

Copenhagen Free University #10

# Media Landscapes

Travelling over the last year, Henriette Heise and I have made an effort to watch TV with friends and acquaintances living in the cities we have visited. We are interested in exploring the different media landscapes that are found on TV around the world. Sometimes the media geography is continuous from city to city, other times there are conspicuous differences. Asking our local guides to pick up a remote control and show us around the media landscape they live in affords us a look at the images and rhythms and spaces unfolding in their homes via the TV screen.

To compare the different journeys we have been on, the Situationist *dérive*, a familiar strategy to many, may be a useful tool. “A technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances,” the *dérive* seems a fitting description of the perambulations we have made through media landscapes by means of a remote control. In particular, the Situationist emphasis on the speed of the passage, in counterpoint to contemplative observation, seems directly applicable to channel surfing, which usually takes place at high speed. The *dérive* was conceived as a means for unsystematic analysis of urban geography; our journeys into different media landscapes are a corresponding analysis of media geography.

Most people watch TV in the confines of their homes. That is the common situation and for most people watching TV is a private affair. Moreover, the remote as an extension of the hand has increasingly individualized TV viewing. When television was first introduced and caught on after World War II, it was conceived as a domestic gathering point for the entire family, but today many home have as many TV sets as they do people. Even if we sometimes watch TV with other people, we seldom watch TV with strangers. There are exceptions, of course, especially sporting events, when people have been known to transfer the stadium situation and act as if they were at the actual event when watching it on TV with strangers in a bar. Our journeys into different media landscapes were all made in private homes.

A media landscape can be explored with a single local guide, but a group of no more than three people is preferable. In Utrecht, Holland, we once organized a public media landscape with 12 people acting as guides, but the outcome was more generic, as personal attractions and aversions were lost in the overall survey. The landscape was not bad, but it represents a different quality

than journeys in private homes controlled by smaller groups. We had actually considered introducing several remote controls to the 12-person group, but for technical reasons we abandoned the idea.

Because of our asking to be guided through the media landscape, our guides have to address the landscapes they usually flip through without much comment. This articulation, this talking, unfolds smoothly along a more or less straight course, relating to our specific route through the media landscape. The talking takes place across a montage of images and sequences created by the movement between channels. In this stream, some images become attractors that make us stay tuned for a while, partly to study what is shown and partly to talk about it, circling the subject or moving tangentially away from what we were seeing. Conversely, some images are repulsive, which may be another reason to stay with the channel, either to study the images more closely or to dress your repulsion in words. Another reaction to repulsive images is quickly zapping away.

The image and sound montage that makes up the journey represents an associative sequence of material that is more or less familiar to our guides and never entirely unfamiliar. Our guides usually maintain an overview of the channels they have available at home, as well as the images, faces, colors and rhythms streaming through them. In a split second, you can tell if you are watching MTV or ZDF or NBC. But the specific content is continually new and, on a journey through media geography, accident is a big factor in the montage of channels. Even our guides sometimes get lost.

In the last 30 years, various ethnographic studies have been made of the behavior and reactions of people watching TV.<sup>1</sup> The studies were made expressly to attack the more structural and ideologically critical condemnation of television as technology that had dominated leftist media criticism. As the Situationists saw it, TV was probably the most abhorrent instance of the spectacle, and it's far from our intention to deny this. The ethnographic studies indicated that TV was not as hegemonic as thought; viewers had many freedoms in terms of interpreting and using what they saw on TV. The ethnographic angle has a problem, though, in its too-isolated focus on the relation between the program ("the text," as the studies call it) and how the program is read. It was based on the assertion that people watch the programs from the beginning to the end. Unlike the more contemplative situation of actually watching a program, the rapid passage between channels is more of an associative movement between images and sounds. In our journeys into media geography, we usually avoid hanging on to a program from beginning to end. We do this to avoid any risk of the dominant ideology taking over our nervous system.

Another aspect of the influence of television on us as viewers is that we should not underestimate the role of television as raw material for imagination.

Imagination, probably, is always defined by percepts and TV is a powerful medium in that regard, even if it is more mirror than window. As Karl Marx said, “Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image: everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive.”

