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European cultures of production

Article

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Critical Studies in Television Issue 13 Volume 2

Editorial: European Cultures of Production

Simone Knox and Elke Weissmann

Production Studies has given Television Studies a welcome chance to investigate the processes of putting television together, highlighting sense-making structures that are engaged with in the processes of production (see, for example, Caldwell 2008, Mayer, Banks and Caldwell 2009). While, as Elana Levine (2007) highlights, this has uncovered the 'audience-like' behaviour of production personnel, an ECREA-organised conference ('Making Television in the 21st Century', Aarhus University, October 2013) has also investigated how these processes of labour have been changed as a result of digitalisation. It is our interest to extend the debates by looking at the wider contexts in which television production operates – its cultures of production – and to build on the work by scholars including Vicki Mayer (2011), Miranda Banks, Bridget Conor and Vicki Mayer (2016) as well as Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson (2016) to widen the focus of existing debates by focusing on production contexts beyond the Anglophone sphere.

In doing so, we are part of the collaboration between *Critical Studies in Television* and the Television Studies Section of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). This collaboration seeks to promote both non-Anglophone television scholarship and scholarship on non-Anglophone television, and facilitate closer dialogue between colleagues in Europe (and beyond, of course). To this purpose, we called for contributions that investigate the conditions and television cultures that determine television production across Europe. Such was the volume of high-quality submissions we received that the editorial board of *Critical Studies in Television* agreed to allocate two special issues to this: the present one, focused on European Cultures of Production, and an additional one in Spring 2020, which will move the debate further by exploring Transnational European Cultures of Production.

In what follows, readers will find six articles as well as the first of our full-length aerial reviews of the state of television scholarship within a particular national context. Readers will notice a range of perspectives and contexts across the contributions, which cover different parts of the European continent, the work of a number of different television personnel, as well as fiction and non-fiction programming. What the contributions have in common is a shared commitment to engage with the ways in which television is produced and disseminated within contexts that are inevitably embedded within a global television landscape and being transformed by digital technologies, but also marked by their own specific particularities, histories and traditions. Individually and collectively, the contributions provide insights into the fascinating texture of these particularities, which they have uncovered through a range of methodologies. Readers will further notice that the contributions also engage – at times more implicitly, at others more explicitly – with the ways in which the work of television personnel is conditioned by structures of power (see Giddens 1984), with their professional agency simultaneously constrained and facilitated. With wrangling for socio-political power within Europe (and elsewhere) especially acute at the present time, and – as the contributions reflect – with the cultures of television

production in Europe experiencing a number of significant changes, such a commitment to critically engaging with power is especially welcome and needed.

Heike Bruun's article begins the special issue with a study of the on-air schedule of Danish broadcaster TV 2 in the digital era. She articulates the broadcaster's response to the need to negotiate public service obligations within an increasingly fragmented and non-linear television landscape. As her analysis points out, this may involve resurrecting older practices in the contemporary need for competitive distinction, thus pointing to the possibility for future transformations that the more things change, they more they may stay (or become) the same. Working at the intersection of the global and the local, Heidi Keinonen presents an analysis of the programme format import and adaptation in Finland. She introduces the format catalogue as a central tool in marketing new programme formats, with a role not unlike that of the mail-order catalogues of the 20th century, and considers how television production in a small national market may be affected by transnational flows and structures.

Notions of public service broadcasting and small nations already engaged with by Bruun and Keinonen become the focal point in the article co-authored by Ruth McElroy, Jakob Isak Nielsen and Caitriona Noonan. Their cross-national study explores how small nation public service broadcasters navigate the changing ecology of television production in Denmark, Ireland and Wales, highlighting the need for more nuance in considerations of power. With their case studies located at the global-local intersection, their discussion considers how international appeal and local specificity are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but that the latter may indeed be instrumental for the former. Kai Hanno Schwind successfully negotiates the different levels of industrial reflexivity (Caldwell, 2008) presented by his 'exclusive informants' (Bruun, 2016) in order to explore the copyright infringement of *Stromberg*, the German format adaptation of the British sitcom *The Office*. By thinking through the complex relationships between conceptualisations of 'format' and creative agency, his article makes a valuable contribution to both non-Anglophone comedy production studies and format scholarship.

Building on John T. Caldwell's (2008) work, Petr Szczepanik moves the debate to Central-Eastern Europe by examining how the self-conceptualisations of independent producers in the Czech Republic may affect their working practices, providing an insight into the relationships between film and television as experienced by the practitioner. Through articulating the differences between Czech producers and their British and American counterparts, his work provides a fascinating and timely counterpoint to the critical attention to the showrunner in Anglophone contexts. With a similar commitment to providing a synthetic overview as Szczepanik, Ana Vinuela presents an in-depth study of how television documentary production in France has operated within a shifting regulatory framework. By doing so, she joins scholars such as Helen Wheatley (2004) in extending discussions concerning 'quality television' beyond fiction programming by considering how documentary production has been affected by discourses of value and evaluation.

Georgia Aitaki concludes the special issue by providing an insightful assessment of the present state of scholarship on Greek television, both mapping the dominant concerns and

approaches of the existing (both Greek- and English-language) literature and signposting future directions.

Finally, we would like to thank all our contributors and reviewers for their involvement, insight and intellectual rigour, and our colleagues at *Critical Studies in Television* for their enthusiasm, intellectual generosity and support.

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