

TELEVISION AS TRANSITIONAL MEDIUM

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Abstract

The development of television is never complete. It is a medium in permanent change, even if some aspects of television outlasted several decades. Television in the second decade of the 21st century looks different than in the 1950s of the 20th century. The screens are bigger, the picture is colourful, and the reception possibilities are more diverse, even mobile. Since the invention of television in the 1920s, the medium has undergone major changes, both in terms of technology and content. Television can therefore be seen on the one hand as a transitional medium - quasi a medium in permanent transition, because it repeatedly takes up and unites various technical developments. On the other hand, television can also be described as a transmedial medium because it incorporates aesthetic and narrative forms from other media into its programmes and at the same time has developed programme forms that radiate onto other, newer media (e.g. forms of television series form an important content on the Internet as web series or as an offer on streaming platforms such as Amazon Prime Video, Movistar+, Viaplay or Netflix). This double configuration of television as a transitional and transmedial medium makes up its fluid character. In the following, an initial attempt will be made to approach television in order to work out what actually constitutes this medium. Afterwards, the technical and institutional development of television is dealt with, before the development of programme forms is described. Finally, current developments resulting from the digitalization of television are presented.

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Television - an Approach

When people talk about television, it is often not quite clear what it is all about. In fact, the medium can be considered in six different ways: 1) as an institution, 2) as technology, 3) as a programme, 4) as programme(s) or formats and genres, 5) in the context of television personalities, 6) in the context of television consumption. This definition differs from the definition of Johnson (2019) who differentiates classical television which she called broadcasting into four aspects: 1) broadcasting (technological infrastructure, 2) television set (technological device), 3) channels and schedules (service and frames as cultural form), and 4) programmes and interstitials (content as cultural form). Johnson positions her definition in the context of Raymond Williams (1974) notion of “television as technology and cultural form.” But it’s also an institution that is regulated by media policy, by law, and by economy (in the case of commercial television). Therefore television can be defined as technology and cultural form, but it has to be contextualised by political, legal and economic aspects which differ from country to country, even if there are transnational regulations such as the European Audiovisual Media Service Directive (AVMSD 2018) which each European country has to transpose in national law. Therefore, the television industry in Europe (Iosifides et.al. 2005) is not homogenous, as the media regulations differ in the countries, even if they follow some common European regulations. In the end television is nationally regulated with some transnational aspects. Due to national legislation television is transnational but “takes nationally specific forms” (Bignell 2013, 18). Even transnational legislation practices such as the Audiovisual Media Service Directive are related to national legislation, also bi-national or multi-national treaties for co-productions are based on national, transnational or global laws (Mikos 2020).

Television as an institution initially comprises the organisational constitution as a broadcaster, of which we are familiar in most European countries with public-law and private-commercial broadcasters. The institutional aspects also include

the political and legal framework conditions, e.g. the Interstate Broadcasting Treaty, but also the Telemedia Act, the State Media Acts and the European Directive for Audiovisual Media Services. Economic contexts also play a role, as television is now part of a global television market (Havens 2006; Straubhaar 2007). The technical component of television comprises both the recording and broadcasting technology as well as the reception technology including the television sets. In other words, electronic image transmission is commonly referred to as television. Television stations broadcast a television program, initially only a few hours a day in the 1950s, but now in the 21st century mostly a 24-hour program every day of the week. The programme consists of individual programmes which have also been called formats since the 1990s (Chalaby 2015; Moran 2009; Moran & Malbon 2006). The programmes are part of certain programme categories (e.g. news, sports, series, etc.) which are also referred to as genres (Bignell 2013). Presenters and hosts, but also candidates for reality shows or actors in television series can become television personalities who play a role in public discussion. James Cordon, Miley Cyrus, Kim Kardashian, Jimmy Kimmel, and Heidi Klum may suffice as examples here. After all, television consumption also belongs to television, because in Europe people watch an average of around 200 minutes of television a day. Whereas older people watch more television, youngster watch less.

The term television can therefore refer to various things. The following section deals on the one hand with the technical side and on the other with the programme side which represent the content side of television.

Transitional Television

Television has several obstetricians. One might think that film, the medium of the moving image, was just as much a forerunner of television as radio, into whose institutional structures of stations television was integrated. According to Abramson (1987) television, on the other hand, stems from the field of electrical communication; it is a direct

descendant of the electric telegraph, the telephone, and finally of image telegraphy (the transmission of static individual images on paper). As a result, the history of television begins with the telephone and Samuel F.B. Morse's electric telegraph in 1837. Six years later, Alexander Bain developed an automatic copy telegraph, but it was not very successful. In Italy, in 1855, Giovanni Caselli patented an apparatus, similar to the one of Bain. The various inventions then led to the patent for the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876. In the 1880s there were various experiments with so-called photo receivers.

