Television memory after the end of television history?

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At a time when television is undergoing significant transformations and scholars are rethinking television theory, it is also necessary to reflect on the key subjects, methodologies and concepts used for research on TV history. The aim of this article is to highlight and explain the significance of the concept of television memory for research on television and history. The reflections on television memory provided in this article will be useful both for media historians and media theorists. More specifically, I will discuss examples of nostalgic programming by contemporary television channels as well as the interactive (re)use of old television material by Internet and new media users, and ask what the notion of television memory brings to the analysis of these practices.

Television memory is always linked to a socially-shared televisual past, but can be manifested in a variety of ways, collective as well as individual. Looking firstly at collective manifestations, television memory is most visibly linked to the audiovisual archives of TV broadcasters and companies. In recent years, stations have introduced several formats that are based on an exploitation of the medium's past, using material from the archives, broadcasting reruns or producing contemporary versions of old popular shows. These types of programming appeal to viewers' curiosity and emotions by taking them on a nostalgic journey through their own recollections of TV and can be considered key contributory factors in the generation of today's collective television memory. As well as being used by professional media institutions, the material from these archives is now increasingly being made available for consultation by the public.

As individual manifestation, television memory can be understood as a construction process comprising the continuous recollections of TV viewers based on their experiences as members of a particular audience. If these memories of events and material perceived through television are expressed verbally and recorded analytically by researchers, then television memory becomes a valuable source of historical data. Academic study can use these personal recollections of television to generate aggregated knowledge on collective social processes.

It is my contention that the analysis of television memory in its multiple manifestations will provide us with a greater insight into both the history of television and its present day incarnations. The central thesis of this article is that television memory holds the key to understanding and analysing current TV phenomena, such as the varying popularity of certain types of programmes among different audiences and the means of sharing, discussing and exchanging material offered

by the new *social media*. At the same time, however, these media recollections also have an effect on collective memory in general. For this reason, I want to suggest that any attempt to conceptualize TV in theoretical terms and, indeed, any approach adopted for its investigation, must address the notion of television memory.

This contribution is divided into two main sections. The first examines television memory in relation to television history and audience research. The second section highlights the complexity of the concept of television memory, explaining how it is linked to the development of memory studies and looking at the directions in which it has evolved since. Here, I will include my reflections on 'nostalgic programming' and the new 'participatory' forms of cultivating television memory. Both practices have contributed to the heightened presence of television's past in the contemporary media landscape. If the ultimate aim of this edited volume is to rethink television theory, I argue that we need to begin by accounting for the intertwinement of present and past in television today.

1. Television memory and television history

I shall begin by explaining why, in view of the increased audience research now being carried out as part of television history studies, a deeper insight into television memory has become indispensable. Television memory is not merely a concept and research theme, it is also a valuable empirical source of information capable of significantly enriching any academic study into this particular area. Naturally, one can also use methodologies based on textual studies or TV programmes from the past to analyze television memory and explain how it has been built up over the years; alternatively, one can examine TV archives and the way in which they operate, or even focus on television's political economy. However, what I want to emphasize here is the importance of the audience itself: given that recollections of television are part of the collective memory of society as a whole, and that the process in question is one of continuous reconstruction in which the viewers play a prominent role, it is imperative that they remain at the forefront of any studies on TV history. In this part, I will present a number of projects from around the world that have employed this approach to underline the particular usefulness of such audience research.

The onset of globalization has shown much of what has been written about the history of television to date to be excessively descriptive in focus and too heavily reliant on local or national perspectives (Hilmes 2003: 1-3). The global world enables national identities to be transformed and reconstructed in a different context. The idea of nation itself thus ceases to be a stable, homogenous concept, and the new 'cosmopolitanism' generated by the various nationalisms to a certain extent even serves to promote the globalization of culture. In short, we might say that in spite of the 'nationalized' manner in which television has developed and been analyzed, it has made a key contribution to the achievement of international homogeneity.

