TELE-CLUBS AND EUROPEAN TELEVISION HISTORY BEYOND THE SCREEN

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Abstract: This essay looks into the intellectual life of *télé-clubs*, the collective television watching experiment prominent in France in the 1950s, and its role in television studies. The article explores different directions by analyzing *télé-clubs* as a moment in television history itself and based on that, searching for a new method of studying television history. The article will examine the place of *télé-clubs* in European television history in two ways. Firstly, the article will look into how two recent conceptual developments that see media forms as transnational and remedial are useful for addressing some aspects of *télé-clubs* that have not received much treatment. Secondly, the article will consider where the first piece of intellectual work on *télé-clubs* – the report on the *télé-clubs* themselves by Joffre Dumazedier (1956) – might be located in the history of television studies in relation to other developments occurring in the 1950s. The article will plead in favour of the need to think of the instrumental uses of television in the period before its expansion and eventual domestication.

Keywords: television, télé-club, UNESCO, historiography

1 Re-Remembering Télé-clubs

The French *télé-club* represents one of the early formations of collective television reception in Europe. With its first appearance in the village of Nogentel in 1951, the tele-club offered the opportunity for village residents to watch television in a communal setting, usually a local schoolhouse. Like its precursor in collective reception, the 'cine-club', tele-clubs encouraged audience feedback through discussions with facilitators once the programmes were over, and through contact with the broadcaster, the RTF.

This mode of television reception attracted considerable attention both within and outside France. By 1953, UNESCO was assisting in the production of a series of programmes, entitled *L'État d'Urgence*, which was aired in 1954 to a number of village tele-clubs established throughout France, as part of its effort to encourage freer flows of communication and post-war modernisation. The programmes, on subjects varying from 'co-operation' to 'women in the country', were produced in conjunction with officials involved in the original tele-club experiments, the RTF, and a team of sociologists led by Joffre Dumazedier from the CNRS (French National Centre for Scientific Research) were enlisted to study audience behaviour. From here, tele-clubs became a travelling phenomenon at UNESCO – a global 'format' for television reception, if you will – with similar initiatives occurring in Italy and Japan and, by the 1960s and 70s, in countries such as India, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire. The French tele-club experiments of the 1950s stand as a well-worn moment in many historical narratives about the history of the medium. However, revisiting key moments

in the medium can often open up new questions or revive old debates about the nature of television history and the challenges of studying television as a cultural form, object, or medium.

Consider the following example: a regional newspaper for the Ardennes and Picardie regions recently ran a story about Nogentel's commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the first meeting of the village tele-club.[1] The celebrations spread out over three days and featured lectures on the history of tele-clubs, a performance by a former student from the village school, a discussion of television programs, **and a re-enactment of the arrival of the first television antenna**.

The fact that the village chose to remember tele-clubs when they did, at a time when a number of disturbing currents are converging, is worth noting here. With the hyper-nationalism of the far-right, Euro-scepticism, economic upheaval in the name of austerity and anti-immigration sentiments, it should perhaps come as no surprise that a village might look for something that reminds them of quieter times in a familiar place. This in itself is a reminder of John Lukacs' observation that nostalgia's classical meaning invokes a longing not only for a certain *time*, but also a certain *home*.[2]

But there is something else worth noting. **The Nogentel *télé-clubs* are also featured on Picardie En Ligne,** a website which supports local communities in the Picardy region to establish digital public spaces. The site explains that these spaces come complete with facilitators offering to train people to use the Internet and other online applications free-of-charge. Here the tele-clubs serve as a kind of symbolic shorthand, a reminder of another attempt of media education that took place in an earlier age. Furthermore, the site also claims that the room in Nogentel now reserved for digital education was once the classroom where the original tele-clubs were held.

A detailed description of the history of tele-clubs in France has been discussed in detail in the work of others, and a discussion of its afterlife in different settings will have to wait for another occasion.[3] In this essay, I want to move beyond the screen to discuss how tele-clubs have served as a tool for making sense of the history of television in Europe. More importantly, for my purpose, I want to explore how they may be used again to ask different questions about the nature of the medium and the way it has been studied in Europe over time. What will be clear from this account is that thinking of television less as an institutional form or aesthetic style but in utilitarian terms, as a tool for doing things, might be an appropriate way of accounting for television during what Delavaud and Maréchal (2011) call the "experimental moment" of television's development.[4] What follows should be read as a search for a method, as a way of thinking through how to make sense of *télé-clubs*, rather than a detailed account of the tele-clubs themselves.

