

A Switched-on TV:

The arts in the black and white of the cathode ray tube

International conference
presented during the
International Festival of Films on Art

Organized by

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Viva Paci (Université du Québec à Montréal)

Cinémathèque québécoise (Montreal)
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Deadline for submitting a proposal for a presentation (in French or in English)
using the attached PDF form:

1 May 2014

Please send your completed form to us at the following address:

television@hstart.umontreal.ca

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Deirdre BOYLE

(New School for Public Engagement, NY)

Gilles DELAVAUD

(Université Paris 8)

Thomas ELSAESSER

(Universiteit van Amsterdam)

François JOST

(Université Paris 3)

Gilles MOUËLLIC

(Université Rennes 2)

William URICCHIO

(Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

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From its founding in 1951, *Cahiers du Cinéma* devoted several pages to another, emerging medium: television. Each month this magazine, whose subtitle until issue no. 49, moreover, was “Revue du cinéma et du télécinéma” (“Film and Telefilm Magazine”), published articles by some of the leading figures in television circles, including the director and producer of television programs Pierre Viallet. In an article entitled “Télévision: Portrait d’une machine” (no. 3, June 1951), Viallet emphasised the need for a broad and diverse catalogue, because “the monster is hungry”. To fill in the gaps in programming schedules in these early years, re-broadcasts of pre-recorded programs were added to those broadcast live. The arts quickly became an important part of the diet used to satisfy the monster’s appetite. Whether recording arts events and works of art live or drawing on art for new forms of presentation, television immediately turned to the world of art. What’s more, in the discourses that accompanied the “image box” from its beginnings, the arts always played an important part, one distinct from information and entertainment programs.

In 1952, the broadcast “Visite au Musée Rodin” roused the enthusiasm of André Bazin, in particular for its stirring tracking shots grazing the surface of the statues. For Bazin, the means of expression of this new medium, its “hesitant compositions, simple and brutal lighting and slight fumbling in the editing . . . make [the viewer] a part of creating the broadcast” (“Un reportage sur l’éternité: la visite au Musée Rodin”, *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision*, 16 November 1952). Through the medium of television, part of the “spirit” of the sculptor’s studio was thus conveyed by the images. This conception of television as an instrument for transmitting the arts had been a part of thinking about the

medium ever since the experimental period of the 1930s. Gerald Cock, for example, the first director of the BBC’s television division and a fervent champion of the young medium’s social mission, dreamt of how theatre might find a new stage there, ensuring the future of dramatic art (“Looking Forward, A Personal Forecast of the Future of Television”, *Radio Times*, London, 29 October 1936).

A social conception of television as a means for the cultural emancipation of peoples thus developed, to the point of occupying a significant place in twentieth-century discourses around the evolution of humanity wherein humankind was being constantly confronted with machines (audiovisual and otherwise). If we accept today the oxymoron “digital humanities”, we might, to take a historicised view, project the idea back to the mid-twentieth century to speak of “cathode ray humanities”. The cinema, or course, had already opened the way for the representation of the arts on screen, which television took up and developed in turn. Nevertheless, several issues proper to the television medium truly redefined this process of cultural appropriation of the arts, in particular the fact that the television set is found in the heart of domestic space, becoming a part of viewers’ daily lives and thereby encouraging a personal and almost intimate relationship with the images flowing past.

One of the paths television took was to act as a place where the viewer could obtain information, among other things on the arts. But another path of experimentation also took shape, consisting not only in “appropriating” the arts but in offering new work specific to the medium. The ARTE network’s name, for example, is more than a mere marketing strategy; it stems from a yearning, still present today, to create innovative artistic content capable of opening up new spaces for interpretation and, perhaps, of drawing new audiences to traditional art forms. The

performing arts, visual arts and music once outlined the contours of creative television programming. At the same time, by examining the role of the representation of the arts on television, we can sketch the basis of a counter-history of television, one which may have had ontological affinities with Bazin's *impure cinema*: pure television . . .

This international conference seeks to bring together television studies specialists and media historians presenting case studies on legendary or forgotten television productions which have fallen through the cracks of history or been kept alive in the pages of commentators (or even through the raids television carries out today on its own archives). This conference, with its intermedial aspirations, will promote an encounter between varied and complementary perspectives (television studies, film studies, media archaeology, etc.) as a way of proposing new ideas about these historical phenomena, which are rarely addressed in television studies.

The focus of this conference is the *first era of television*, which we propose to identify here as being in **black and white** (we are well aware that, inasmuch as the standardisation of colour

television has its own history which is different for every national television service, the temporal frame for the study of colour television's early period is not fixed). This period of emergence and institutionalisation, characterised by a great freedom for experimentation, will serve to guide presentations around this new cultural paradigm we know as television.

We thus invite submissions which propose to analyse works or the careers of their authors, critical discourses, institutional policies, technological contexts and audience studies in the trade press on the topic of television productions which presented the arts during this *first era of television*.

This call for submissions was prepared in collaboration with Nicolas Dulac and Kim Décarie (GRAFICS, Université de Montréal). www.grafics.ca

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