This is not to say that national and regional studies undertaken so far should

be dismissed as insignificant. Indeed, the contribution by Alexander Dhoest in this volume deals precisely with the importance of national television. In the field of history, however, we must now seek the kind of historiographical progress that will broaden our perspective and facilitate analyses of the different developments that have taken place in the media, thus providing a comprehensive overview of the history of the broadcasting era, from its very beginnings right through to the present day transformation of the manner in which TV programmes are produced and, more significantly, transmitted and received throughout the planet. Among the challenges that await television historians are issues that so far have been largely neglected, such as the comparative study of how different international TV systems have evolved and a historical scrutiny of the viewers themselves. Both approaches have traditionally received considerably less attention from television historians than other perspectives, like institutional and technological angles or textual analysis (Gutiérrez 2007).

As Bourdon writes, interaction on an international scale has been a feature of television throughout most of its history, not only in the political and technological sense but also, and most visibly, in terms of the schedules themselves (Bourdon 2004). The exchange of TV programmes, notably the sale and broadcast of fiction series, has arguably been the most frequent focus of international research into television history.[1] One of the main shortcomings of the way in which TV's history has been charted over the years, however, has been the dearth of comparative studies on the development of different television systems. In recent years, some attempts have been made to fill this void with studies carried out in English-speaking, European and Latin American countries (Hilmes 2003; Bignell and Fickers 2008; Fickers and Johnson 2010; Orozco 2002). What is lacking in these existing international comparative studies, however, is attention for television memory, the recollections of the medium held by the viewers themselves. The similarities and differences that may be found between historical viewer experiences in different countries will surely aid scholars in formulating common international procedures underpinned by theoretical concepts. Moreover, if we combine existing work on national communities with new international comparative studies this would significantly reinforce the study of television memory.

2. Television memory and audience research

Though memory studies as a discipline is still in its infancy, the methodology of oral history has already provided rigorous analyses of television viewer reception and of the way in which media memory functions in contemporary societies. Oral history has in particular proven to be an effective tool in compiling biographies of television professionals and in drafting institutional histories of the television stations themselves. However, the recollections of stars, journalists and entrepreneurs involved in the production of television programmes in a variety of countries paint only a partial picture of television memory. I will argue that oral history can serve not only as an auxiliary tool, but also as a conceptual vantage point for the diachronic and historical analysis of television reception and that

the latter is essential if one wants to unravel the way television memory is formed.

The reconstruction of viewers' recollections of television has been the objective of a number of historical research projects. An important advantage of sources and approaches connected with oral history is that they can be employed in research on different television systems; studies have shown that despite structural differences between the European and American television systems, oral methodology is appropriate for the study of either (Podber 2001; Boddy 1995). In Europe, Tim O'Sullivan's research (1991) into British television between 1950 and 1965 used information gathered by interviewing octogenarian couples from three different regions of the United Kingdom in their own homes. Focusing on Spanish television, my own project entitled 'The social impact of television in Spain. Its origins in Andalusia through the memories of the first viewers', constituted a historical study of the social acceptance of television in Andalusia during the 1960s (Gutiérrez 2006).[2] Finally, while Latin American studies into television history have tended to focus either on political control of television or on its economic workings (Orozco 2002; Fernández 1987), there have also been scholars that turned to audience research. For example, Mirta Varela who reconstructed the memories of early TV audiences in Argentina by conducting some one hundred biographical interviews in which the country's first viewers were asked about the process via which television was introduced in the 1950s and how their own personal relationship with the medium was established (Varela 1999).

Some of the research projects described above were undertaken not only with the aim of providing new historiographical perspectives but also in response to the absence of any audiovisual texts that could be analyzed or, in some cases, the lack of access to the TV archives in which these were kept. Naturally, all these works must be integrated into and complemented by the models for interpreting reception and assessing message comprehension, such as developed by media studies, cultural studies or the Latin American critical approach.