After a brief reflection on the place of tele-clubs in European television history, I think about the intellectual work of tele-clubs in two senses. First I argue that two recent conceptual developments that see media forms as transnational and remedial are useful for addressing some aspects of tele-clubs that have not received much treatment. Second, I briefly consider where the first piece of intellectual work on tele-clubs – the report on the tele-clubs themselves by Dumazedier – might be located in the history of television studies. I conclude by suggesting that the examples mentioned here point in the direction of a way of thinking about the instrumental uses of television in the period before its expansion and eventual domestication.

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[1] For the story and a fascinating image, see 'Les soixante ans du téléclub un "événement historique"', *L'Union Ardennais*, 27 September 2011. http://www.lunion.presse.fr/article/aisne/nogentel-les-soixante-ans-du-teleclub-un-evenement-historique
[2] John Lukacs, *The Future of History*, Yale University Press, 2012, p.68. Emphasis in original.
[3] An excellent example is Marie-Françoise Levy, 'La création des *télé-clubs*: L'expérience de l'Aisne', in Marie-Françoise Levy, eds, *La Télévision dans la République dans les annéés 50*, Editions Complexe, 1999, pp.107-132.
[4] Gilles Delavaud and Denis Maréchal, eds, *Television: le moment experimental: De l'invention à l'institution* (1935-1955), Rennes: Editions Apogée, 2011.

2 Tele-clubs and Television History

The reasons for the prominent place of the tele-club within European television history are probably obvious but they bear repeating here. As an early instance of media consumption in public settings they are a reminder of television's "extra-domestic presence", to borrow a term from Milly Buonanno.[5] In the French case, this is because it is part of the decade of slow adoption of the medium, as television was only available in a small number of French cities until the late 1950s and into the 1960s. The relationship between tele-clubs and France's national broadcaster RTF, which would produce programmes for the clubs and would take feedback from the audience to improve future productions, is cited as an example of the emergence of the television public.[6] As an attempt at public education it stands as yet another example of the belief in the pedagogical power of the media. Finally, as a model of television watching that encouraged discussion, interactivity and the consumption of programmes linked to lived experience, tele-clubs also represented an alternative version of television from that on offer in other places, particularly in America. UNESCO's adaptation of tele-clubs only served to fortify the perception of the tele-club as a potentially valuable tool, a device capable of reaching people to bring about a range of different objectives, from intercultural dialogue to the modernisation of farming techniques, or to assist efforts in the developing world.

2.1 The Role of Archives

If these reasons are more apparent to the reader there are others that require equal airtime. While the effectiveness of these broadcasts in bringing about their objectives may remain an open question, one might argue that the most effective thing about tele-clubs, especially in France, is archival. France's Institut national d'audiovisuel (INA) has maintained copies of *L'État d'Urgence* and other fragments of tele-club history, such as **a film documenting the arrival of television at Nogentel, available for streaming through INA's web presence**.[7] During my research for this project I watched episodes in the basement of the national library complex in Paris and, thanks to some nifty work by archivists and the projectionist in the Place de Fontenoy, I was also able to watch the shows on film at UNESCO's very own cinema, a site for non-theatrical film consumption if there ever was one.

This is only half of the story. Tele-clubs have also been richly documented. Indeed, *Television and Rural Adult Education*, the study of the French tele-club experiment by Joffre Dumazedier, is routinely cited in historiographical accounts of the medium. They also have a life well beyond official documents, as they receive constant references by UNESCO officials in articles in scholarly journals, in articles in popular newspapers like *The New York Times,* and through its primary publication, *The UNESCO Courier*, **whose contents are now freely available online**. This is to say nothing of the records of tele-club activities held in French national archives, either through the papers of one of its founders, Roger Louis, or through the records of the organisation that was principally behind the French efforts.[8] The rich paper and video trail has helped to cement tele-clubs as a key early instance in French television history.