A journey through a given media landscape also creates a montage of the different programming genres available: news, sitcoms, commercials, game shows, cooking shows, movies, etc. Newspapers, likewise, don't just print news but include many different genres and forms. Genre leaps underscore the spatial nature of the journey – international news is one kind of terrain, sports another, nature shows yet another, etc. Often, it's the transitions between different terrains that create the dynamic momentum, the abrupt tempo shifts and the sometimes absurd drainage of meaning and disorientation that are so useful for dissolving overly ingrown media habits and for finding cracks in the ideological character of the landscapes. To date, we have recorded media landscapes in Vienna, Hamburg, New York, London and Stockholm. Compiling our recordings into thematic programs allows us to reach objective results.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> I specifically have in mind David Morley's *The Nationwide Audience* (1980).





**Stockholm:**

Jakob (off screen): The camera is running and what matters is that you are watching TV and you can comment as you wish...

Markus: Let's watch something else.

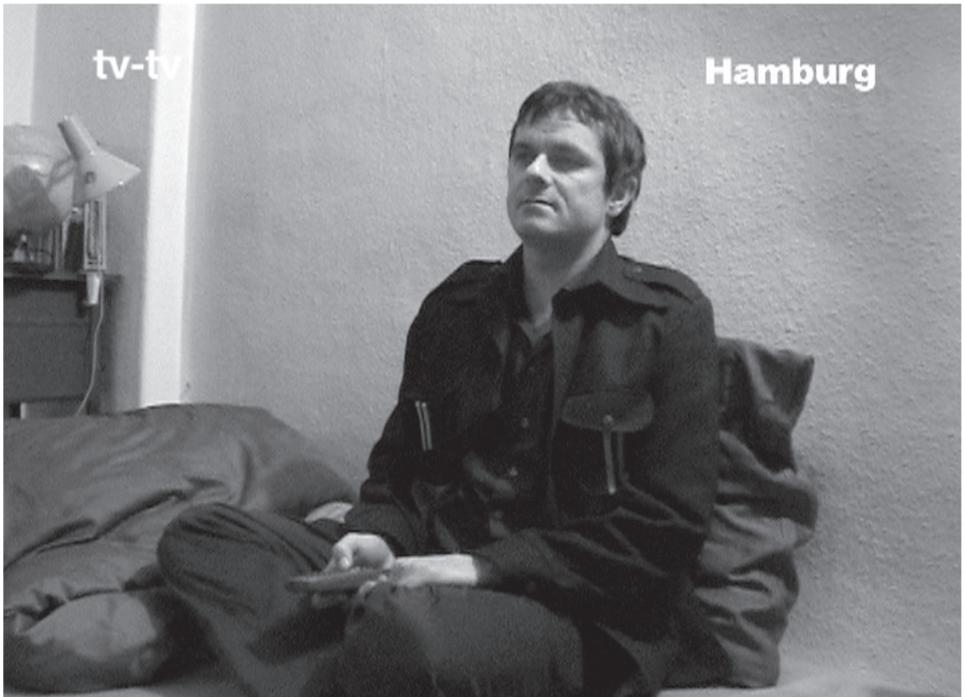
Lisa: Eurosport – that is good fun.

Markus: Maybe...

Lisa: Most of the time.

Markus: I am not watching it very often.

Lisa: I watch it sometimes. For example ski jump. That's what we watch. That's always good fun. Or figure skating...



## Hamburg

Christoph: I am watching television alone, which I do very rarely... only, but when I am alone I watch a lot of trash.



*New York*

Marina: Ok.

Jakob (off screen): Yeah we are running.

Camelo: Aha.

Marina: Ok, so what is this?

Camelo: Oh this is about a... some type of an alien spaceship... but it is my kind of movie. Sci-fi, monsters and aliens... that's my kind of stuff.

Marina: So would you... Oh it's a gorilla... would you be watching it all night?

Camelo: Practically I watch a combination of sci-fi and action movies. And this is me: I just move around from finger to finger, back and forward and this is me.

Nina: That's how you watch.

Camelo: This is her favorite show. Nina's favorite show. Raymond.

Nina: It's about family...

Camelo: Comedy, mainly comedy. They are rated one of the best comedy shows on TV.

Nina: They have finished to run all of them. They just repeat now.