In addition to oral history as a methodology, we must also draw on theoretical notions of the concept of social memory, however evasive, conflictive or ephemeral we may consider the term to be. As the historian Wulf Kansteiner pointed out, scholars in memory studies will have to continue to design innovative ways of understanding media reception in order to study past, contemporary, and future collective memories (2002). I fully agree with him when he underlines that 'the media, their structure, and the rituals of consumption they underwrite might represent the most important shared component of people's historical consciousness, although this non-confrontational, semi-conscious, non-referential, and decentralized process is extremely difficult to reconstruct after the fact' (Kansteiner 2002: 195). Having explained the importance of television memory to the study of television history in this first part, I will now move on to outline the difficulties involved in defining the concept of television memory in more comprehensive terms that do not focus purely on the past but instead embrace the field of television studies as a whole.

3. The complexity of the concept of television memory

Kansteiner defines the concept of collective memory as the result of the interaction between three types of historical factors: 'the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore or transform such artefacts according to their own interest' (Kansteiner 2002: 180). Following Kansteiner, I understand television memory as not limited to television (audience recollections of specific programmes or archive material), but also extending to ways in which television's past is utilized by various people. This includes both its institutional and commercial exploitation by the TV channels themselves and the more spontaneous consumption enjoyed by fans and viewers. Such usage is yet another symptom of a brand of television memory that is rooted, sociologically speaking, in the preoccupation with the past that characterizes contemporary Western society.

Jacques Le Goff has noted that our control over what we remember and forget, collective amnesia, has become a major cause for concern in all societies (Le Goff 1991: 133). This phenomenon, the memory trend, is rooted in what the French historian Pierre Nora has referred to as the 'era of commemoration' and in our fixation, from the standpoint of the present, with the past rather than the future. He believes that this fact is linked to the apparent speeding up of historical processes with what is known as the 'reheating of the present' (Nora 1984-1993). New media (including the post-broadcast age of television) are changing existing time structures, combining a return to the past and the present moment in equal parts. What role does television play in this phenomenon? A crucial one; so much so that Andrew Hoskins has noted that 'if television transcribes memory and history into artificial form, then what is required is a *re-transcription* of the media's lexical and visual imagery into something recognizable as new memory' (Hoskins 2001: 341).

While the task of defining and analyzing media memory, a concept linked to the ways in which individual and collective identities are forged by television's messages, journalistic or otherwise, is by no means an easy one, it is nevertheless an enormously appealing challenge. As Amy Holdsworth writes 'the relationship between television and memory is an underexplored area of study which stems perhaps from the familiar narrative in which television is seen as an 'amnesiac', responsible for the 'undermining' of memory' (Holdsworth 2010: 130). The critical view (Mellencamp 1990) has traditionally been that the neverending flux of television to which the viewer is exposed makes it impossible for the medium to be seen as a formative or contributory factor in memory construction, with the possible exception of television content related with historical experiences considered traumatic within the societies to which they are broadcast. However, the consolidation of research into the relationship between memory and the media casts serious doubts on that hypothesis: not only does television help create shared recollections within a given society, its own televized history also enables it to generate a common memory among viewers both of the actual television programmes and of the social uses made of the medium itself.

Research on memory, an activity which is establishing a new field of academic study that entails risk and opportunity alike, cannot eschew the key role played by the media in general, and by television in particular, in this process of continuously constructing the past. Though the theoretical and even metaphorical concepts employed to justify its influence are many and varied, those most frequently cited concern the 'mediation', 'pre-mediation' and even 'remediation' effects generated by television (Zierold 2008: 392-393; Erll et al. 2009; Van Dijck 2004: 271-272). For me it is undeniable that memory of the past and of what was shown on television is a binding element of collectiveness. The concept of 'collective memory' (Halbwachs [1925] 1994, [1950] 1968) is inexorably linked to a continuous, inter-subjective process of construction and reconstruction. In this line, I consider television memory as an emotive concept, linked to a combination of personal experience and fragments of historical recollection. It is a consciousness or memory that is even shared on an international scale in the Western world, though with obvious and certain differences in terms of national identity, social status, gender or other circumstances.