Of course the presence of one thing is a reminder of that which is absent. While UNESCO has undertaken a massive initiative to digitise many of its records, reports and publications through its **UNESDOC** database, the records of the institution's early history, from the mid-1940s until the mid-1960s remains largely a paper record, an exercise in consulting card catalogues, master files of record groups and other aspects of investigative work. The fragmented nature of these early documents, or the presence of file folders with enticing names but empty contents raise more questions than I have been able to answer to date, due to my own linguistic limitations or imagination. For example,

[5] Milly Buonanno, *The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories*, Intellect, 2008, p.14.
[6] See Marie-Françoise-Lévy and Marie-Noëlle Sicard, "L'éveil des publics à l'Europe: Les années 1950-1968", in Lévy and Sicard, eds, *Les Lucarnes de l'Europe: Télévisions, cultures, identités 1945-2005*, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2008, p. 970-114.
[7] For an excellent analysis, see François Jost, *La Télévision en Quotidien: Entre Réalité et Fiction*, De Boeck, 2004, 114-123.
[8] For a discussion on the challenges of reconstructing *télé-clubs*, see Levy, 'La Creation des *télé-clubs*', in Marie-Françoise Levy, eds, *La Télévision dans la République dans les annéés 50*, Editions Complexe, 1999, pp.108-109

a file referring to a collective television initiative in Germany, located at the back of a series of files pertaining to the French tele-club initiative, is empty. Correspondence between UNESCO officials, Roger Louis, and officials from RAI in Italy about establishing tele-clubs there are incomplete or trail off. References to the presence of tele-clubs in Belgium or Switzerland are mentioned but without evidence or citations.

The relative comprehensiveness of the French case is a testament to the continuing importance of paperwork in the enterprise of television history, as well as the importance of bureaucracy, in the sense of putting things in the *bureau* or leaving them aside, either by choice or for some other reason.[9] That "some other reason" is probably due not only to the different policies of UNESCO's archives but also of the changing working conditions under which archivists operate, a story sorely in need of being told and for which this journal is clearly committed to address. It is also one of the reasons why Fickers and Bignell (2008) are able to conclude their book on European television history: "we still know very little – certainly from a comparative European perspective – about the concrete contexts of domestic television reception and its roles in the routines of daily life in which it is so deeply embedded.[10]

3 Télé-clubs as Transnational and Remedial Media

With that in mind, perhaps changing the terms on which we think of tele-clubs might open up some different ways of going about thinking about the early history of television. We can draw inspiration from two more recent conceptual developments in media studies to do this. For example, the recent turn towards transnational approaches to media studies, whether from a historical perspective or through analyses of more contemporary developments, has addressed two concerns. Firstly, there has been an attempt to move away from methodological nationalism and towards a cosmopolitan approach to scholarship, recently expressed by Ulrich Beck, that accounts for a cross-cultural mixture, flows of knowledge and resources, and the interconnection of peoples and cultures.[11] Secondly, there has been an attempt to provide a means of addressing international flows of media without defaulting to a media imperialism thesis.[12] The other development is the emergence of approaches concerned with mapping relations between old and new media. The famous observation by Marshall McLuhan that all new media have old media within them has served as the inspiration for a range of insights. Bolter and Grusin's (2000) conception of 're-mediation' draws attention to the ways new media forms make their cultural entry through paying homage to the forms that preceded them. The contributors to Charles Acland's *Residual Media* pay attention to the afterlife of media forms preciously thought as 'dead', ranging from old typewriters to tachistoscopes.[13]

By combining these two approaches we get a different approach towards the writing of television history. Benjamin Peters (2009) asserts that the key question in the study of any new media – for whom and when are which media new – asks scholars 'to engage and become those who openly struggle to classify, namel ad codify media' [14]. If that is the case, then perhaps we can agree that the question about newness is useful as a way of making sense of the things that are old about tele-clubs, or as a way of understanding how old things have become new thanks to the placement of televisions in community centres in different cultural contexts. The case of tele-clubs is also a reminder of another one of Peters' key points: since scholars tend to focus on events when a medium was new or relatively new, many of us who study the past are, ourselves, scholars of new media and, as a result, the chroniclers of new media history.[15] If we accept this premise for the purpose of the exercise where does this take us? For starters, it reminds us of the

