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A Forgotten Profession: Producer Representatives

Andre Dechert

When West Germany's regional television broadcasters started to jointly produce a nationally distributed program in the mid-1950s, their resources were in many cases rather scarce. Especially those who were responsible for its afternoon programming – a programming that was primarily designed for children, young people and homemakers – had to deal with a lack of money. Since creating and programming one's own television shows was a rather expensive undertaking, the regional broadcasters' staff was looking for an alternative. Instead of creating television shows that were especially designed for a West German audience, at least some of the people responsible for the DFS' afternoon programming turned to a – at least in comparison – rather low-priced alternative.¹ They started broadcasting television series from other nations, especially from the United States of America where television had already been established as a mass medium.²

When West German television executives were purchasing the rights to broadcast 'canned programming', they and the company holding the rights to the respective series were not the only parties involved. At least until the advent and establishment of international television fairs in the course of the 1960s,³ the business of licensing and distributing TV series to broadcasters from other nations also included some highly involved intermediaries that represented the producers of the series. Even though, in recent years, research on television history has crossed the boundaries of the nation state by adding international and transnational perspectives, also pointing to "the flows and transfers of personnel across [...] boundaries" as an important part of "the historical development of television as a medium",⁴ our knowledge about producer representatives is still very limited. It is basically limited to the fact that US-American companies (both producers and distributors) that were pushing for the control of the emerging global television market relied upon overseas sales agents/representatives for economic

1 DFS ("Deutsches Fernsehen") was the official name of West Germany's first TV station. It has been changed to "Erstes Deutsches Fernsehen" in 1984.

2 See Andre Dechert, 'A Case of Asynchronous Media Change in the 1950s: How US-American TV Series Came to Early West German Television,' *Global Media Journal German Edition*, 6, 2, 2016, https://www.db-thueringen.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/dbt_derivate_00037163/GMJ12_Deichert_final.pdf.

3 On these fairs see Timothy Havens: *Global Television Marketplace*, BFI, 2006.

4 Andreas Fickers and Catherine Johnson, 'Introduction,' in Andreas Fickers and Catherine Johnson, eds, *Transnational Television History: A Comparative Approach*, Routledge, 2012, pp. 1–12, here p. 7.

reasons as some earlier studies have mentioned rather in passing.⁵ This limited knowledge of this profession is probably based not least on the fact that, in most cases, the histories of these intermediaries are quite elusive as sources on their professional careers are, as far as we know, rather scarce. However, from time to time we may succeed in catching a glimpse of the professional life and actions of a producer representative. Such a glimpse is offered by documents that are preserved within the historical archive of Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), one of the regional West German television broadcasters which jointly produced West Germany's then-only national TV channel DFS. When taking a closer look at these single documents, i.e. some of BR's correspondence on the broadcasting of the two famous US-American TV series *Fury* and *Lassie* which this article refers to in the following, we can recognize producer representatives as a potentially important part of 1950s and 1960s television business.

The Case of Leo J. Horster

In the early years of West German television, Dr. Gertrud Simmerding, who was in charge of BR's afternoon programming, not only had to cope with a lack of money. She also believed that West German television was suffering from a lack of entertaining programs for children. Thus, in 1956, she secured the rights to broadcast episodes of *Fury* and *Lassie* from Television Producers of America (TPA), the company which was originally producing the two series. She believed that at least some episodes of the two series were offering a rather low-priced, but suitable and entertaining program for children.⁶ However, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, not only Simmerding secured further episodes of the series as they proved popular among the West German television audience. Broadcasters from Austria and Switzerland also decided to include *Fury* and *Lassie* into their television programs.⁷ At this time, another company had acquired the rights to the two series: In 1958, the British production company Incorporated Television Company, Ltd. (ITC) had bought TPA.

Unfortunately, the documents from the historical archive of the West German regional broadcaster Bayerischer Rundfunk do not shed light on the question if and how a producer representative was involved when the West German broadcaster secured the rights to some of the series' episodes in the first place. However, BR's correspondence shows us that at least ITC was relying on a producer representative when licensing and distributing the two series to other nations: Leo J. Horster from Munich, an intermediary who was rooted both in the United States as well as Germany. In fact, Horster was not only capable of speaking English and German, the lingua franca (or at least one of them) of West Germany, Austria and Switzerland, he was also familiar with both US-American and Western European culture: He had been born in Germany but emigrated to the United States sometime in the 1920s and finally became an

⁵ I.e. esp. Kerry Segrave, *American Television Abroad: Hollywood's Attempt to Dominate World Television*. Jefferson, NC/London 1998, pp. 12, 20. See also Havens 2006, pp. 13–24.