The complexity of defining the concept of 'television memory' and the way in which it is analyzed is without doubt one of the toughest challenges faced by the discipline of television studies. This complexity is bound up with the theoretical tensions and bases inherent to the new area of memory studies. Studies into collective or social memory are still in the stage of final consolidation and redefinition. Nevertheless, the interdisciplinary nature of research into social and cultural memory (Kansteiner 2002) has facilitated a swift interrelationship with media and cultural studies methodologies. However, and as Susanne Radstone concludes, given the lingering complications that continue to cloud the field of memory studies, it is expedient on occasion to turn to the same theoretical models and methodologies that were initially borrowed by cultural studies from the academic sphere and which played a key role in its earliest advances, such as those drawn from anthropology or literature. She argues:

> Both Cultural and Media studies are themselves interdisciplinary subjects that borrow their research methods from disciplines including anthropology, film and literary studies [...] Memory research might currently be most productively practiced within the disciplines from which Media and Cultural Studies borrow, rather than within the transdisciplinary space of "memory studies" (Radstone 2008: 35).

4. Representations of the past on television: television as memory maker

If the oral accounts given by viewers of their television memories have provided historians with an alternative source of data, then the past has been no less prolific in supplying material for many television programmes made in the last decade. The past has gradually become ever more present in television discourse through a variety of different genres. These are fine examples of how television memory is currently visible in different formats on television channels. In this way, televi-

sion becomes a memory maker with different intentions, cultural, political or simply economic. For instance, today the major national networks, particularly in Europe, are attempting to take advantage of their television archives by retro-digitizing material and providing internet sites where visitors can delve deep into their audiovisual heritage. At the same time, however, many of these channels are also slipping nostalgic hints and references to their own programmes into primetime schedules. Therefore, public television stations interest in old archives is not related exclusively to the historical value of audiovisual fund preservation, also it has also opened the way to the location of the public broadcasters in the new television context given by new technologies and digital channels via satellite, cable or terrestrial.

Two cases, the BBC in the United Kingdom and TVE in Spain, are unquestionably representative of this tendency to use the past of television in current channel programming. The BBC, for example, has broadcasted a series of programmes entitled 'I love the 1970s', 'the 80s' and 'the 90s' since 2000. These programmes emphasized the material memories, music and fashion of these decades through images from its archives.[3] Thanks to the success of these series, specific sites at the BBC webpage were dedicated to these programmes, while others referred to the landmarks and myths of the BBC programming or the history of this British company itself.[4] One of the most significant and recent projects of the British corporation with regard to the social construction of television memory is called *BBC Memoryshare*. The site is a living archive that blends memories from 1900 to the present day both of the audience and the different channels of the corporation. It allows users to share contents and comments across different platforms and social networks.[5] TVE, also a major European state public channel, created a thematic channel from the contents of its archive in the late nineties. From 1997 until 2005 *Canal Nostalgia* was devoted exclusively to fiction productions and programmes from TVE's history. Between 2005 and 2009, to celebrate the 50 anniversary of the Spanish state broadcaster, TVE launched other similar channel called *TVE-50*, one of the first channels of Spanish Digital Terrestrial Television. Like the BBC, TVE has made great efforts in digitization and facilitating public access to their archive. Since these projects require strong financial investment and are labour intensive, they are ongoing.