[9] This discussion is inspired by Ben Kafka's article, 'Paperwork: The State of the Discipline', *Book History 12*, 2009, pp.340-353.
[10] This is from the conclusion of Andreas Fickers and Jonathan Bignell, *A European Television History*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, p.248.
[11] Andreas Fickers and Catherine Johnson, 'Transnational Television History: A Comparative Approach', *Media History* 16,1, 2010, 1-11; Dwayne Winseck and Robert Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization*, 1860-1930, Duke University Press, 2008. For an articulation of Beck's thesis, see *What is Globalization*, Polity Press, 1999.
[12] On this see the introduction to Jean Chalaby, *Transnational Television in Europe*, I.B. Taurus, 2009.
[13] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation*, MIT Press, 2000; Charles Acland, ed. *Residual Media*, University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
[14] Benjamin Peters, 'And Lead Us Not Into Thinking the New is New: A Bibliographic Case for New Media History', *New Media and Society* 11, 1/2, 2009, 19.
[15] Ibid, p.23

place of multilateral institutions in Europe in the post-war era. The United Nations and its various agencies begin after 1945 with the dissolution of the League of Nations. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was signed in 1947 and has since transformed into the World Trade Organisation. The North Atlantic Treaty Alliance, or NATO, was signed in 1949. Both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were established out of the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944. Many of these organisations, such as the Food and Agricultural Organisation or the International Court of Justice, take residence in places like Rome and The Hague and make use of media in a number of complex ways.[16] UNESCO may well be the organisation that we associate with media and culture, for obvious reasons. However, these organisations produced a considerable amount of paper and media discussions involving or pertaining to the activities of various organisations are likely to be found there. A cursory reminder of the place of celebrities in the United Nations system, whether in the form of **Danny Kaye** or **Peter Ustinov's work for UNICEF**, to the current efforts of Angelina Jolie with UNHCR serve as evidence of the relationship between media and international diplomacy.[17]

It is with UNESCO that we have the clearest evidence of this. In part this is due to the relationship between media and culture that falls under the organisation's mandate. In addition, though, is the stated belief in modes of communication as representing important tools for building peace and understanding. Member states either provide experts to write reports, or provide analysis, or local populations act as sites for different communication experiments.

Of course, it was not only television that was put into the service of UNESCO's efforts. A few examples from the literature are relevant here. Sonja de Leeuw (2010) has focused on the work of a Dutch television pioneer, Erik de Vries, and his efforts for UNESCO in establishing television in places like Costa Rica.[18] Recent work by Zöe Druick (2008) has drawn attention to the complex role played by documentary film at UNESCO, influenced by the British documentary tradition.[19] Journalism training has also been a part of UNESCO's efforts, through the development of curricula and training programmes.[20] Furthermore, the institution itself has served as the repository for a number of surveys and studies of international media systems: the *Press, Film, and Radio in the World Today* series, beginning in 1949, and *Reports and Papers on Mass Communication* series, which has published over 100 works.

3.1 Multilateral Instruments

We can see then that for UNESCO, tele-clubs represented one of a number of instruments put to use in the attempt to meet its objectives. I use the word 'instrument' purposely here, since the deployment of instruments is one of the features of multilateral organisations. As John Ruggie (1992) argues, multilateralism is about the establishment of systems of conduct, about institutional arrangements intended to manage tensions among states and ensure participation from different member-states in the forging of peaceful resolutions.[21] One could see the efforts of organisations like UNESCO in this way, as an institution that offers a series of tools, or instruments, to be used in different contexts, depending on where they might be most appropriate, where the resources are the most abundant and, of course, where the most powerful interests lie or where individual interest can be gained on the political or economic stage.

[16] See Suzanne Langlois, 'La contribution du cinéma documentaire en faveur de l'Administration des Nations unies pour les secours et la reconstruction (UNRRA) 1944-1947', in Roch Legault and Magali Deleuze, eds, *Lendemains de guerre*, Lux Éditeur, 2006, pp.129-147
[17] See Lisa Tsaliki, Christos Frangonikolopoulos, Asteris Hularias, *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics*, Intellect Books, 2011, pp.26-58.
[18] Sonja de Leeuw, 'Transnationality in Dutch (Pre) Television: The Central Role of Erik de Vries', *Media History* 16, 1, 2010, 13-29.
[19] Zoe Druick, 'Reaching the Multimillions: Liberal Internationalism and the Establishment of Documentary Film', in Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Inventing Film Studies*, Duke University Press, 2008, pp.66-92, and 'Unesco, Film, and Education: Mediating Postwar Paradigms of Communication', in Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful Cinema*, Duke University Press, 2011, p. 81-102.
[20] A discussion of UNESCO's journalism training in Africa can be found in Abiodun Salawu, 'The Growth and Development of African Media Studies: Perspectives from Nigeria', *Journal of African Media Studies* 1,1, 2009, p. 81-90.
[21] John Gerard Ruggie, 'Mutlilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution', *International Organization* 46,3, 1992, 561-598

