

## Book Review: Television across Europe: a comparative introduction

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Jan Wieten, Graham Murdock and Peter Dahlgren (eds), *Television Across Europe: A Comparative Introduction*. London: Sage, 2000. 268 pp. (inc. index). ISBN 0-7619-6884-9 (hbk); ISBN 0-7619-6885-7 (pbk) £18.99

*Television Across Europe*, by January Wieten, Graham Murdock and Peter Dahlgren, tries to give a picture of the processes that influenced the development of television to become the dominant medium in Europe and which will become increasingly relevant for the near future. In so doing, television appears as a medium of symbolic representation and as an institution that depends on the structures of economy. Primarily, television makes public reflection possible and produces, slows down and yet accelerates social processes. It is this social and institutional framework of television with which the first part of the book concerns itself. The authors are concerned with the monopoly of public television and the division into public and private networks which took place in many European countries during the 1980s. Here, central topics include the consequences of political-economic deregulation, the fragmentation of viewers caused by the emergence of new channels, the influence of digital transmission methods and the increasing convergence of television, telecommunications and computers.

The publication's second section addresses current trends and patterns as well as the organization and financing of contemporary television programmes. The authors approach the question of whether the acceptance of imported content and commercial television formats has brought about an Americanization of European TV. Furthermore, different types of programme production are described. For example, private networks no longer mainly try to develop original programmes. Instead, they follow a strategy called 'programming': productions with the sole aim of selling viewer ratings to advertising companies.

On the basis of selected television genres and new 'hybrid' programme forms, the third section points out changes within the European television society and the complicated relation of the global and local. MTV's altered strategy of adapting musical, cultural and linguistic diversity in order to compete with local television stations may serve as an example here, as may the European acceptance of the American breakfast television format, a mix of information, service and entertainment linked by a strong involvement of viewers.



'Euro-Media Research Group' – the authors elaborate a comparative European perspective which manages to take the different historical, social and national contexts into account and, furthermore, demonstrates the divergence of American media society. *Television Across Europe* primarily addresses students of media and communication sciences, of film and television theories and of European studies. Due to its descriptive, understandable and detailed style the book can be recommended as an introduction to the comparative European discussion of media. To attain a deeper understanding of the subject matter, however, additional texts and theoretical concepts seem necessary to me. As I see it, the heavy emphasis on empirical, quantitative examples will not be too useful for students at the beginning of their studies and the total lack of explanations below many images makes it hard to put them into context. Yet the didactic design of the individual chapters is remarkable: each has a detailed introduction, explanatory transitions between greater areas of topics, emphasis through keywords, suggestions and questions concerning further research and bibliographies intended to guide advanced studies.

Researchers who already have an advanced level of knowledge concerning the subject matter will probably not have much use for this book, as its conception as a text book precludes deeper theoretical analyses – even though the many examples of quantitative research may prove to be incentive to further comparative research. Thus the importance of this publication for the field of cultural studies, rather, lies in its well-made didactic design and its application of a culturally comparing perspective.

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Paul Willis, *The Ethnographic Imagination*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000. 153 pp. (inc. index). ISBN 0-7456-0173-1 (hbk) £50.00; ISBN 0-7456-0174-X (pbk) £15.99

In *The Ethnographic Imagination*, Paul Willis, renowned for his classic study *Learning to Labour*, makes a strong claim for the centrality of ethnographic method to contemporary social science. Using a title that harks back to C. Wright Mills, the author pays homage to Raymond Williams' seminal work in cultural studies. According to Willis, who moved into cultural studies from literature, the establishment of the field of cultural studies similarly involved a move from textual approaches to a multi-method approach which includes ethnographic fieldwork.

*The Ethnographic Imagination* is divided into two parts. The first part, 'Art in the Everyday', constitutes the more abstract and theoretical section of the book. The chapter headings in Part I give an indication of Willis'