The basic patent that drove the development of television was filed by Paul Nipkow (Patent No. 30105) in Berlin on January 6, 1884. "This document is the basic television patent par excellence, because it showed for the first time a concrete practical realization of the principle of systematic scanning and decomposition of an image into its elementary components by means of a perforated disc. The light of a transmitter falls through the constantly rotating disc, on which 24 holes are arranged spirally on the outer edge, onto a selenium cell, which is connected to the rotating disc of a receiver via an electric circuit. A year later Sumner Tainter patented a magnetic storage process before Jan Szczepanik and Ludwig Kleinberg filed a patent application for a device for the electrical transmission of images in Great Britain in 1897, and Ferdinand Braun patented the electron tube. The first television sets were developed in 1900. In the years 1909 and 1910 different television systems were patented (among others von Dieckmann, Ruhmer, Rignoux and Fournier, Ekström, Schmierer, Hoglund, Sinding-Larsen). In 1911, Alan Archibald Campbell Swinton patented the first fully electronic television system using electron tubes on both the transmitter and receiver. In the 1920s, the development of television reaches its peak. Vladimir Zworykin first developed a fully electronic camera before developing a picture display tube a few years later. At the same time, John Logie Baird was able to transmit images with the help of the Nipkow disk for the first time, and

Philo T. Farnsworth developed an electronic camera based on image dissecting tubes.

In Germany it was then Manfred von Ardenne on 27 March 1931 a patent for a television system. This patent described the use of an electron tube that produced a wandering point of light with which a transparent image could be systematically scanned. The use of an electron tube was also planned for the receiver (Abramson 1987) The German postal service had already carried out the first test broadcasts with the help of the Telenor television system developed by Denis von Mihály, but without sound. The first receivers were presented at the radio exhibition in 1932. In Berlin, so-called television rooms were set up in which the population could gain their first visual experience, albeit on very small screens and in black and white. It then took until the 1960s for the television picture to become colourful, and until 1979 for stereo sound to be introduced. In the 1980s, high-definition HDTV was developed, but it was not until the end of the 20th century that it became established on the mass market (Abramson 2007).

Ampex had already developed a device for magnetic recording of television signals in 1956. Previously, television pictures had to be recorded on film. It was not until the end of the 1960s that the first video recorders were developed with which viewers could also record television programmes (ibid.). Following the first satellite transmissions in the 1960s (Schwoch 2009), the satellite system was expanded in the 1970s and 1980s (Russo 1997; Galloway 1997). This established the possibility of broadcasting television programmes nationwide via satellite transmitters directly to home receivers with connected satellite receivers. The transmission of digital television signals begins in 1995 (Abramson 2007). The digitalisation of television and the connection to the Internet have far-reaching consequences which will have to be discussed in more detail (see below). In summary, it can be said that television developed from the telephone and the electrical transmission of images before it underwent

permanent change in the second half of the 20th century. This also includes the deregulation of broadcasting in Europe, which made it possible to introduce private-commercial broadcasters alongside state and public broadcasters (Iosifides et al. 2005). Television can be considered a transitional medium, as a medium in constant transition, caused mainly by technological change and the associated political, legal and economic frame conditions.

Transmedial Television

Television is a medium characterized by its transmedial references. Already during the technical history, it became clear that telephone and picture telegraphy had a decisive influence on the development. In times of digitalisation at the beginning of the 21st century, we are dealing technologically with the convergence of television, telecommunications and the Internet. This opens new distribution channels for television, and television programmes can also be watched on laptops, tablets or smartphones beyond the classic television set. In addition, so-called smart TV televisions have been developed which make it possible to receive content from the Internet. From an organizational point of view, television has evolved out of radio, as the electronic transmission of images has taken place with stations that already operate radio programmes. Television was to a greater or lesser extent integrated into the existing organisational structure of radio. For many countries, the British BBC became a role model. "From Scandinavia to Japan and beyond the outposts of the Empire, nations modelled their broadcasting systems on the model of the British BBC, seeking state ownership, regulation, quotas, tax structures, public funding and other methods to bring national culture together and resist de-nationalisation from within and without. (Hilmes 2013, 28) Radio had already established institutional structures such as editorial offices in which program forms such as news, talk shows, daily soaps and others were developed that could then be adopted by television.

Visually, television was based on photography and film. However, many forms of programming were taken from the radio or other media such as theatre, cabaret, ballet, musical, operetta and opera, concerts, variety shows and not to forget film. Television became the biggest screening station for feature films, which reached more viewers there than in the cinema. Television, however, has not simply adopted the forms of programming from the various media, but has adjusted them to its own conditions and structures and developed them further so that its own forms of broadcasting have emerged. While numerous quiz shows were taken over from the radio at the beginning of television, they later developed into game shows on television. The television series developed not only from the Radio Serial (Cantor & Pingree 1983; Warner & Henry 1948), but also from the feature novel, the comic series and the film serials (Mikos 1994; Wedel 2012). In the course of television history, various forms of series have emerged, ranging from the daily soap to so-called "procedurals" or "episode series", in which a story is concluded within a series with the same heroines, from telenovelas to horizontally narrated series, in which a story is told over an entire season or even several seasons and continues to evolve (Thompson 1996; Mikos 2015). The latter no longer have much in common with the first series that were shown on television in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, television has also developed original forms of programming, such as court shows, reality shows and the so-called scripted reality formats.