In this way we can talk of the circulation of tele-clubs or any other media instrument deployed by the institution in much the same way we have come to talk about other kinds of media formats in the age of globalisation. Indeed, much of the time those issues have dealt precisely with the issues tele-clubs raise – about whether they are tools deployed to structure discussion, to frame citizenship, to spread ideology, or whether they provide opportunities for local or national forms of expression that would not otherwise be heard – in much the same way we have talked about the globalisation of franchise television programmes. In both cases what those discussions do is hinge upon basic assumptions about behaviourism, whether in the form of cultural imperialism or otherwise. There is, of course, the other question that one might ask, about why some countries take up certain programmes over others. Unfortunately, the question of why UNESCO's tele-clubs 'globalised' to **Japan** or **Senegal** and not to other places is something that needs to be answered in a different place. Attention to those kinds of questions would then have the effect of thinking of tele-clubs as a more complex form of communication than simply an act of sending and receiving, which appears to be the way they are currently conceived.[22]

3.2 What do Tele-clubs Remediate?

If this discussion touches on the transnational components of tele-clubs, what of their remedial nature? To a degree we have already answered that question, as we know of the ways the French tele-clubs emerged out of the cine-clubs that preceded them. However, to stop here would only be part of the story. In an article on educational media, Henry Cassirer (1959), the UNESCO official responsible for television, drew on three examples that preceded tele-clubs.[23] This included the BBC's Listening Groups, an early form of adult education through radio from 1927-1947.[24] However, it also included a discussion of the farm radio programming based in Canada. Consider **The National Farm Radio Forum** (portions of which are now available from the archives of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), an initiative of agricultural organisations, adult education associations and Canada's public broadcaster, the CBC, from 1941 until into the 1960s.[25] The farm forum's organisers would produce and distribute a guide containing discussion questions that were mailed out to local discussion group organisers. But farm forums were more than radio programmes; they involved an entire range of media, from newsletters and guides for discussion leaders on how to encourage greater participation, to encouragement for listeners to interact with the programme's producers, through feedback to group facilitators, to letters to the CBC.[26] The third reference was a similar experience in farm radio, this time through a co-operative experiment with All India Radio and UNESCO in the village of Poona. Reports of both farm forums were published and distributed by UNESCO[27] and farm radio has had a rich afterlife, particularly in the countries of the developing world.[28] There are many other examples that can be drawn from radio, particularly if we consider the extent of broadcasting efforts aimed at schoolchildren which appear throughout the 1920s, 30s, and 40s in numerous European countries, including Germany, Belgium, Portugal, and Switzerland.[29]

We could take this even further if we wanted to, of course. Could we not say that the formats of the tele-clubs themselves, with the importance placed on the discussion group, simply remediated this particular format for communication? If we interpret it this way tele-clubs provide insights on two different ways of thinking about the

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[22] The implications of a "loose coupling of sending and receiving" are taken up by John Durham Peters, 'Mass Media', in W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen, eds., *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 275

[23] Henry Cassirer, 'Audience Participation, New Style', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 23, 4, 1959, 529-536.

[24] For more see John Ohlinger, 'The Listening Group., *Journal of Broadcasting* 13, 2, 1969, 153-162.

[25] Farm forum broadcasts can be heard at **http://www.cbc.ca/archives/discover/programs/n/national-farm-radio-forum/farm-radio-forum-jan-28-1941.html.**

[26] For an excellent overview, see R.W. Sandwell, 'Read, Listen, Discuss, Act: Adult Education, Rural Citizenship, and the Canadian National Farm Radio Forum, 1941-1965', *Historical Studies in Education* **http://historicalstudiesineducation.ca/index.php/edu_hse-rhe/article/view/4256.**

[27] John Nicol et al, Canada's Radio Forum, Unesco, 1956; Mathur, J.C. and P. Neurath, *An Indian Experiment in Farm Radio Forum,* Unesco, 1959.

[28] As Sandwell points out, Farm Radio International was set up in 1979 by a group of Canadians connected to the original incarnation, and developed farmer-centred broadcasting in countries such as Malawi, Ghana, and South Africa. See Sandwell, 'Read, Listen, Discuss, Act', p. 172.

