



Tensions of Europe/Inventing Europe

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Title: Transmitting and Receiving Europe
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Abstract:

The invention of broadcasting and the idea of inventing Europe as the “United Nations of Europe” date more or less from the same time. Despite the very nature of radio waves – that is, not to be affected by any political or national boundaries – the concept of broadcasting was the result of a concerted effort on the part of big business and government to create a highly centralized, one-way, restricted-access system that is broadcasting. From a transnational historical perspective, the process of institutionalization of public service radio broadcasting in Europe after the First World War must be interpreted as a process of national appropriation and social shaping of radio as a broadcast medium. Just as radio had done after the Great War, television played a central role in the process of moral recovery in the post-WW2 crisis of national identity of many countries. The historiography of broadcasting has been a favourite object of national historical narratives, emphasising the crucial role of broadcasting in the construction or stabilisation of the nation as an imagined community. On the other hand, the transnational character of radio waves made them an issue of cross-border negotiation and legislation from the very beginning. The transnational character of broadcasting therefore calls for a historical contextualisation, reflecting the dynamics of a communication tool that reshaped time and space.

History and state of the art of the collaborative research activities of the TRANS-group

a) State of the art of European broadcast history

The invention of broadcasting and the idea of inventing Europe as the “United Nations of Europe” date more or less from the same time. To study the role of broadcasting in the making of Europe seems to meet perfectly the central vision of this Eurocores programme: to emphasize the role of technology as central actor in the story of Europe’s “hidden integration”, and – here’s the other side of the story – its often apparent fragmentation. Inspired by the innovative and interdisciplinary layout of the “Inventing Europe” programme, looking at the history of European broadcasting is a challenging enterprise. To problematize these tensions between the integrative and fragmenting forces of broadcasting technologies in the complex process of European identity construction is the scholarly heart of this collective research proposal.

Despite the very nature of radio waves – that is, not to be affected by any political or national boundaries – the concept of broadcasting was the result of a concerted effort on the part of big business and government to create a highly centralized, one-way, restricted-access system that is broadcasting (Hilmes, 2002). From a transnational historical perspective, the process of institutionalization of public service radio broadcasting in Europe after the First World War must be interpreted as a process of national appropriation and social shaping of radio as a broadcast medium. Just as radio had done after the Great War, television played a central role in the process of moral recovery in the post-WW2 crisis of national identity of many countries, offering a unique opportunity to create national spaces of experience, carefully controlled by state authorities and embedded in nationally determined modernization processes.

It is not surprising that the historiography of broadcasting (both radio and television) has been – and still remains – a favourite object of national historical narratives (Fickers 2005), emphasising the crucial role of broadcasting in the construction or stabilisation of the nation as an imagined community (Thompson 1995). On the other hand, the transnational character of radio waves made them an issue of cross-border negotiation and legislation from the very beginning, resulting in the foundation of international, non-governmental broadcasting institutions (International Broadcasting Union (IBU), European Broadcasting Union (EBU), Organisation Internationale de Radiodiffusion et Télévision (OIRT)). The transnational character of broadcasting therefore calls for a historical contextualisation, reflecting the dynamics of a communication tool that reshaped time and space. While some publications focus on the institutional development of international and European broadcasting institutions (Zeller 1999) or on European program initiatives like “Eurovision” (Degenhardt / Strautz 1999), there is no single monograph on the history of European broadcasting as a cultural phenomenon. While there are books on international (Huth 1937; Smith 1998; Burns 1998) and European (Noam 1991; Wieten 2000) radio, television or broadcast history, they all remain compilations of separately authored chapters on national radio or television without a common ground of shared questions or methodological reflections. In order to facilitate the study of the complex and disparate development of broadcasting in Europe, this project will define chronological, geographical and thematic paths charting that development in an interdisciplinary and transnational perspective.

