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Translating 'Liebeskummer'

Combo 1965

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Abstract: This article explores the possibilities for using TV archive documents for constructing transnational European heritage environments online. It looks closely at one episode of the Dutch popular music programme Combo from the mid-1960s, where artists from inside and outside the Netherlands perform in front of dancing teenagers. It points in particular to the acts of translation that take place within the programme, and argues that such acts must also be key in constructing television heritage online.
Keywords: transnational history, European heritage, popular music, television, youth culture

1 Is This A Joke? A Wacky Combo

A few years ago - 25 August, 2010, to be exact - I made one of my first forays into Dutch TV history. I was curious about the ways that public broadcasters were addressing the rapid upheavals happening in youth culture and popular music in the 1960s, with the rise of the Beatles and the coming of commercial offshore 'pirate' stations. I started with the AVRO's Combo, the first show on Dutch television devoted to teenage fans. According to its metadata : "A series of programmes where national and international [binnen- en buitenlandse] pop artists perform (more or less live) for dancing Dutch teenagers. With attention paid to genres such as Dixieland, chansons and the recently 'sprouting' rock and roll. Series of programmes presented by Jos Brink, where national and international artists perform from the Concertgebouw in Haarlem." The last sentence is specific to the episode - the show was broadcast from a different location each time, presumably featuring local teenagers.

Not even ten minutes into the first episode I watched (April 10, 1965), I was rewarded with a gem: a Swedish woman singing in German for the aforementioned dancing Dutch teenagers. It's almost like one of those jokes about European stereotypes - except it doesn't come with a punchline. It's just the way it was, apparently.

I, of course, did what any red-blooded TV historian in the 21st century would do in the glow of a new discovery: I updated my facebook status. And I added the punchline it seemed to be missing:

> **Alec Badenoch** coming back from Hilversum. Don't know if it was cooler watching old advertising films for chocolate or seeing one of the big hits of 1965 on the Dutch version of Top of the Pops: a Swedish woman (Siw Malmkvist) singing in German (Liebeskummer lohnt sich nicht my darling) for dancing Dutch teenagers.
>
> I have witnessed European integration, and it is wacky.
>
> 25 August at 17:50 🔒 · Comment ·Like

(I never claimed it was a good punchline.)

Of course it was not possible - yet - to share the actual clip I had in mind. But it was no trouble quickly to find a clip on YouTube of Siw Malmkvist singing the song (figure 1.2). This one comes with different frames of reference. This clip is, predictably, German television, but it appears to be German television doubled. It re-uses unidentified old footage in the service of German musical nostalgia. The 'related' clips presented by YouTube, mostly other German *Schlager* from the 1960s and 1970s, confirm this. Still, it does also offer a little bit more information, in the form of a text frame (whether this was added by the channel owner or is taken from another TV/DVD programme is not clear), telling us that this song was #1 in Germany the year before the *Combo* episode in question.

> **Alec Badenoch** see what you were missing, English-speaking world?
>
> **Siw Malmkvist - Liebeskummer lohnt sich nicht 1964**
> www.youtube.com
> Siw Malmkvist - Liebeskummer lohnt sich nicht 1964
> Liebeskummer lohnt sich nicht, my darling! Schade um die Tränen in der Nacht! Liebeskummer lohnt sich nicht, my darling, weil schon morgen Dein Herz darüber lacht. Im Hof, da spielte sie mit Joe von vis-à-vis, doch dann zog er in eine and'...
>
> 🎞 25 August at 18:09 🔒 · Comment ·Like · Share
>
> > ████████ Oh. My. Gosh.   ✕
> > 25 August at 21:18 · Like
>
> Write a comment...

I mention these three items - archive document, related web document, and narrative commentary - in combination (or combo, if you will) because they are *in nuce* the components of online television heritage. As archive material comes online, people will use it, comment on it, link to it and bring it into dialogue with other documents. Much of it probably will happen on this kind of level. As such, this 'combo' raises some basic issues for the way we view TV documents from the past, but also the way we set about putting European (TV) heritage online. Like this episode of *Combo*, TV heritage is never entirely self-evident, even though it often seems to be. It requires acts of translation: from then to now, from there to here, from them to us. For my Anglophone facebook friends, *Top of the Pops*, which the BBC brought out in January 1964, a few months before the first (listed) episode of *Combo*, was a good point of reference. For my German friends, I might just as well have mentioned Beat-Club (ARD), which started in a similar format in 1965 (all of them drawing in part on the US American Bandstand). The coincidence in time is not accidental - it is also why I was in the archive in the first place. At the same time, calling it the Dutch version of TOTP was a misnomer - it was not until the 1990s that TOTP was sold as a format. But this short moment of translation produces both a transnational frame (the 'multi-national' performance of Siw Malmkvist) as well as a comparative frame (popular music on public service TV in the 1960s) in which to place the document.