## London

Mike: The problem for me, to be honest with you, I don't really watch TV with other people.

Emma: Yeah

Mike: TV for me is very much about being on my own in this flat, being like an old granny, just needing voices... It's like that period when I had... the reason I got this box was because I didn't have... did I tell you that? My reception got all fucked up from the aerial and they fitted a new aerial to my block and it got interference from the Sky TV satellite, so all of the channels had this giant blue box in the middle of the screen, that said 'your Sky subscription has run out, you need to renew it'. Even just my ordinary terrestrial channels and it was covering like 75% of the screen and at first I was really outraged, but then I just started to watch TV like that anyway and I watched the whole of Fargo or some Cohen brothers film, you know... seeing like just the border of the whole screen. Because when you are on your own, it's just like... you know like... and especially if you are like working from home... you are not having voices around and radio just seem to be depressing.



## Vienna

Ralo: Weather!

Eva: Shall we watch the weather?

Ralo: Yeah. I think weather is really interesting. Isn't there like all this research on how weather maps look on TV and what that says?

Eva: Christa Kummer... That is on this Grossglockner, this Austrian mountain.

Ralo: The highest Austrian mountain is 3900 ... 907?

Eva I don't know actually.

Ralo: We don't know, we learnt at school, but we forgot.

Ralo: And every night there is a lot of talk about what Christa Kummer wears.

Eva: Why?

Ralo: Isn't it always the case?

Eva: Because she is so extraordinary well dressed?

Ralo: No, but like it's just...

Eva: I think people think she is not good dressed at all. That is why they talk about it.

Ralo: Here my grandfather would say: This is too pink. It doesn't fit to the yellow.

Eva: So it's getting warmer in the weekend.

Ralo: But they said it would rain.



## London

Emma: I also think even if... I don't... because even if you share certain TV programmes... you just don't... even if you watch them you just don't want to admit that and even if there is someone else who does admit it, you just don't want to get into having a conversation about certain programmes that you feel bad enough watching anyway...

Mike: But you would never watch ITV at eight o'clock on a weekday night would you?

Emma: I never watch ITV.

Mike: You never watch ITV?

Emma: I only watch Channel Five... BBC2 and Channel Four. I never watch ITV. Very rarely BBC1.

Mike: See this is the ad break where I normally watch Channel Four news, 'cause it's a really long ad break, so I can get most of the 'end of the first big story' and the beginning of the 'second one'.

Marina: Then you miss all these ads.



## Hamburg

TV: Vierzig lange bitte, vierzig lange.

Christoph: Hmm, that's boring...

Christoph: Uh, Mister Bean! I like Mister Bean. I look in fact a little like Mister Bean... that's what people say in Indonesia...

TV: Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha.

Christoph: Ha-ha-ha-ha.



## London

Emma: See this is where I feel more at home.

Mike: What channel is this?

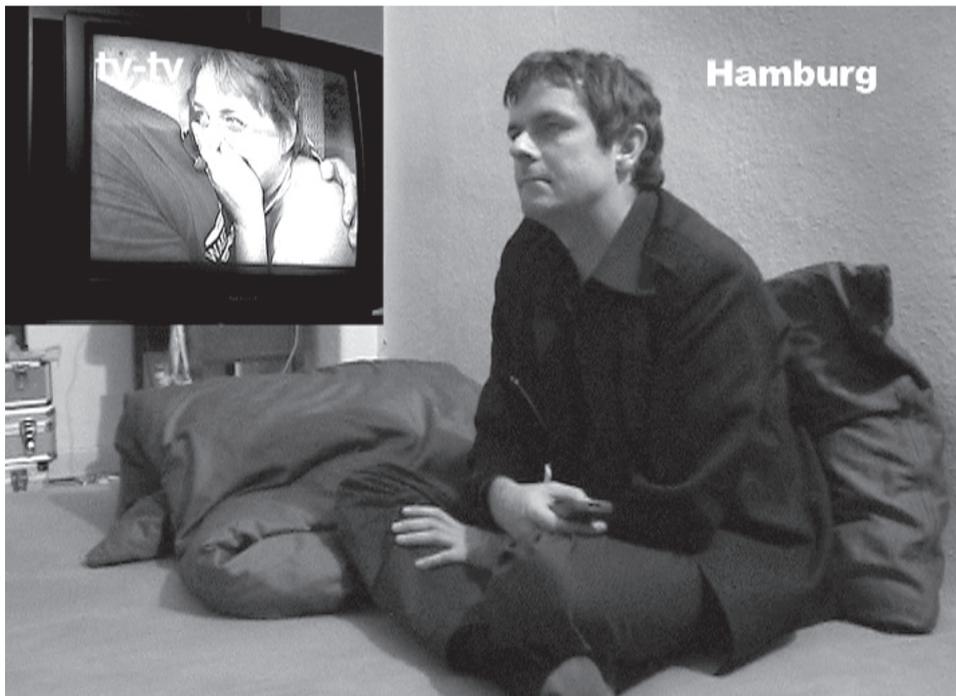
Emma: BBC.