Television memory is not only visible in thematic channels. 'Traditional' television has used the past in a number of different genres to attract audience interest, like documentaries, fiction series and films. These have been joined more recently by the exploitation of television memories through magazines, shows, comedy and parody. In the case of Spain, the existence of an older audience with a generational interest in the past, combined with the influence of TV chiefs who in their day experienced television as children (not to mention the possible involvement of political interests), has helped to revitalize programmes about both the historical past and the past of television itself. Fiction series have enjoyed the greatest following. *Cuéntame como pasó* (Tell me how it was), produced by Televisión Española (TVE), attracted a weekly average of 6-7 million viewers and a 40 % share in its initial seasons and has been one of the country's biggest hits with viewers and critics alike since 2001. It narrates the adventures of a

typical Spanish family, the Alcántaras, during the 1960s and 1970s, in the midst of Franco's dictatorship. It is essentially a Spanish version of the US series *The wonder years* and similar adaptations have appeared in Italy and Portugal. *Cine de barrio* (Local cinema) is another fine Spanish example of a programme that relies heavily on the past. The format this time consists of weekly screenings of low-quality Spanish films, musicals and comedies that were popular during the 1960s and 70s. The programme is complemented by a discussion interspersed with old footage from television and cinema archives, along with the latest news about the lives of Spanish film stars. Both *Cuéntame* and *Cine de barrio* appeal not only to mature viewers but also to younger ones who are curious about their relatives' past.

Theses uses of memory are not exclusive to public television. Commercial channels now exploit media memories for pecuniary gain in much the same way as they use advertising itself, adapting them to formats more in keeping with both the tendency for dumbing down and with the popularity of celebrity gossip shows. The latest 'find' in this regard, and a format that is currently extremely popular on Spanish television, is the sensationalist documentary. Under the guise of serious investigation, this type of programme uses material drawn from old press cuttings and even from TVE's own audiovisual archives to chart the careers of the famous faces that habitually adorn the pages of the country's gossip magazines. Another example is the nostalgic chat show. Devoted to TV stars and to the retrieval of television memories rather than historical ones, this genre relies predominantly on comedy and on what Raphael Samuel refers to as 'retro chic', i.e. referring to the past in order to make jokes about it and take advantage of its lighter side (Samuel 1994: 95). The degree of indifference shown to the social significance of the past ranges from light to absolute. In the words of Joan Moran (2000: 158), the nostalgia to be found here is not intended to help us to recreate or reflect upon the past, but rather to paint a superficial picture that can be exploited for economic gain. Television chiefs are thus to be found among the 'memory merchants' that reap the benefits of the *mode retro* (Le Goff 1991: 178).

I believe that any exercises in nostalgia and memory undertaken by public and commercial television channels alike, through their sites as well as programming, should essentially contain an element of cultural and critical discernment. In order to achieve this, all viewers must be capable of making critical appraisals of television messages designed to appeal to their sense of nostalgia. We should proceed with caution, though: it must be stressed that while television (or televized) memory refers to the past, it is not actually the past itself, in the same way that the past is not history. Its very nature means that television content is capable of offering no more than a reconstruction of the past. Though individual memory is partially dependent on human intellect and reason, its roots are nevertheless firmly anchored in emotion. It is precisely to the emotions of its audience that the language of television seeks to appeal. For this reason, programmers have used the lure of nostalgia to awaken and arouse viewers' memories as a means of capturing their attention.

As audiences have become progressively fragmented, a number of once-hegemonic major channels have sacrificed their younger viewers and sought instead

to establish sentimental or emotional ties with the older generation through a variety of products. The re-running of old television series or the past used as a setting for the fictions is not in itself a new programming tactic, from *Bonanza* to *Mad Men* there have been countless examples of these uses of the history as an attraction to audiences. However, the fact that they are now coexisting and even integrating with the new formats and genres that characterize today's participative, interactive brand of television makes them worthy subjects of consideration and analysis for any study of television and its history. As Brian Ott writes, programmes in which the past plays a leading role ('nostalgia television') now share billing with others aimed at younger audiences more accustomed to the newer products of narrowcasting ('hyperconscious television'). Both can be seen as a response to the uncertainties generated by the Information Age:

> Hyperconscious television savages the past, shamelessly stealing and mixing pre-existing styles and genres. It revels in reference and reflexivity. Its impulse toward the present is one of reverie and it may therefore be thought of as belonging to realm of postmodern imagination. Nostalgia television, by contrast, salvages the past, rescuing it from obscurity and obliteration. It deals in sincerity and authenticity. Its impulse toward the present is pessimistic and it may therefore be thought of as belonging to the realm of postmodern nihilism (Ott 2007: 14).

