action: Andreas Fickers*

NB

We confirm that the strength of ETHN is that it covers critical historical and archival expertise, different nationalities and countries, different methodologies and theoretical approaches, and of course Birth.