Mike: What BBC?

Emma: BBC1

Mike: Is it?

TV: I am glad to say the wind is slowing down...



## Hamburg

Christoph (translates a German voice on the television): You know what's expecting you... Your husband knows... You are allowed to look at everything.  
Christoph: Her T-shirt says: I want to have the most happy time of my life from now on. I don't know what she is crying about...

Christoph (translates): First I saw the couch, I didn't dare to go on looking. I just thought, oh, I can't believe this. I was so happy, because that sofa we had was a catastrophe. I am speechless... Ohh the ceiling is new too, this was a living room in the morning and 12 hours later, completely different picture. From ehhh bricolage to furniture collection: A dream land... a dream living landscape has been created. Now eating and sitting area fluently fall into each other. Mediterranean plants and decorations... White ceiling makes the space much bigger.



## Vienna

Eva: Ralo and me are coming from Hilbilly land.

Ralo: That is where the red arrow is. And the red arrow is the communist danger coming from the east.

Eva: And we are coming from Brunland – which is like the region with the border to the Hungarian border. Like it is this little, little part on the...

Ralo: Where the “10” is.

Eva: And this Brunland, the place we come from, it is like.. how would you describe it?

Ralo: It looks like Denmark, it is very flat, it is not Austrian at all.

Eva: It is very flat and it's a region, where there are jokes about the people who live there.

Ralo: Like Jutland in Denmark.

Eva: And in Austria you always have the jokes about Brunland. Yeah we are from that kind of area and I think I like it the most actually. But the thing I like in Brunland is that it is so flat and nothing goes on there, because when I go with a car to the other side of Austria, through all the mountains, I really get claustrophobic, when you are going through the streets with all these mountains.

Ralo: You never see the horizon.

Eva: And it is always dark, because the sun can not get through.



## London

Mike: Actually you see, if we where really watching TV, we would be watching Simpsons on Sky One.

Marina and Emma: Ok.

Mike: There is a quadruple bill on weekday's nights

Marina: Sure, then let's go and watch that.



## Stockholm

Markus: Should we watch..

Lisa: Let's move on...

Markus: Simpsons, again. That was on earlier today. Now it's on again.

Lisa: It's the next episode.

Markus: They show probably three episodes every day. This is Z-TV. They are always funny. I would probably watch this... rather than the literature programme ... maybe.



## London

Emma: Bingo. Here is the Simpsons.

Emma: So we are watching Sky, but I don't understand how we are watching Sky?

Mike: What do you mean?

Emma: But you don't have a dish?

Mike: No, Sky One is like a, what do you call it...

Marina: The poor man's version?

Mike: Yes, it's like the main Sky Channel they give to other providers as well.

TV (Simpsons): Well, Cadettes, its been a great year. You've all worked very hard, developing academic skills and general killing skills. These skills are nothing without courage and stamina. The academy tested these skills by putting you up against each other in a two day battle royal...

Marina: Battle royal!

Mike: This isn't a very good episode.

Emma: So in the US, would the Simpsons be on at six o'clock? Is that a universal norm?

Marian: Uhm, I can't remember. I think they just have them, like here, like different times on different channels. So maybe you can always watch the Simpsons.

Emma: Where ever you are in the world... Simpsons will always be on.



## New York

Camelo: That is one of my favorite cartoons... the Boy Genius.