⁶ Dechert 2016.

⁷ On the history of Swiss children's television see Sara Signer Widmer: *Qualität im Kinderfernsehen: Beurteilung von Programmqualität am Beispiel des Schweizer Kinderfernsehens* [Quality in children's television: An assessment of program quality using the example of Swiss children's television]. Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 107–162.

US-citizen. In the United States, he worked in the movie business, e. g. as Paramount's distribution chief and general sales manager to Germany, before he finally returned to Germany after World War II and became a producer representative. After first representing renowned companies like Goldwyn and Walt Disney he set up his own business as a producer representative in Munich in 1959.⁸

When taking a closer look at the documents in BR's historical archive, we are able to reconstruct some of Horster's professional actions, some of which appear to be potentially significant, particularly in regard to a history of transnational TV content circulation. When representing ITC, Leo Horster tried to support the diffusion process by offering to the interested broadcasters the opportunity to pre-screen episodes of the series before actually deciding on which episodes to purchase and to broadcast. In this context, he not only arranged for pre-screening copies to be sent to BR and Simmerding.⁹ When Austrian television broadcaster Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF) got interested in broadcasting *Fury* episodes, Horster remembered that many episodes were available in Munich since the West German broadcaster from Bavaria had acquired the rights to broadcast episodes of the two series. A letter from Horster to BR from May 31, 1960, implies, that the representative of ITC considered this an opportunity and that he facilitated a pre-screening in Munich. In this letter, Horster states that Austrian television has bought 13 episodes of *Fury*'s third season after the opportunity to pre-screen episodes in BR's offices at Freimann, Munich.¹⁰ Indeed, this was probably not the only time, that people of ORF were able to come to Munich and to have a look at episodes of *Fury* and also *Lassie*. A further letter of Horster, dated September 30, 1960, tells us that someone from ORF has sighted episodes of *Fury* and *Lassie* "for hours these days".¹¹

The correspondence that has been preserved in the historical archive of Bayerischer Rundfunk also shows us that copies of *Fury* and *Lassie* episodes were not abundant: All three broadcasters had to rely on the exact same 16mm films.¹² Taking into account that we do not only need to ask what humans did with 'things', but also how these 'things' might have enabled, shaped and limited human actions,¹³ it has to be assumed that the profession of producer rep-

⁸ *Who's who in Germany. A biographical encyclopedia of Sutter's international red series containing biographies on top-ranking personalities in the fields of business, politics, science, the arts and entertainment*, Intercontinental Book & Publishing, p. 730.

⁹ Bayerischer Rundfunk [Bavarian Broadcasting] (BR), Historical Archive, FS/5524-FS/5525, letter from Leo Horster to Friedrich Sauer (Bayerischer Rundfunk), 10.8.1960; Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), Historical Archive, FS/5524-FS/5525, letter from Leo Horster to Gertrud Simmerding (Bayerischer Rundfunk), 9.7.1962.

¹⁰ Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), Historical Archive, FS/5524-FS/5525, letter from Leo Horster to Friedrich Sauer (Bayerischer Rundfunk), 31.5.1960.

¹¹ Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), Historical Archive, FS/5524-FS/5525, letter from Leo Horster to Friedrich Sauer (Bayerischer Rundfunk), 30.9.1960; my translation.

¹² For sound, different tapes (Magnetocord) were used. See Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), Historical Archive, FS/5524-FS/5525, letter from Leo Horster to Friedrich Sauer (Bayerischer Rundfunk), 31.5.1960. On the translation of 16mm films into a signal ready for broadcasting see Richard Misek, *Chromatic Cinema. A History of Screen Color*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 158; 'Telecine: preparing 16mm film for television broadcast,' <http://www.adapttvhistory.org.uk/16mm/telecine/>.