2   Transnational History To Transnational Heritage

For the television historians among my readers here, I need not argue that television history, especially European television history, needs to be understood as a transnational phenomenon. That case has been made convincingly by a range of scholars, and we have now moved on to exploring *how*, *where¸ when* and *why* transnational flows intersected with and shaped that apparently most national of media.[1] It follows that as television heritage becomes increasingly available online that it, too, should be placed in transnational circulation. Popular music provides an ideal place to begin to develop such transnational (European) heritage. Popular songs and popular artists have been circulating (often separately) over borders long before the advent of television. Popular music was a key component in propaganda from in both directions across the Iron Curtain. Television, of course, has never entirely captured these flows. It is not an accident that the longest-running and best-known pan-European television programme, the Eurovison Song Contest, is a show of popular music. And indeed Siw Malmkvist competed there twice: once for Sweden in 1960 and once for Germany in 1969. Popular music is a supposedly universal language, which untold numbers of people use to regulate their moods, express their desires and narrate their lives. Hit parades and broadcast schedules mark it with time and allow us to place it both in personal memory and social memory.

At the same time, as we set about reconstructing transnational broadcasting history, we find plenty of borders, and plenty of people (on both sides of the camera and both sides of the screen) and things that perform acts of translation and mediation. Music has not flowed smoothly over borders, but has been subject of constant negotiations of rights, languages and recording technologies – not unlike the digital environments now.[2] I want to argue that there are important lessons we can learn from the transnational history of television for the way we present historical TV texts online and design online heritage environments for them in the present. Here, too, popular music, and specifically this episode of *Combo* can help us think this through. One lesson comes already in the banal insight expressed above, that when you look over the border, things often do look 'wacky'. A large part of the joy of history - and a large part of its point, as well - is the shock of the familiar. It is a two-way shock: either you find very familiar behaviours, desires, or structures in radically different circumstances, or you discover how people found things that now seem strange to be 'normal'. My short Facebook punchline to English speakers was probably taken in the spirit of sarcastic BBC commentators of the Eurovision song competition. Misunderstanding is always a risk when you cross borders. But still, it might keep you looking, and that's a start.

3   Speaking Of Borders...

Fortunately, my little quip offered one interpretation of the segment's transnational status, but not the only one now that we have access to the digital document. If you watch at 6:48, the young presenter Jos Brink tells viewers (in Dutch): "We are also international tonight. Besides Liliane, who comes from Belgium, there is a singer who has come all the way from the far North, all the way from Sweden. Her name has stood often and high in the hit parade. We all know her: Siw Malmkvist." Broadcasting is such a compelling historical source precisely because it is constantly attempting to calibrate what is normal, and what is 'eventful'. The flow of television, particularly as Paddy Scannell has described it, is about creating intricate textures of eventfulness.[3]
Brink does this naturally, pointing first to the exceptional ('all the way from the far North') and placing it back in viewers' ordinary lives ('we all know her'). That she is about to sing in German apparently needs no explanation, but her Swedishness still needs marking: for her second appearance they even dress her in a fur coat and hat.

Having the show in its entirety online helps make this single moment of translation all the more understandable. In fact, it allows us to see the complicated geography that runs through the programme. When they enter into

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1 See, among others, Jonathan Bignell and Andreas Fickers, eds, A European Television History, Wiley-Blackwell 2008; the special issue edited by Andreas Fickers and Cathy Johnson, 'Transnational Television History: A Comparative Perspective', *Media History* 16, 1 2010; Michelle Hilmes, *Networked Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting*, Routledge, 2011.
2 Andreas Fickers and Suzanne Lommers, 'Eventing Europe. Broadcasting and the Mediated Performances of Europe' in Alexander Badenoch and Andreas Fickers, eds, *Materializing Europe: Transnational Infrastructures and the Project of Europe*, Palgrave, 2010, 225-251; The chapters in Raykoff and Deam Tobin's edited volume also point to the many problematic issues of borders and belonging raised by the competition. Ivan Raykoff and Robert Deam Tobin, *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, Ashgate, 2007
3 Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life*, Blackwell, 1996.

the digital sphere, popular music performances are usually divorced from the show that frames them. The clip of Siw Malmkvist I posted on facebook is a case in point. The BBC's Top of the Pops History site takes a similar approach, offering small samples of individual performances. On YouTube, it is because clips are mostly there for those who want to see the particular performer. From the broadcaster, copyright issues probably also have something to do with this.

The thorough show description gives us a guide that would take us on a similar trajectory through the show, focussing on individual performances. At the same time, the mix of languages in the song titles gives an indication that Malmkvist's performance is not the only part of the broadcast where translation is at work:

> 00:00:06 + 00:28:16 Anthony en The Skylarks met "Caravan" en "Lady of Spain";
> 00:03:11 Jan Rath en zijn Trio met "In your own sweet way";
> 00:07:10 + 00:25:02 Siw Malmkvist met "Liebeskummer" en "Küsse nie nach Mitternacht";
> 00:10:05 Peter en zijn Rockets met "Walking with my shadow" en "Ren naar hem";
> 00:15:45 interview met Liliane, waarna zij optreedt met "Mixed up shook up girl";
> 00:19:11 The Cousins met "New Orleans" en "Pep's".
> Mmv De Combonisten olv Joop Stokkermans.