Nina: It's a cartoon. Nickelodeon is a channel for kids.

Camelo: Yeah. Nickelodeon is for kids, cartoons I like. It relaxes me.

Nina: Yes.

Marina: But there is also comedy channels.

Camelo: Yeah

Nina: Comedy channel 45.

Camelo: This is another one of her shows...

Nina: One of my shows?

Camelo: Yeah, That you like. This is one of her favorites – Friends – also has to do with comedy.

TV: ... so you are saying ... I have become so ...



## Stockholm

Henriette: Do you use the television listings?

Markus: No. In the papers? ... No, very rarely. Sometimes maybe. I look quickly through and I spot something – that one I have to watch, a film or...

Lisa: It is very rarely. Maybe when you are really tired and knows that you are going to lie in front of the TV, that you look... Or someone has told you that something will be there.

Markus: It is mainly zapping and... really lazy, lazy and we take it easy... watching nothing special, I think.



# Medielandskaber

Inden for det sidste år har Henriette og jeg, under vores rejser rundt omkring i verden, tilstræbt at se TV sammen med venner og bekendte som bor i de byer vi besøger. Vi er interesserede i at gå på opdagelse i de forskellige medielandskaber der findes og som udfolder sig på TV rundt omkring. Undertiden hænger mediegeografien sammen fra by til by, undertiden er der iøjnefaldende forskelle. Vi spørger vores lokale guider om de, bevæbnet med en remotekontrol, vil vise os rundt i det landskab de lever i, og give os et indblik i de billeder og de rytmer og rum som udfolder sig i deres hjem gennem TV-skærmen.

Hvis man skulle sammenligne de udflugter vi har været på, med en strategi som mange kender, er den situationistiske derivé måske et godt eksempel. Derivé'n er 'den hastige passage gennem skiftende omgivelser eller atmosfærer' hvilket også kan siges at være en dækkende beskrivelse af de vandringer vi ofte har gjort i et medielandskab ved hjælp af en remotekontrol. Specielt det forhold at situationisterne lagde vægt på passagens hastighed som et modtræk mod den kontemplative betragtning, synes direkte at kunne overføres på kanal hopning der jo som regel foregår med høj hastighed. Deriven var tiltænkt som middel til usystematisk analyse af bygeografien; vores udflugter i de forskellige medielandskaber kan siges at være en tilsvarende analyse af mediegeografien.

De fleste mennesker ser TV inden for rammerne af hjemmet. Det er den almindelige situation og det at se TV er for de fleste en privat sag. Remoten som en forlængelse af hånden har gjort TV'et mere og mere individualiseret. Da TV'et blev introduceret og vandt indpas efter 2. Verdenskrig var det mest tiltænkt som hjemmets samlingspunkt for familien, men nu er der i mange hjem ligeså mange TV som der er beboere. Selv om vi selvfølgelig ind i mellem ser TV sammen med andre er det meget sjældent vi ser TV sammen med fremmede mennesker. Dog er der nogle undtagelser som for eksempel i forbindelse med sportsbegivenheder hvor man undertiden overfører situationen fra stadion og opfører sig som om man var tilstede ved selve begivenheden foran TV'et sammen med fremmede på værtshuset (eller sammen med venner i hjemmet). Vores udflugter i de medielandskaber vi har besøgt har alle foregået med udgangspunkt i private hjem.

Et medielandskab kan undersøges sammen med en enkelt lokal guide, men det er at foretrække at det foregår i en gruppe på op til 3 mennesker. I Utrecht

i Holland arrangerede vi et offentligt medielandskab hvor omkring 12 personer deltog, men dette betød også at gennemgangen blev mere generel, og at personlige attraktioner og mishag fortonede sig i forhold til det generelle overblik. Dette landskab var ikke dårligt, men repræsenterer en anden kvalitet end udflugterne i private hjem styret af mindre grupper. Vi overvejede dog at introducere flere remotekontroler til gruppen på 12 personer, men afstod af tekniske grunde.