b) Aims & Objectives

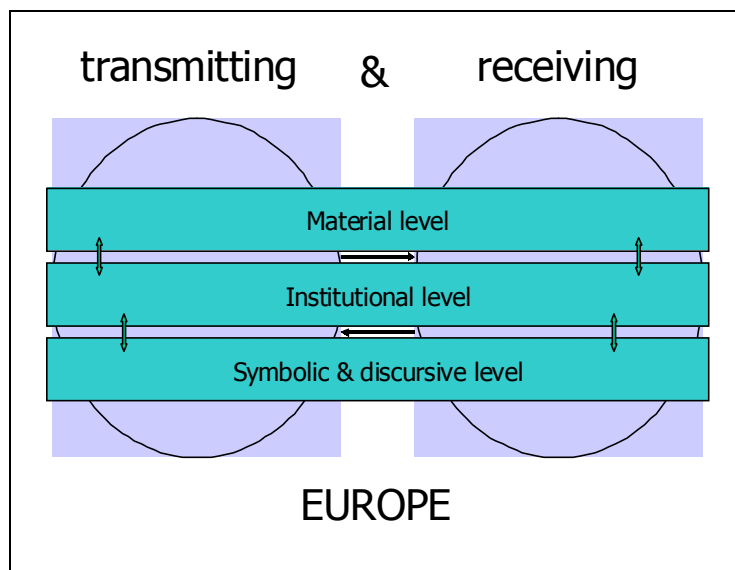
Vision

This project aims at writing a history of Europe centred on the idea of broadcast communication being the most powerful and influential means for both national and transnational communication in the 20th century. The central objective is to problematize *Europe as a broadcasting space* by describing and analyzing different transmission and reception technologies

of broadcast communication and by questioning their specific contribution to the medial construction of European communication spaces in constantly changing political and cultural environments. Based on the profound and varied expertise of the project collaborators and their involvement in international and European research networks, this CRP makes a strong case for an innovative European history: a European history that emphasises the role of technology and technological infrastructures in the invention and building of Europe without neglecting the institutional or individual actors in the mutual process of circulation, mediation and appropriation of Europe as a discursive construction.

Chronological and Geographical Scope, Methodology, Sources & Analysis

In retracing the different modes of broadcast transmission (short wave radio, FM radio, UHF television, cable, satellite) we will link the development of different broadcast technologies to visions of European broadcasting spaces and their role in the continuous re-invention of Europe or re-imagination of European identities. The *chronological scope* of the CRP covers the whole of the twentieth century. Within the thematic range of the related projects, the historical scope of the CRP reaches from early radio amateurs in the first decade of the 20th century to the actual state of satellite broadcasting. The *geographical scope* varies according to individual project themes. While all projects pay attention to the changing political geographies of Europe caused by major military and/or ideological confrontations in the “age of extremes”, some are dealing with alternative concepts (for example Europe as part of “Region 1” in the ITU-world map) of European broadcast spaces. The need to embed “Europe” as a discursive construction into changing material, legal and institutional maps makes adopting an over-arching geographical definition of Europe for the project as a whole as impractical as it would be counter-productive to the study's aims. Here again, the very nature of broadcasting as a transnational or transborder phenomenon with its inevitable spill-over effects challenges the classic ways of mapping Europe.



The *methodological design* of the project laid out in the graphic above reflects the double dynamics of the tensions between the transmission and reception of Europe (horizontal dynamics) and the tensions between different forms of European representations, emerging on the material, the institutional and the discursive level (vertical dynamics).