[29] A survey of school broadcasting can be found in Burton Paulu, *Radio and Television Broadcasting on the European Continent*, University of Minnesota Press, 1967.

productivity of talk. In documenting attempts at film education in the United States, Charles Acland (2009) notes that media discussion groups "were part of an effort to establish regularized procedures and conditions for a particular vision of democratic life, one in which laypeople, guided by a disinterested leader, would come to know and respond to world issues in an informal, locally generated situation"[30]. In addition to this, discussion group format also serves as a reminder of the power of the focus group as a methodology for social scientific analysis, as David Morrison (1998) has shown.[31] Speaking of the history of British television Gill Branston (1998) wrote: "As soon as a powerful institution is founded, its practices imply a history".[32] That sentiment applies in the case of multilateral institutions such as UNESCO and accounting for its practices needs to incorporate various instruments across media in order to account for the variation of its activities and to avoid the medium specificity one might tend towards with a study of tele-clubs at UNESCO.

4 Télé-clubs and the Historical Study of Television

This takes me to the other point I want to make here. If the French tele-club study has received considerable attention as an instance of early television history it has received less scrutiny as a moment in the history of the medium as an object of study. Within communication and media studies, the same may be true; many scholars have worked for UNESCO in some capacity, but there is considerably less work about the institution and its place in media history as an institution that has commissioned and distributed a considerable amount of knowledge about television.

4.1 The Dumazedier Study

Considering the following assessment of Joffre Dumazedier's report on the French tele-clubs should be seen then as a very tentative opening step. *Television and Rural Adult Education* is a frequently cited text from the various UNESCO collections published on media over the years. This is a testament not only to the power of the institution, but also to the comprehensiveness of the work itself. Spanning nearly 300 pages, the study features statistical analyses of survey results, detailed instructions of the kinds of questions asked of discussion group leaders, photographs of villagers, equipment inventories, content analyses of programme genres broadcast by RTF, demographic data on test villages, and other detailed methodological notes collected by Dumazedier's research team. This is in addition to the more qualitative material, such as a history of tele-clubs in France, details about their organisation and operation, assessments of the difference between cinema and television, of the difference between television in domestic and public settings, a review of the cultural potentialities of television as a medium and a review of results of the specific case study undertaken for the report.

A few general themes about the study are worth mentioning for our discussion here. Perhaps the most important has to do with the fact that the report goes to considerable length to say that the primary issue about television is not the medium itself but its use. Dumazedier discussed at length the way in which television raised alarm bells among many different communities, among intellectuals who see it as a cultural problem. "Is not the criticism leveled at television really directed against certain specific programmes and a particular form of commercial operation?" Dumazedier asked. "Surely", he went on, "television is not merely a form of entertainment that may take the place of reading

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[30] Charles Acland, 'Screen Technology, Mobilization and Adult Education in the 1950s' in William Buxton, ed. *Patronizing the Public: American Philanthropy's Transformation of Culture, Communication and the Humanities*. Lexington Books, 2009 p. 273.
[31] David Morrison, *The Search for a Method: Focus Groups and the Development of Mass Communication Research*, University of Luton Press, 1998.
[32] Gill Branston, 'Histories of British Television', in Christine Geraghty and David Lusted, eds., *The Television Studies Book*, Arnold, 1998, p.51.

and culture, but rather a new language of Aesop that can be put to the best and worst uses".[33] One of those uses would be to create a mode of television that was educational in nature but which could produce 'active responses' from audience members that would then bring audiences closer to producers, who would then adapt their content in response to audience reaction.

The second theme is the conception of television within a language of leisure. For Dumazedier, this was not a matter of semantics, but the key to understanding television's 'cultural possibilities':

> A didactic view of educational television in some quarters is an inacceptable point of view because not taking account of all the subjects and techniques available for the education of the public through television. We chose another starting point. Televiewing is first and foremost a leisure-time occupation: the extent to which it can be used for cultural purposes, and the bounds to be set to such use, must therefore be determined by reference to the main purposes of leisure. Of these there are three: to bring relaxation after the fatigues of every-day work; to provide entertainment, and take the mind off that work for a short while; and to help to develop the personality, by showing people how to cope more satisfactorily with the problems of their daily lives.[34]

It is the relationship between television and daily life that is important here. For later on in the study Dumazedier explains that it is the recreational nature of much of the television offerings that provide relaxation and distraction which comprise "the two chief functions of leisure" and which make variety and music programmes so attractive to farm workers whose daily life is arduous and difficult. Tele-clubs, then, have to be seen in the context of a "leisure institution", providing them with "an invaluable link with modern civilization which will enable their outlook to be broadened.[35] More than this, though, is the effect of the tele-clubs in organising leisure activities among social groups:

