

Dana Mustata

Editorial

2014-06-23

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/14088>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Mustata, Dana: Editorial. In: *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture*, Jg. 3 (2014-06-23), Nr. 5, S. 1–6. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/14088>.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here:

<https://doi.org/10.18146/2213-0969.2014.jethc050>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen 4.0 Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution - Share Alike 4.0 License. For more information see:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

EDITORIAL

1. Why an Issue on 'Television Histories in (Post) Socialist Europe'?

There is a *momentum* for television histories coming from Eastern Europe. This momentum was anticipated by several initiatives in the field of television history in Europe. The launch of the European Television History Network (ETHN) in 2005 made it evident that Eastern European television histories were mostly absent on the European map. The more recent transnational and comparative approaches to television history made it even clearer that there was a need to understand television not only beyond its national context, but also beyond the Western European borders¹ and against strict Eastern versus Western boundaries.²

Interest in television history in Eastern Europe is not recent, however. As Anikó Imre, Timothy Havens and Katalin Lustyik noted in their introduction to the edited collection *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism*, in 2009 there was already a critical mass of television scholarship in the region.³ Several works addressing television across Eastern Europe have been published recently: the above mentioned anthology edited by Anikó Imre, Timothy Havens and Katalin Lustyik (Routledge, 2013), the special issue of *Journal of Popular Film and Television* on 'Popular Television in Central and Eastern Europe' (2012), Peter Goddard's edited collection on *Popular Television in Authoritarian Europe* (Manchester University Press, 2013) and Jan Čulík's edited book on *National Mythologies in Central European TV Series: How JR Won the Cold War* (Sussex Academic Press, 2013).

Certainly attention to television in Eastern Europe comes with a somewhat longer history of publications. Paulu Burton's 1974 book *Radio and Television Broadcasting in Eastern Europe* is referential in this sense. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that television history in the former GDR has been widely researched from much earlier on.⁴

Despite all these endeavors of attending to television in Eastern Europe, there are several challenges that have stood in the way of television histories from Eastern Europe to emerge as a cohesive area of study. Except for the few edited collections mentioned before, work on television histories in this region has remained isolated to national borders and languages, preventing it from becoming part of international debates. The umbilical relation between television and national languages and cultures has made television in Eastern Europe hard to access outside national borders. Furthermore, the Western-centrism inherent to media studies⁵ - including television studies - has kept our

¹ Andreas Fickers and Catherine Johnson, eds, *Transnational Television History: a Comparative Approach*, Routledge, 2012.

² Alec Badenoch, Andreas Fickers, Christian Henrich-Franke, eds, *Airy Curtains in the European Ether. Broadcasting and the Cold War*, Nomos, 2013.

³ Anikó Imre, Timothy Havens and Katalin Lustyik, eds, 'Introduction' in *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism*, Routledge, 2012, p. 1.

⁴ To mention just a few earlier works: Braumann, C.: *Fernsehforschung zwischen Parteilichkeit und Objektivität. Zur Zuschauerforschung in der ehemaligen DDR*, *Rundfunk und Fernsehen* 42, 1994, pp. 524-41; Hickethier, K (1989): *Fernsehspielforschung in der Bundesrepublik und der DDR 1950-1985*, Lang, 1989; Dittmar C. and Vollberg S., eds, *Alternativen im DDR-Fernsehen? Die Programmentwicklung 1981 bis 1985*, Universitätsverlag, 2005; Dittmar C. and Vollberg S., eds., *Die Überwindung der Langeweile? Zur Programmentwicklung des DDR-Fernsehens 1968 bis 1974*, Universitätsverlag, 2002. It is may be also worth mentioning that in August 2004, the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol. 24, Nr. 3) dedicated a special issue to television in the former GDR, with contributions covering wide areas of interest, from programmes, genres to audiences and events.

⁵ James Curran and Myung-Jin Park, eds, (2000) *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, Routledge, 2000; John Downing, *Internationalizing Media Theory. Transition, power, culture*, Sage, 1996.

understanding of television in this region veiled in discourses of Cold War politics and East versus West dichotomies that have taught us little about television itself and have instead perpetuated stories of political control and national isolation.