5. Towards a new participative television memory

In the wake of the retrieval of television memory and the fresh uses to which this legacy has been turned by the internet, we must seek a more complex explanation of television's second lease of life and the new ways in which it is received. The TV historians of the future will need to explain why a brand of television that had been presumed dead is still very much alive and kicking, why certain things are forgotten but not others, and why our interest in history that is neither television-related nor televized appears supplementary rather than indispensable.

The concept of television memory is changing. Our experience of 'today' is also changed by this constant presence of yesteryear, due largely to the mass dissemination of the latter effected by the media, notably television and digital archives. The current traces of artificial memory present in collective recollections, combined with the new complexities brought by connectivity, an area in which Google, YouTube and Facebook exert as much influence as television itself – there is no need to remember anything because we can access everything at any given moment – have led to what Hoskins calls 'a 'collapse' of memory' (Hoskins 2004). However, we must not forget that televized memory is no more than a continuous rebuilding of incomplete, carefully-selected media images.

Traditional television now reigns supreme among the new breed of audiovisual broadcasting platforms. Interactivity has not only strengthened the fan base of old-style television content, whose members hold 'wakes' at which they swap memories of the series and programmes of yesteryear. These new social networks

also generate different modes of consumption in which TV's past is occasionally reviewed with irony, melancholy or even hope that the experiences revisited might one day be fully revived either on the big screen or by new television formats devoted to the task of trawling through the medium's golden age. Though the producers of TV and digital media keep a close watch on these fashions and trends, it may well be that they are more interested in exploiting the market than in offering faithful historical reconstructions.

The internet has turned products intended for ephemeral consumption only into collectable items. This same phenomenon applies to the programmes produced for modern television, a platform currently undergoing a process of transformation, and also to those originally shown on traditional TV which, paradoxically, are now being revived in small doses or digital resurrections. These resurrections often come from the 'mausoleums' where the traditional channels recover their own history and its archives in the shape of commemorative programmes, nostalgic broadcasts and the depictions of television's past offered by their Internet sites (Holdsworth 2010: 132). However, viewers themselves also 'desecrate' the vaults of television history by sharing – and discussing – their own stockpile of recordings, recollections and experiences related with television as we have known it thus far.

The unrepeatable and irretrievable nature of past television experiences has led to the adoption of new methods of production and, more significantly, of distribution and consumption (Lotz 2007). Though attempts are being made to recover audiovisual archives of the major TV stations and make them available to all, they are currently no more than a potential institutional source of television memory. Meanwhile, personal collections of material, many of them fragmented or pirated, are being uploaded to the internet. As Hoskins writes, 'the traditional materiality associated with the artefactual archive has been challenged by the fluidity, reproducibility and transferability of digital data' (Hoskins 2009b: 6).

Thanks to social networks and other digital platforms, most television viewers now have the opportunity to climb aboard the flagship of days gone by, bringing with them, in diverse but always enriching ways, fragments of a past that clearly reflects their own personal experiences. As media scholar José van Dijck explains, the circulation of audiovisual files which can be commented on and exchanged via internet has led to a merging of personal and collective memories in which users are 'individual agents as active producers and collectors of mediated memories' (Van Dijck 2004: 273). The driving force behind this desire to share, discuss and revisit the material broadcast by traditional television is undoubtedly emotion. In a process defined by Maffesoli as the imposition of 'the culture of feelings', emotions have become one of the keys to understanding present day society (Rodrigo 1995: 135-145). As Rodrigo asserts, the power of the media lies in their capacity for establishing emotive behaviours that can be emulated by the audience. I believe that this line of research is vital to the task of understanding the different brand of exploitation of viewer memory carried out by traditional television channels to date using a variety of formats, nostalgic or otherwise. At the same time, it should also lead us to consider the causes behind the consumption and enjoyment of the past now exercised by internet users.