> The collective purchase of television sets, often at great expense, is proof of the extraordinary power of the tele-clubs as a spur to cultural co-operation. It harmonizes with the economic conditions in which most people in the economically under-developed or war-devastated countries will be living for a long time to come. It also provides a new means of meeting the aspirations, in the way of communal life, characteristic of small local communities, which are seeking to establish a new balance between the individual and the social unit.[36]

4.2 Dumazedier in Context, Tele-clubs in Context

Those familiar with Dumazedier's achievements will understand the context in which these remarks emerge from someone working out of the CNRS and through the work and leisure studies designed by Georges Friedmann. Dumazedier was connected to the People and Culture movement in France and a key voice in the development of French cultural policy initiatives based around notions of cultural development.[37] However, it is the larger context of the emergence of the sociology of leisure that is also worth noting here: the formation of peace in western societies, namely through the expansion of the welfare state in social democratic systems in Western Europe, and rapid technological change through the proliferation of computers, cars, air travel, and other developments. Among the key changes brought on by these developments is the further diminishing of work into smaller amounts of time and the emergence of a clearer break between 'work time' and 'leisure time'. In a later book, Dumazedier (1974) explained the issue of leisure, once restricted to unions in the French context, had now come under a wider scope

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[33] Joffre Dumazedier, *Television and Rural Adult Education: The Télé-Clubs in France*, UNESCO, 1956, p.19.
[34] Ibid, p.73
[35] Ibid, p.217
[36] Ibid, p.218
[37] See Jeremy Ahearne, eds., *French Cultural Policy Debates: A Reader*. Routledge, 2002, pp.6-7.

of interest, with debates in different venues "not only on the initiative of trade unions, but of employers associations, advertising agencies, social workers" groups, educational associations, cultural organisations, religious bodies, state administrators, etc.[38] Although the number of interested parties had increased, for Dumazedier the research questions for the study of leisure were the same, namely how to incorporate new forms of leisure into environments based on traditional value systems and how to find balance, "an equilibrium between enjoyment and effort, escape and participation, entertainment and high culture".[39]

If we take Jeremy Butler's (2011) recent attempt to sketch a history of television studies[40] then one can see Dumazedier's book and the sociology of leisure in and around the establishment of the Society for Education in Film and Television in 1959 and the establishment of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham five years later, on the heels of sociologically inspired work on 'mass communication' such as that of Lazarsfeld and Katz in the 1940s and 50s[41]. Or perhaps it might be more appropriate to locate the sociology of leisure with work on the complexities and contradictions of the affluent or post-industrial society, such as that of David Riesman or C. Wright Mills[42]. The French tele-club study can be put in a different light, alongside previous work to do with television and children, namely Hilda Himmelthweit's *Television and the Child* (1958) and Wilbur Schramm's *Television in the Lives of our Children* (1961).[43] Another way of putting it might be to situate it within the curious place of media studies in France, where we can take a grouping offered by Isabelle Veyrat-Masson which features Dumazedier and Friedmann's work alongside the establishment of the French journal *Communications,* and the work of Roland Barthes and Edgar Morin as it is taken up across a range of different disciplines within French universities.[44]

All of these attempts at clustering, clumsy or partial as they may be here, are reminders of Paul Attallah's (2007) observation that "the most salient feature of the study of television is its institutional dispersal".[45] For Attallah, the fact that television is studied by so many researchers, from psychologists to industry professionals frustrates the ability to produce a unified field of knowledge with shared research questions. "It is", Attallah explains, "an object – usually a bad one – upon which anyone can produce a discourse".[46] John Durham Peters (2008) has also noted that "almost all of the intellectually generative institutions in twentieth century thought about communication were outside of university departments".[47] Since UNESCO produced a considerable amount of this discourse through its various forms of communication – academic journals, government reports, initiatives by national commissions, and public statements of key officials – and since it utilised a range of different scholars employing different research approaches, it marks a fascinating location for the mapping out of a global discourse on the medium during its formative phase, as well as in understanding the institutional actors that played a role in making television an object of study.

[38] Joffre Dumazedier, *Sociology of Leisure.*, Elsevier, 1974, 59.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Jeremy Butler, 'Eluding Elegy: Placing Screen in One Possible History of Television Studies', *Screen* 52, 4, 2011, 493-502.