To overcome all these challenges, the [European \(Post\)Socialist Television History Network](#)⁶ and its accompanying project 'Television Histories in (Post)Socialist Europe' were launched in September 2013 with the aims to offer an international collaborative platform for scholars working on television histories in Eastern Europe, encourage comparative approaches to television in the region and create a dialogue with European television scholarship. Other initiatives have seen the light recently, such as Sabina Mihelj's project ['Screening Socialism'](#) which looks into the history of popular television in socialist Eastern Europe and the ['Television in Europe beyond the Iron Curtain'](#) conference organized by the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg in December 2013, where leading scholars working on television histories in Eastern Europe convened.

This special issue continues the series of initiatives launched by the European (Post)Socialist Television History Network. The issue is the result of the joint forces of a team of guest editors: Kirsten Bönker (Bielefeld University, DE), Sven Grampp (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, DE), Ferenc Hammer (ELTE University, HU), Anikó Imre (University of Southern California, USA), Lars Lundgren (Södertörn University, SE), Sabina Mihelj (Loughborough University, UK), Dana Mustata (University of Groningen, NL), Julia Obertreis (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, DE), and Irena Reifová (Charles University, CZ).

2. What's in a Name? Coining (Post)Socialist Television Histories

This thematic issue invites its readers to reflect upon two central questions:

What is 'socialist' about television?

How do we approach (post)socialist television in Europe?

These questions come with issues of definition, approach and positioning of this area of study within a broader European agenda.

Socialist television needs not to be confounded with a political regime or reduced to the political history of the Cold War. Obviously socialist television marks a specific geographical area in Europe, namely Central and Eastern Europe, at the time of the Cold War. But that is not to say that television in this region needs to be reduced to Cold War politics. Socialist television has not necessarily developed in opposition with or in isolation from the West. Nor do Eastern and Western European television need to be looked at through the lens of the binary oppositions inherited from Cold War politics. Certainly the political regimes and the particular period of the Cold War have weighed in on the practice and experience of television in Eastern and Central Europe. But that doesn't mean that politics and political history are the exclusive lenses through which we need to understand television in this region. There is much more to socialist television than Cold War history and East versus West politics.

As various articles in this issue show, the dynamics between television in Eastern and Western Europe have challenged the strict East-West oppositions of the Cold War. As Judith Keilbach argues in her article about the broadcasting of the Eichmann Trial, transnational media events are a good platform for studying the cooperation between broadcasters across the East-West divide and the role of Cold War politics in the process. Cold War politics

⁶ The network was co-founded by Dana Mustata together with Anikó Imre (University of Southern California, USA), Ferenc Hammer (ELTE University, Hungary), Irena Reifová (Charles University, Czech Republic) and Lars Lundgren (Södertörn University, Sweden).

have not always dictated television exchanges across the Iron Curtain. As Thomas Beutelschmidt and Richard Oehmig show in their article on programme exchanges in East Germany, the transfer of programmes carried out through organizations such as Intervision and the OIRT (Organisation Internationale de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision) have also been guided by the intrinsic needs of the televisual medium and the global development of television.

Imported foreign programmes have been a relevant part of socialist television cultures. In his article on socialist Poland, Patryk Wasiak shows how foreign programmes were ‘domesticated’ in Polish television cultures, while Heather Gumbert illustrates in her article that imported programmes were a cornerstone of East German television schedules, building upon a shared televisual culture which shaped the visions projected to socialist audiences.

Dynamics between television in Eastern Europe and the West did not only take the form of programme transfers or professional collaborations, but they have also manifested in terms of flows of influence from the West to the East as well as from the East to the West. In his article, Paolo Carelli demonstrates how Albanian television underwent a process of ‘italianization’ in its dependence upon the structures, economic and cultural models of Italian television. Similarly, Mari Pajala describes how early Finnish television was influenced by Soviet television and how it resisted positioning itself as part of the East versus West politics of the Cold War.

3. Doing (Post)Socialist Television History

In this issue we invite readers to let go of the East-West divide inherited from Cold War politics and instead, embrace questions as to what socialist television could possibly mean beyond the political history of the Cold War. To begin to understand what socialist television has been, we propose to study it through the full spectrum of its lived experiences and social practices. That means pursuing socialist television through a wide variety of social spaces: from professional and institutional spaces of broadcasting, to symbolic spaces of television programmes, biographical spaces of television watching and remembering, to spaces of technological achievement; from micro spaces of television viewers, to macro spaces of televised national history, all the way to transnational spaces of foreign exchanges.