As much as television on the internet may pay continuous homage to the present, the blurring of timescales is yet another ingredient of the simultaneity that currently holds sway among the interactive media and in the ecosystem of globalization. The past is woven into the products that these platforms offer the public; in those of a more serious, reliable nature, these hidden corners of yesteryear evoke shared emotions and create a sense of social cohesion and communal history. We coincide with Hoskins when he recognized that we could now speak of a 'diffused memory', 'a living memory that is articulated through the everyday digital connectivity of the self (with others and with the past) that can be continually produced, accessed and updated, but which is also subject to different although nonetheless highly significant modes of 'forgetting" (Hoskins 2010).

At the same time, however, we should not forget that the presence of this continuously reconstructed audiovisual memory is also conflictive: social networks do not establish scales of importance or provide a context for the content that is displayed and exchanged. Furthermore, the apparently transient nature of digital files is more likely to throw up further problems than to provide solutions; it might even become a significant factor in the construction of collective TV-linked memories (Hoskins 2009b: 12). For this reason, the state-financed public media must at least be urged to retrieve television's past in a stable, responsible manner that is both contextualized and compared with other international systems. This is the main aim of certain European research projects as Videoactive (http://videoactive.wordpress.com/) and EUSCREEN (www.euscreen.eu/). Perhaps these will help television to become a new medium that can provide a mature, civic construction of the past, rather than merely serving as a tool for creating public memories tainted by political bias or aimed at camouflaging specific periods in history. For this reason, it is essential that all viewers, the older ones included, and in their role as users of memory, be taught to view representations of the past critically. In the future, television historians and researchers will also need to delve deeper into the effects of mixing the currently omnipresent past of television – and, by extension, that of society itself – with the present.

6. Conclusion

The technological changes that affect television, coupled with the comparative youth of memory studies as an academic field of study, have significantly conditioned our understanding of the implications of television memory, of the various ways in which it is manifested, and of the contribution made by its active agents or users (TV channels, historians and viewers, not forgetting, of course, the role played by television's historical archives themselves). Nevertheless, though television is currently in a state of constant change, we cannot overlook the social importance of television memory to contemporary societies in general, and to television theory in particular.

In this article, I have argued that the understanding of the extent to which television memory is present today in various different guises should be an essential element when rethinking television theory. These guises range from the TV chan-

nels' own exploitation of bygone days (evident in those programmes which seek to attract viewers to eminently nostalgic products) to the presence of the past in the debates, formats and activities characteristic of the new digital era. The concept of television memory must not be understood as an encyclopedic memory, as it was during the times when audiovisual archives was closed to public access. Rather, it should be viewed in relation to the ongoing process of creation, closer to the new modes of 'Wikipedia age' participation, where the importance of institutional agents will coexist with individual contributions from audiences like memory users.

Within the new concept of the medium characterized by technological convergence, multiple channels, unlimited broadcasting and interactivity, the field of research that focuses on viewers and, more specifically, on the concept of television memory will be crucial to the study of television history, as well as providing vital clues, which will lead us to conclude that the contents associated to the television past are, in fact, still very much alive.

Notes

1. One of its weak points, however, has been the scant identification and assessment of the flow of news between countries, while the sharing of formats, ideas and even scheduling strategies is another aspect of international television's comparative history that has generally been overlooked (Cohen et al. 1996).
2. The project was based on a multi-method research system which combined a questionnaire, qualitative focus group interviews and the use of complementary articles from the period.
3. Before these programmes, a channel launched in 1992, UK Gold, as a joint venture between Thames Television and the BBC, began to show repeats of their classic archive programming. The offer based on the past changed through the years and it is now part of the different services of UKTV, a digital cable and satellite television network, a joint venture between BBC Worldwide and Virgin Media.
4. See for example, www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc (1 October 2010).
5. See www.bbc.co.uk/dna/memoryshare/ (25 September 2010).

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