[41] For example, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communication.* Free Press, 1955.

[42] David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*. Yale University Press, 1955; C. Wright Mills, White Collar. New York: Oxford University Press, 1951. One can also see a strain of urban sociology within France in and around the same time. See Rosemary Wakeman, *The Heroic City: Paris 1945-1958*. University of Chicago Press, 2009.

[43] References for these sources come from David Morrison, 'Opportunity Structures and the Creation of Knowledge: Paul Lazarsfeld and the Politics of Research', in Jefferson Pooley and David Park, eds., *The History of Communication and Media Research,* Peter Lang, 2008, p.179. Morrison also notes that few studies of television had been undertaken into the 1950s, in part because institutions active in previous rounds of media research, namely philanthropic organisations, had largely failed to set up television research programmes.

[44] Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, 'Quand le petit écran explore le temps', *La revue pour l'histoire du CNRS*, http://histoire-cnrs.revues.org/9165.

[45] Paul Attallah, 'A Usable History for the Study of Television', *Canadian Review of American Studies,* 37, 3, 2007, 339.

[46] Paul Attallah, 'A Usable History for the Study of Television', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 37, 3, 2007, 339.

[47] John Durham Peters, 'Institutional Opportunities for Intellectual History in Communication Studies', in Jefferson Pooley and David Park, eds., *The History of Media and Communication Research*, Peter Lang, 2008, p.156.

5 Conclusion

Inspired by the villagers in Nogentel, this essay was also an exercise in re-remembering *télé-clubs* in an attempt to make something old new again. By considering the tele-club in the context of recent theoretical and historiographical developments, and by considering the Dumazedier study within a broader history of the study of television, I offer a number of different avenues in which to make sense of tele-clubs beyond some of the ways in which they have previously been understood.

Clearly there are a number of additional avenues this discussion could take. For example, there needs to be a better accounting of the place of tele-clubs in the history of UNESCO as an institution, and the way these intiatives interacted with some of the areas for which there is much more academic work, such as the debates around the New World Information and Communication Order that occur in the 1970s and 80s.

There is also an additional line of analysis that relates tele-clubs to processes of rural modernisation. As Tony Judt (2005) explains, a key part of post-war reconstruction was a series of efforts to improve working conditions for farmers, either through the redistribution of large holdings, the subsidisation of the purchase of new technologies, new legal rights for farmers, and easier access to credit. Price controls and increased urban development, offering the potential to make farming more efficient, increase the chances for long-term success. This was seen by many as a way to bring about agrarian reform, and to build democracy among populations perceived to be susceptible to demagoguery.[48] Little has been said here relating tele-clubs to the broader institutional history of UNESCO. James Schwoch's recent book on communications media and Cold War diplomacy calls for a greater understanding of the role played by the United Nations and its agencies from the perspective of European countries.[49] In these and the other examples mentioned here what is clear is that a productive approach can be taken by thinking of tele-clubs as a device or instrument for performing various kinds of intellectual work having to do with the history of television.

Such an approach carries with it a theoretical claim that media technologies should be seen as tools that can be put into use in different ways by different people for different circumstances, whether to bring about peace or to historicise television reception. It is, to paraphrase Jonathan Sterne (2006), about the interplay between technology and technique, about how media forms engage with various features of social life.[50] Tele-clubs, and the story of television in Europe in the 1950s, is an appropriate place in which to undertake that kind of work, to explore the variety of ways in which it came to be used, and the implications for these early models of television consumption on the construction of television as a domestic medium. Such a conception offers the prospect to expand the horizons for television scholarship, as well as to revivify an interest in new or different archival holdings as repositories for knowledge about the early history of the medium, even if that ends up taking us beyond the screen. Doing so may have the effect of leading towards more comparative approaches to the study of television in Europe, since television is less about the place where programmes were aired and more about the ways in which it has come to be used – in this case, for educational purposes – in different contexts and by different agencies.

[48] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945.* Pengiun, 2005, p. 78-79.
[49] See J.P. Singh, *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Creating Norms for a Complex World*, Routledge, 2011; Chloé Maurel, L'Histoire de l'UNESCO: Les trentes prémieres années. L'Harmattan, 2010; James Schwoch, *Global TV: New Media and Cold War, 1946-69,* University of Illinois Press, 2009.
[50] Jonathan Sterne, 'Communication as Techné', in *Communication As…: Perspectives on Theory.* Sage, 2006, p. 97.

Biography

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