On the *material level*, the technical infrastructure of broadcasting is of interest. Transmitters, networks of relay stations, cables and satellite dishes are evidence of Europe as a technically connected communication space. On the *institutional level*, European broadcast institutions (like the EBU, the OIRT or Nordvision) and telecom institutions (like Conférence Européenne des Administrations des Postes et des Télécommunications (CEPT) and the Inter-

national Telecommunication Union (ITU)) have functioned as crucial gateways for realizing transnational interaction, both on the technical and juridical level as well as on the level of intercultural communication. The institutional level stands for Europe as a social space. Beyond their function as gateways they can be analyzed as mediators of changing discourses about what, how and why Europe should be, could be or had to be. In combining the material and institutional approach with *discursive analysis* of the transmitted and received contents of broadcasted programmes, this project aims at investigating the tensions between the intent of transmitting European sounds and images and their individual and creative appropriation. The sonic and visual icons of Europe (think about the symbolic force of the Eurovision hymn) finally represent Europe as a cultural space. As visualized in the methodological scheme, these different levels “interact” in various forms. While political conceptions of Europe as a community of sovereign but legally committed nations have influenced the (fragmented) construction of a European broadcasting space, broadcast technologies (short wave radio, satellites) have challenged the politicization of the ether and offered unexpected possibilities for civilian appropriations (amateurs) of Europe as a transnational communication space. In this sense, the “reversion of the public / private relationship” (Scannell, 1996, 69) through broadcasting can be interpreted as a structural transformation of the European political public sphere.

The multi-level approach allows us to link the history of technology perspective to disciplines like STS, media and journalism studies, cultural anthropology, sociology of institutions, nationalism / transnationalism studies and European integration history. Although all projects share this common methodological framework of the three-level approach, the analysis of the sources and their theoretical discussion vary according to the specific research questions and cognitive interest of each case study.

C Ongoing activities since June 2007

Although recommended for funding, the TRANS-project ended up being 5th on the ranking list of ESF, and only the first 4 projects finally got funding. After a short moment of depression, the team decided that it was worthwhile continuing the planned collaboration – in what form so ever. Fortunately, both Karin Bijsterveld and Christian Henrich-Franke got funding for their individual projects which gave us the opportunity to continue our collaboration although on a smaller financial basis. The first activity we planned and realized was an archival workshop at the European Broadcast Union in Geneva. The holdings of the EBU archives are of central importance for nearly all of our projects, and we profited from our stay in Geneva (11.-13th of February 2008) to discuss our ongoing research activities and to plan our next workshop in Lisbon (see a report of the workshop in the ToE newsletter of June 2008: http://www.tensionsofeurope.eu/nieuws/newsletters/NL5_0608.pdf). We decided to concentrate this workshop on the East/West-relations in broadcasting and communication technologies and circulated a call for paper. The title of the workshop is: *Airy Curtains in the European Ether: Broadcasting and communication technologies in East/West-relations during the short 20th century*. We got some very interesting proposals and hope to extend our group by a number of interesting scholars.

In addition to our archival workshop and the Lisbon meeting some of us participated at various meetings / conferences more or less related to our common research activities. Andreas was invited to present a paper on broadcasting as critical infrastructure at the workshop “Transnational infrastructures: Coping with scarcity and vulnerability” of the EUROCRIT-group in Stockholm (May 2008). The aim of this paper was to demonstrate the validity or attractiveness of the three-dimensional approach (material, institutional, symbolic) for the study of infrastructures as mediating interfaces (see: www.eurocrit.eu).

Finally, Andreas was invited to present a position paper at the ESF/IE workshop in Florence (July 2008), where some 30 people discussed the plans of a book series on the history of Europe from a transnational and history of technology focus. In this paper that was co-

authored by Alec Badenoch, we have tried to explore the theoretical and methodological challenges of an interdisciplinary approach to European infrastructures by using the concepts of “event” and “dispositive”. These concepts allowed us to tackle the challenge of problematizing infrastructures from a user perspective in order to understand how people experience their interaction with such infrastructures. In addition to that, we explored the usefulness of the concept of “dispositive” as a tool for the cultural analysis of infrastructures, or, in other words, to be able to interpret the symbolic meaning of infrastructures in a European context. (see: <http://www.tensionsofeurope.eu/events/florence/framePDF.asp>)

We hope that the Lisbon workshop will provide us with enough critical energy and stimulating intellectual input to further develop our research agenda. Definitely we aim at publishing a book that will somehow demonstrate the richness of our various papers and projects.

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