Det forhold at vi beder om at blive guidet gennem medielandskabet, betyder at vores guider bliver nødt til at italesætte det landskab som de almindeligvis hopper igennem uden at ytre sig i særlig grad. Denne artikulation, denne tale, udfolder sig glidende på mere eller mindre ret kurs, i forhold til den konkrete rute som vi bevæger os ad gennem medieterrænet. Denne tale udfolder sig i forhold til den montage af billeder og sekvenser som bevægelsen mellem kanalerne skaber. I strømmen bliver nogle billeder attraktorer som betyder at vi bliver hængende på en kanal i en periode, for dels at studere hvad der bliver vist og dels for at tale om det viste, enten cirkulært omkring emnet eller tangentielt væk fra hvad vi så. På samme måde kan andre billeder virke frastødende hvilket igen kan være grund til at blive på kanalen, enten for at studere billederne nøjere eller for at spinde afskyen ind med ord. En anden reaktion på frastødende billeder er at vi springer videre med stor fart.

Den billed- og lydmontage som udflugten udgør kommer til at fremstå som en associativ række af billeder og lyd bygget af materiale som er mere eller mindre genkendeligt for vores guider, og aldrig fuldstændigt ukendt. Vores guider har sædvanligvis overblik over de kanaler som findes i hjemmets TV, og de billeder og ansigter, farver og rytmer som de forskellige kanaler strømmer med. På et mikrosekund kan man se om det er MTV eller ZDF eller NBC. Men det konkrete indhold er løbende nyt og i montagen mellem kanalerne spiller tilfældet en stor rolle under disse udflugter i mediegeografien. Dog hænder det at vores guider farer vild.

Der har inden for de sidste 30 år foregået en del etnografiske undersøgelser af adfærd og reaktioner hos folk der ser TV<sup>1</sup>. Disse undersøgelser er blevet gjort specielt med henblik på at angribe den mere strukturelle og ideologikritiske fordømmelse af TV som teknologi, der ellers har været gennemgående i venstreorienteret mediekritik. Bla. var TV nok for situationisterne den mest modbydelige repræsentant for skuespillet, hvilket vi slet ikke vil afvise. De etnografiske undersøgelser pegede på at TV ikke var så undertrykkende som påstået; seerne havde mange friheder i fortolkningen og brugen af hvad de så i TV. Dog har den etnografiske indgangsvinkel det problem at den fokuserer for isoleret på forholdet mellem program (teksten som det kaldes i undersøgelserne) og dette programs aflæsning. Den hastige passage gennem kanalerne handler mere om associativ bevægelse gennem billeder og lyde, end den mere

kontemplative situation hvor man faktisk ser et program. Ved vores udflugt i mediegeografien undgår vi som regel at se et program fra start til slut for at undvige enhver risiko for at den dominerende ideologi skulle overtage vores nervesystem.

Man skal ikke undervurdere TV'ets rolle som råmateriale for forestillingsevnen. Forestillingsevnen er vel altid indskrevet af perceptioner og TV'et er et stærkt medie i den sammenhæng, også selvom TV'et nok mere har karakter af spejl end vindue. Som Karl Marx skriver: 'Menneskene kan ikke se noget omkring sig som ikke er deres eget billede, alting taler til dem om dem selv. Selve deres landskab er i live'.

En udflugt i et givet medielandskab skaber også en montage mellem de forskellige genrer på sendefloden; nyheder, sitcoms, reklamer, gameshows, madprogrammer, film, osv. Lidt ligesom aviser ikke kun indeholder nyheder, men indeholder mange forskellige genrer og former. Disse genre-mæssige spring forstærker udflugtens rummelige karakter; de internationale nyheder udgør én slags terræn, sporten et andet, naturprogrammer et tredje, osv. Ofte er det netop overgangene mellem de forskellige terræner som skaber dynamisk fremdrift, abrupte temposkift og undertiden absurd meningstømning og desorientering, som jo er brugbar i opløsningen af alt for indgroede medievaner og til at finde sprækker i landskabernes ideologiske karakter. Vi har indtil videre optaget medielandskaber i Wien, Hamburg, New York, London og Stockholm og ved at sammensætte vores optagelser i tematiske programmer gør det os muligt at nå frem til objektive resultater.

<sup>1</sup> Her tænker jeg specielt på David Morley: The 'Nationwide' audience (1980)

# Credits

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Læssøesgade 3, 4th floor  
DK-2200 Copenhagen N

[www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk](http://www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk)

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