Actually watching - and listening to - the show in fact reveals multiple acts of translation. For a start, the titles can play a bit of a joke on the reader: four of them, including the opening number, are instrumental. What is more interesting however, particularly for the vocal performances, how each performer takes up a different position at a time when the landscape of popular music was beginning increasingly to tilt toward the Anglophone world.

I won't run through all of the songs and transitions (Watch it. You can.), but a few of these stand out. After Siw Malmkvist performs, Jos Brink presents Peter Koelewijn very much as one of 'our own' performers to the audience: "One of the first rock groups here in the Netherlands were the Rockets and one of the first rock singers was their own singer, Peter Koelewijn, the boy from 'Kom van dat dak af.'[their first and to this day best-known hit]." Koelewijn then addresses the audience in English: 'Everybody happy?' before launching into a song very much in keeping with the tide of beat music - also sung in English. The song that follows it up, however, is in Dutch.

Even more interesting is the segue at 15:45 directly into the interview with the young Belgian singer Liliane (later known as Liliane Saint Pierre, also eventually a Eurovision song contestant in 1987). Here, Brink opens by asking if the title of the song she is about to sing applies to her ("Mixed up shook up girl" or, as Brink says just before she goes on, 'mixed-up shoo-bop girl'). This introduces here, and also gently offers the audience a translation of the title. In the exchange that follows, both orient themselves in the international geography of pop music from a Dutch point of view:

> Brink: You are currently the top star in Belgium, and in the Netherlands not exactly an unknown. But what are your plans for the future?
> Liliane: Work very hard, together with my orchestra, and hope to break through at the international level.
> Brink: So you want Germany and France and England. I hope it for you and as I see working like this I think you will succeed. In what language do you like to sing best, French or German?
> Liliane: English.

Exchanges like this one suggest a new way of tracing transnational geographies throughout Europe. Statements and exchanges like this were taking place on television, radio, in programme guides and teen magazines. This is not merely a question of an 'Americanization' of national airwaves, but a more complex picture. It offers a glimpse of a landscape that varies greatly depending on where you stand.

The programme also shows us people orienting and translating within this shifting transnational landscape. If you watch - especially if you don't speak Dutch - you will also quickly realise that "mixed up" also applies to the song itself: while its chorus is mostly in English, the rest is in Flemish. Taken together, the songs actually present a full range of strategies of imitation, appropriation and adaptation of pop music culture. This also extends to the styles of dancing (watch around 20:42, for example), which vary from relatively traditional-looking pairs dancing to more independent, wilder moves. Comparing the crane shots during each performance is both amusing and edifying. It not only shows differing styles of dancing, but also relative engagement with various performers. When did TV stop being so honest?

In terms of television heritage, the issue here then is not only about the transnational space of television. It is also about the way we understand the time of a broadcast when it appears as history. When we shift our attention here slightly out of phase with the 'natural' segmentation of the programme to focus on its borders, transitions and margins (by now a classical analytical manoeuvre), its entire nature seems to change before our very eyes. It becomes (interestingly) unstable, and recognizable as being in flux. It raises new questions about broader processes, and creates new forms of sympathy with the television text by inviting readers to engage in their own acts of translation.

You don't need to roll your eyes and tell me that we can't possibly put a full half- hour of television in an online exhibition and expect people to watch it. But we don't have to, either. What we can do is choose differently the segments that we do show and where we direct attention within them. The point here is actually a broader one. Making digital heritage available online can help us to tell important stories about Europe's past - even if they come in seemingly trivial guise. Making them available online, even with the valuable metadata from the archive, is also not enough. There need to be narrators - and translators - who will add their voice to those that are growing without our help around the archive documents. Showing the borders also means doing more with the metadata that is available, even if the audiovisual material cannot be shown for rights issues. The goal should not be to create a perfectly smooth space of European heritage - we will fail if we try.[4] Instead, we should embrace the rough spots and mobilizing them to show where the borders are.

Biography

Alexander Badenoch lectures in Media and Cultural Studies at Utrecht University and is main editor of the online virtual exhibit Inventing Europe. He is author of *Voices in Ruins: West German Radio Across the 1945 Divide* (2008) and editor, with Andreas Fickers, of *Materializing Europe: Transnational Infrastructures and the Project of Europe* (2010).

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4 See Alexander Badenoch, 'Harmonized Spaces, Dissonant Objects, Inventing Europe? Mobilizing Digital Heritage', *Culture Unbound*, Vol. 3. p. 295-315 http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/v3/a20/cu11v3a20.pdf