

Anikó Imre, Timothy Havens,
Katalin Lustyik (eds.),
*Popular Television in Eastern Europe
During and Since Socialism*,
Routledge, New York/London 2013, pp. 285

For a long time, the reflection devoted to cultural formations in Central and Eastern Europe excluded television from academic discourse. A number of reasons explains such a blind spot: the privilege accorded to traditional arts when considering cultural production in the area; the reduction of mass media to their political function; scholars' limited access to national productions, due to linguistic barriers that prevented the developing of a truly transnational approach to the area; the dominance of a Western paradigm in media studies. The project underneath the volume fills in many gaps, by acknowledging TV's multifaceted nature and role in the former Socialist block, from its early development to the present date. As the editors state in their introduction: "such a volume might spotlight, nurture and reclaim Eastern European television studies from the margins of both television studies and Eastern European media studies. As an intellectual endeavor, Eastern European television studies suffer from the Western nature of most television scholarship and theory, while the field of Eastern European media studies almost exclusively addresses questions of journalism, democracy and civic life." (p. 1).

The volume is organized in three main sections. The first two examine "Popular Television in Socialist Time" and "Commercial Globalization and Eastern European TV;" the third one discusses "Television and National Identity on Europe's Edge," thus centering on a crucial question for the region, at least from 19th century onward. Compared to previous contributions, the three sections displace the discussion, not confining the reflection on TV to the narrow

borders of media and political power relationships. This approach does not dismiss political agency in popular TV during Socialism (Katalin Lustyik, *From a Socialist Endeavor to a Commercial Enterprise: Children's Television in East-Central Europe*), but persisting policies are to be discovered, as for instance broadcasting (Sylwia Szoztak, *Post-Transitional Continuity and Change: Polish Broadcasting Flow and American TV Series*). At the same time, European strategies to contrast US hegemony

and foster continental cultural diversity seem to follow rather a commercial, Western-based logic (Timothy Havens, Evelyn Bottando, Matthew S. Thatcher, *Intra-European Media Imperialism: Hungarian Program Imports and the Television Without Frontiers Directive*).

The concern with the role of TV in national and regional culture enlightens the dialogue between multiple cultural expressions at the core of popular production, as Dorota Ostrowska explains through the cultural analysis of a 1980s Polish TV series (*The Carnival of the Absurd: Stanislaw Bareja's Alternatywy 4 and Polish Television in the 1980s*). By connecting historical loose descriptions with high and folk culture, "edutainment series [...] were instrumental in fostering national unity through television entertainment not despite but because of the fact that they were mostly made up. In other words, their affective power and longevity within national memory derives precisely from folk culture's and high literature's mutual validation of nationalism's loose treatment of historical fact." (Anikó Imre, *Adventures in Early Socialist Edutainment*, p. 37).

A will to grasp cultural dynamics in popular TV brings to close examination its role in defining identities. These may be declined as national ones (Adina Schneeweis, *To Be Romanian in Post-Communist Romania: Entertainment Television and Patriotism in Popular Discourse*; Alice Bardan, *Big Brothers and Little Brothers: National Identity in Recent Romanian Adaptations of Global Television Formats*). Otherwise, identities can be considered collectively, shaped by a memory of totalitarian past and traumatic shift triggered through popular TV (Irena Carpentier Reifová, Kateřina Gillárová, Radim Hladík, *The Way We Applauded: How Popular Culture Stimulates Collective Memory of the Socialist Past in Czechoslovakia*); or political (Ferenc Hammer, *Coy Utopia: Politics in the First Hungarian*

Soap). Finally, the term concerns also minorities and popular TV, especially telling within a region where the strive for national identities marked discursive and political practices (Annabel Tramblett, *Why Must Roma Minorities Be Always Seen on the Stage and Never in the Audience? Children's Opinions of Reality Roma TV*; Ksenija Vidmar-Horvat, *Racing for the Audience: National Identity, Public Tv and the Roma in Post-socialist Slovenia*).

Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism greatly contributes to a better understanding of cultural Eastern European specificity. To achieve this goal, the volume does not keep its reflection to established geopolitical boundaries, instead, it proves how productive a more problematic approach can be. It questions assumed historical paradigms, includes Eastern European popular TV in the broader international history of the medium, promotes further reflection on national, regional and transnational medial identities, and includes gender and ethnic varieties into a broader scope. A more defined approach to popular culture could clarify the methods, and the issues at stake. At the present stage, the contributions maintain the contradiction at the core of the notion of popular: "On the one hand an emphasis on something produced for the ordinary people, on the other, something approved by the people. It is in the switch between the two emphases that we can locate the problematic of popular culture."¹ Therefore, different approaches are juxtaposed, coupling broadcasting and TV flows analysis with research focused on social discourses on or through media, on ways of building identities, overcoming cultural, social and political traumas by appropriating popular TV. Besides, the same notion of popular has been forged within and applied mostly to Anglo-Saxon cultural production, but does not necessarily fit into different cultural typologies. Eventually, an approach based on a symbolic

economy might provide this vivid discussion with the missing link between modes of production and broadcasting and cultural processes. Though, thanks to this unprecedented and welcomed effort, the reader can take such a step, and further carry on the research.

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Miriam Bratu Hansen,
*Cinema and Experience. Siegfried Kracauer,
Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*,
University of California Press,
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A genuine testament of Hansen, who died prematurely after the publication of the book, *Cinema and Experience* appears as the summation of her long research work. It is also, at the same time, a masterly confrontation with that longstanding theoretical tradition (born in the twenties in Germany mostly around the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt), which was the first to reflect, in an often contradictory and antinomic way, upon modernity and the transformations it had brought about, and upon the crisis for a way of knowing based on memory and tradition. Technological modernity is defined above all by a crisis of experience, a fragmentation of sensory life, which is disintegrated into its different parts in a sort of “apocalypse of the sensible.”

It is “that great overhaul of the perceptual inventory that will modify again and in an unpredictable way our image of the world,” as Benjamin wrote in 1928 trying to define the contours of a new scopic regime and its huge epistemological and social impact. As the subtitle of her book points out, Kracauer, Benjamin and Adorno are Hansen’s direct interlocutors, but Habermas, Negt and Kluge – the last exponents of Critical Theory – are fundamental in

1 Colin MacCabe, *Defining Popular Culture*, in *High Theory/Low Culture*, edited by Colin MacCabe, St. Martin’s Press, New York 1986; now in Id., *The Eloquence of the Vulgar. Language, Cinema and the Politics of Culture*, British Film Institute, London 1999, p. 76.

her analysis of the developments of technological modernity, and of the new forms of experience, sharing and spreading knowledge. When she thinks of cinema as the new public sphere of modernity, the scholar refers to the well-known notion, elaborated by Negt and Kluge¹, of the ‘public sphere’ “as a ‘social horizon of experience’ grounded in the subjects’ ‘context of living’, that is, the lived relationality of social and material, affective and imaginative re/production.” The social and political role of cinema is defined precisely by this ability to create a collective horizon of experience, in which an ever more fragmented and alienated existence can be recomposed. Hansen finds this emancipatory power above all in the work of Kluge, which has been for many years a recurring point of reference for her own research.

In the preface, among various other autobiographical remarks, Hansen admits that the direction of her research has overlapped with that of Film Theory: her studies at Frankfurt University, from 1967 to 1976, are contemporary with the rise of the debate on cinema and media in Germany, a debate which started much later than in France or the United States, but which has been fundamental in identifying the categories and the thinkers that would dominate the theoretical scene in the following decades. As a student of Theodor W. Adorno and Karsten Witte, who edited the writings of Benjamin and Kracauer respectively, Hansen began in those years that careful reading of these au-