Television programmes and forms of programming are inconceivable without references to other media. They have taken up the aesthetics and narration of the previous media and adjusted them to their own medium. At the same time, forms of television programming are also taken up in other media, e.g. in theatre, which has also discovered serial history, or on the Internet, where web series are successful. But they also find their way into the everyday lives of viewers, where elements from television shows are recreated at company

parties and family celebrations. In this sense, television must be described as a transmedial medium.

Television - Current Trends

Since the 1990s of the 20th century, digitization has led to a profound change in the media landscape. Media convergence is the keyword. Media convergence is the convergence of the various media (print, film, television) with telecommunications and the Internet. The concept of convergence is of decisive importance in today's media culture on several levels (Balbi 2017; Jenkins 2006). However, Anders Fagerjord and Tanja Storsul (2007) mentioned several years ago that the term convergence is used as a rhetorical tool. It is used to describe significant and complex changes in today's media landscape triggered by digitization. They note: "Current media developments are diverse. What we see are several parallel developments that lead to higher complexity, with new orientations of networks, terminals, services and markets. (ibid.: 27) Convergence is used as a metaphor to describe these changes in a simple way, i.e. to reduce complexity. Nevertheless, one can speak of a converging media landscape. This converging media landscape comprises developments and changes at different levels and in different areas: 1) technology, 2) economy, 3) politics, 4) culture and 5) social developments. Politics, industry and audience/consumers are undergoing a profound change that also affects television.

Convergence processes go hand in hand with deconvergence processes (Jin 2013; Jin 2017; Mikos 2017; Peil & Mikos 2017). It is a dialectical process. Technological change leads to a multiplicity of channels and platforms which deliver audiovisual content. The number of television channels in Europe has increased from 3615 in 2009 to 5370 in 2015 (Cineuropa 2016). In addition, there are 171 video portals in Germany, and only in France and Great Britain are there 241 portals each, which is even more (Puffer 2015). The market is confusing for viewers. Anyone looking for specific films or

series must consult several providers in order to find what they are looking for. In addition, most offers are limited in time due to the licenses that the video portals acquire from the distributors (Nooke et.al. 2015). In addition, there are numerous apps for mobile devices that can be used to watch TV content. The fragmentation of television also leads to a fragmented audience. Different target groups use different media platforms to receive TV programmes whenever and wherever they want. Producers face different challenges and develop strategies to deal with the fragmentation of media and audiences. There are two goals for television in converged media environments: "First, to stimulate emotional investment and audience engagement, and second, to generate new revenue. (Simons, Dhoest & Malliet 2012, 26)"

One way of attracting audiences is to increase the production of television series that bind viewers to a channel or platform over the course of a season (between 6 and 23 episodes). In 2017, 487 television series were produced in the USA and 515 in Europe in 2016 (Fontaines 2017; Otterson 2018). The streaming platform Netflix simultaneously puts all episodes of a series online in order to animate viewers to so-called binge watching (Mikos 2016a). Another way is to add apps, websites and alternative reality games to TV series, a technique that has been used for many successful TV series in recent years under the term "transmedia storytelling" (Evans 2011; Mikos 2016b). On the one hand, producers must try to reach the various segments of the audience with their content, e.g. with TV series for a niche audience that is reached worldwide. On the other hand, more and more licensees of television programmes are trying to market them on their own online platforms - the number of platforms is increasing. In this increasingly confusing situation, rights holders must devote more and more resources to marketing in order to attract viewers' attention to their products. Firstly, media content and services grow so rapidly that the volume of material is essentially unlimited. Second, old and new media are increasingly available through fully integrated digital networks

that allow users to move easily from one thing to another. Third, the total amount of human attention available for consuming these offerings has an upper limit. The growing gap between borderless media and limited attention makes it a challenge for everyone to reach an audience (Webster 2014: 4). In the world of digital, converging media environments, it is not an art to produce interesting content, but also to increase efforts to make that content reach its audience. At the same time, the people who move in these worlds need help in finding the offerings that meet their needs and desires - algorithms can help.

Conclusion

Television is doubly constituted as a transitional and trans-medial medium. It seems that all media and media forms unite here in order to present themselves in a new form, namely television. Digitalization has led to a multiplication of the distribution channels for television content. Thus, for example, streaming platforms have emerged which not only license television series, but also documentaries and children's programmes. Meanwhile streaming services also commission movies and television drama series that are produced by external production companies. In the second decade of the 21st century, there are more television channels and thus more television content than ever - and: Television can be received on a variety of devices, not only stationary in the living room at home, but also mobile on the tablet and smartphone. "If smartphones and tablets turn television into something you can carry with you in your pocket and easily interact with, then internet-connected televisions further blur the boundaries between television and computing technologies, potentially transforming the 'goggle box' in the corner of the living room into a multifaceted site of media entertainment" (Johnson 2019, 2). As the history of television has shown, it is capable of integrating a wide range of programme forms from other media outlets, of technical innovations, both in production and transmission as well as in the

devices and ways of reception. Even television sets as smart TV or internet-connected television integrate broadcasting and the internet (Johnson 2019). The social importance of television has grown. It is therefore fair to say that television is more present than ever, even though many have already predicted its death.

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