Situating socialist television through its full spectrum of lived experiences and social practices may not be enough. We also need to account for the fact that socialist television has simultaneously occupied conflicting social spaces, having performed simultaneously as part of state politics as well as part of everyday life, as part of history and as part of memory, as part of high culture and equally as part of popular culture. This simultaneous occupying of conflicting social spaces pushes us to acknowledge that socialist television has not only been part of political conformity, but also part resistance or dissidence. To take the example of Romania, the overtly politicized programmes on television in the 1980s were met with audience rebellion in domestic spaces, a phenomenon which the secret police the Securitate documented under the name of operation ‘Malicius.’ It is the dynamics between the state broadcaster and the regime on one hand, and television audiences on the other hand – dynamics that remained confined to the domestic spaces of television watching throughout the 80s - that led to the outburst of the Live Romanian Revolution in December 1989.⁷

In socialist regimes, if we are to justly make television part of any discussions related to the exercise of power, we need to consider power as an interaction between what Michel de Certeau called ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics.’⁸ Socialist television has simultaneously been part of strategies of control and tactics of resistance or subversion. To account

⁷ For a full account of this argument and phenomenon in Romanian television history, please see: Dana Mustata, ‘“The Revolution Has Been Televised...” Television as Historical Agent in the Romanian Revolution’ in *Journal of Modern European History* 10(1), 2011, pp. 76-97; Daniela Mustata, *The Power of Television: Including the Historicizing of the Live Romanian Revolution*, PhD Dissertation, Utrecht University, 2011.

⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 1984.

for these dynamics of power, it is important that we don't reduce socialist television to isolated spaces of institutional management, programme production, spaces of programme transmission and distribution or spaces of reception, but rather discuss all these in dialogue with one another. It is in the interactions between these constituent spaces of television that socialist television occurred. We therefore need integrated approaches to studying socialist television, which would allow us to account for socialist television as part of simultaneous, yet conflicting, social spaces.

I propose to take socialist television off the tower of Cold War politics and high culture and study it through the lens of all areas of socialist societies. As Simon Huxtable shows in his article, the emergence of Soviet television in everyday life and the professional performances of television personalities in the 1950s-60s changed Soviet mass communication from a Stalinist model to a model closer to everyday speech forms. In her article, Alexandra Urdea makes a somewhat similar point where she shows that televised performances of folklore music in socialist and post-socialist Romania have interweaved with state politics and market strategies in order to shape discourses of what authentic folklore is, a cultural form that has been central to Romanian society.

As Sabina Mihelj argues in her opening article, we need to widen our perspectives on socialist television and we can do so by treating socialist television as a cultural, political and economic object of study.

4. Putting (Post)Socialist Television Histories on the European Map

What would (post)socialist television histories add to the broader agenda of television studies in Europe? Empirical knowledge about a region we know little about is something we can all immediately think of. This empirical knowledge would certainly contribute to the recent transnational and comparative approaches to television in Europe. But (post) socialist television histories have more to offer than sheer empirical knowledge. The key questions worth asking here are:

What would be the new topics and themes of study that attention for (post)socialist television would render as relevant in television studies?

What conceptual and methodological debates do the specificities of socialist television help us revisit?

Let us just attempt a few answers to these questions for now.

As Sabina Mihelj convincingly shows in her opening article, an understanding of socialist television helps us revisit the Western-centrism of television studies as well as the set of conceptual binaries (e.g. East versus West, passive versus active audiences, state versus market, information versus propaganda, etc.) that have boiled down the history of television during the Cold War to the politics of the Cold War.

Following up on Mihelj's arguments, socialist television may teach us that the notion of 'class' offers an equally important lens for studying television, one which would help us revisit the 'national lens' that has been at the center of television studies so far.

Socialist television - primarily the relation between the totalitarian past and cultural memory - helps shed new light on processes of trauma and nostalgia, as Imre, Havens and Lustyk have noted.⁹ Ekaterina Kalinina's article on the Russian Nostalgia Channel articulates the complex connotations of nostalgia in a former socialist country. Similarly, Veronika Pehe's article on the reruns of the Czechoslovak series *The Thirty Case of Major Zeman* emphasizes not

⁹ Aniko Imre, Timothy Havens and Katalin Lustyk, eds, 'Introduction' in *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism*, Routledge, 2012, p. 5.

only the popularity of *reruns* as a programme form on post-socialist television, but also the political agendas behind them and their role in renegotiating the socialist past and the post-socialist present.