¹³ See e.g. Simone Derix, Benno Gammerl, Christiane Reinecke, and Nina Verheyen, 'Der Wert der Dinge: Zur Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte der Materialitäten [The Value of Things: On the Economic and Social

representatives was closely tied to this storage medium: It was Horster who repeatedly asked the broadcasters for the episodes on 16mm films to be sent to another broadcaster.¹⁴ Accordingly, it was he to whom Bayerischer Rundfunk turned with a complaint when a local lead was missing on the film reel when it was returned to Munich.¹⁵ In other words, it was Horster who was in charge of the circulation process.¹⁶ However, broadcasters' trust and reliance in him inevitably had its limits as he could not ultimately guarantee the integrity of the film copies: these could still be damaged, e. g. during transport, editing or broadcasting.¹⁷ Thus, it does not come as a surprise that Bavaria's local broadcaster made "the copies [...] available" to other broadcasters "only after the episodes premiere", just to make sure "that nothing has happened to the master copy".¹⁸

Conclusion, or: A Call for Further Research on Producer Representatives

Research on early Western European television is plenty. Still, even though our knowledge about that era of television is thorough, parts of this history are still unknown to us. These parts keep hiding from our eyes as archival documentation of early Post-World War II Western European television is quite often patchy – practical problems in television production at that time dominated over the concern to document and archive. Still, archival research sometimes confronts us with these unsuspected parts of television history and the hitherto 'unknown' draws our attention and curiosity. Such an 'unknown' part of television history is the history of producer representatives such as Leo Horster.

History of Materialities]; *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 13, 3, 2016, <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/3-2016/id=5389>; Leah A. Lievrouw, 'Materiality and Media in Communication and Technology Studies: An Unfinished Project,' in Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and Kirsten A. Foot, eds, *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, MIT Press, 2014, pp. 21–51; Stefanie Samida, 'Materielle Kultur und dann? Kulturwissenschaftliche Anmerkungen zu einem aktuellen Trend in der Zeitgeschichtsforschung [Material culture and then? Notes from Cultural Studies on a Current Trend in Contemporary History Research];' *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 13, 3, 2016, pp. 506–514, here pp. 509, 512.

¹⁴ This is evident from Horster's correspondence, which is partly preserved in: Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), Historical Archive, FS/5524-FS/5525.

¹⁵ Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), Historical Archive, FS/5524-FS/5525, letter from Leo Horster to Schweizerische Rundspruch-Gesellschaft – Fernsehen –, 14.3.1961.

¹⁶ This was probably not due to a fear of product piracy. For the film industry, Paul R. Paradise has pointed out that "for nearly two decades after the war, film piracy was a small, underground problem. The major studios paid little attention to the piracy problem. The market was primarily bootleg prints – copies of older movies that were no longer in distribution." Paul R. Paradise, *Trademark Counterfeiting, Product Piracy, and the Billion Dollar Threat to the U.S. Economy*, Quorum Books, 1999, p. 137. This might also hold true for early television – yet, further research on this issue has still to be done.

¹⁷ See *How television used to be made. ADAPT: Researching the history of television production technology*, <http://www.adapttvhistory.org.uk/>.

¹⁸ Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), Historical Archive, FS/5524-FS/5525, letter from Leo Horster to Friedrich Sauer (Bayerischer Rundfunk), 31.5.1960; my translation. See also Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), Historical Archive, FS/5524-FS/5525, internal note from Gertrud Simmerding to Friedrich Sauer, 27.4.1960.

As I have pointed out, documents that are preserved within the historical archive of West German broadcaster Bayerischer Rundfunk clearly indicate that producer representatives like Horster were deeply involved in the process of licensing and distributing television series from the United States (and Great Britain) to other West European nations like West Germany, Austria and Switzerland, that producer representatives like him were part of the inter- and transnationalization of television: As television was still an analogue medium, a major part of his job was not only to stay in control of the circulation of the film copies among broadcasters. He was also trying to license series such as *Fury* and *Lassie* to different national broadcasters by e. g. organizing pre-screenings of the series, thus potentially fostering or deepening contacts between broadcasters. Thus, this case study urges us to look deeper into the history of producer representatives and to ask about the general importance of this profession to the history of television. In this context, we especially also need to look at different national contexts: it has to be assumed that the profession producer representative was a rather global phenomenon as television was becoming a rather global phenomenon, too. In the end, this profession could complicate our current histories of television, especially in regard to its inter- and transnationalization.