Programme genres specific to the context of socialist television, such as the 'block of flats' genre,¹⁰ can offer new perspectives for studying television programmes and genres.

A look into the financing models of socialist television broadcasters could help us go beyond the existing typologies of Western media systems, as Sabina Mihelj writes in her article.

At the same time, as Mihelj argues, socialist television can also provide insights into an alternative vision of modernity, one based on class and aimed at advancing social equality.

Last, but certainly not least, an understanding of social television may push us to revisit established methods and approaches in television studies. As exemplified earlier with the example of the televised Romanian revolution, if we are to explain the role of television in the events, an integrated approach to television is necessary in order to understand how spaces of television production and transmission interacted with spaces of television reception so to lead to the revolutionary outburst in December 1989.

Zrinjka Peruško and Antonija Čuvalo's longitudinal study of socialist Croatian television schedules makes an important argument in favour of approaching post-socialist television through its continuities with the socialist past as well as through similarities with the West. I could only think that acknowledging the continuities between the socialist past and the (post)socialist present would help us revisit - by means of historicizing - the processes of transition that former socialist countries have embarked on after the fall of the Iron Curtain and which have been at the centre of discussions in media and communications studies in Europe.

Pursuing an understanding of socialist television in its variety of social practices and lived experiences may push us to use a wide spectrum of sources to cover all hierarchical spaces of power embedded into socialist television: from sources on state policies and institutional management to audiovisual archival material, historical written documents, all the way to oral history sources, memoirs and personal diaries.

Accessing and collecting historical sources on aspects related to socialist television remains a challenge. Yulia Yurtaeva's article on studying Intervention speaks about the challenges inherent to accessing historical sources on this topic, from practical issues to linguistic barriers all the way to shifting institutional structures after the fall of the Iron Curtain, which have affected the archiving of documents.

Contextual specificities of socialist television may also inspire us to add new types of sources to the corpus of sources commonly used in television studies. If we are to consider that official historical documents on socialist television that are now part of institutionalized archives may carry with them 'silences' inflicted by the politics of the regime that has produced them, we may find ourselves in need of alternative sources. Material artifacts could offer, for instance, an alternative type of resources, which has the potential to single out stories made silent by official histories.¹¹

A proper dialogue between emerging (post)socialist television histories and European television history needs to be ensured. Overcoming the linguistic borders of Eastern Europe is a first pre-requisite for making scholarship coming from Eastern Europe part of European debates. Publications in widely circulated languages are, of course, necessary. However, key to overcoming these linguistic barriers is collaboration among scholars specialized in the television history of different Eastern European countries and fluent in different Eastern European languages.

This issue of *VIEW* wouldn't have been possible without the joint collaboration of scholars who are experts on television in different former socialist countries and without the collaborative platforms offered by the European (Post)

¹⁰ Dorota Ostrowska, 'The Carnival of the Absurd: Stanisław Bareja's *Alternatywy 4* and Polish Television in the 1980s', in Imre et al., *Popular Television in Eastern Europe*, pp. 65-80.

¹¹ For inspiring insights on this argument, see: Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism*, Berg, 1999.

Socialist Television History Network, the Screening Socialism project and the 'Television in Europe beyond the Iron Curtain' conference organized by the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg.

On behalf of all the guest editors of this issue, I wish you a pleasant journey through Eastern Europe and the television histories it has to offer.

Dana Mustata

Biography:

Dana Mustata is Assistant Professor in Television Studies and Journalism at the Centre for Journalism and Media Studies, University of Groningen. She is co-founder and coordinator of the European (Post)Socialist Television History Network and leader of the collaborative project 'Television Histories in (Post)Socialist Europe.' She has obtained her PhD degree (cum laude) in February 2011 at Utrecht University with a dissertation on a first history of Romanian television entitled 'The Power of Television: Including the Historicizing of the Live Romanian Revolution'. She is currently working on the research project 'Everyday Matters. Material Historiographies of Television in Cold War Contexts,' looking at the work relations between the BBC and Romanian television during the Cold War through the lens of material artifacts used in the everyday professional activities of the two broadcast institutions.