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# Written Reminiscences and Media Ethnography: Television Creating Worldview

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## 1. Introduction

Collecting written reminiscences, ethnographic writing, has a long tradition in Finnish history and folklore studies, and methodologically they have been categorized as oral history research data. In my study<sup>1</sup> (Kortti, 2007) on the history of Finnish television I used two collections of written reminiscences about television in Finnish everyday life. In this article I introduce the possibilities, the cons and pros, of this kind of research data in ethnographic research, more precisely in media ethnography. Here, besides the methodological issues, I particularly depict how ordinary Finns have experienced the changing of their world views caused by television.

Written oral history data is rarely used in media ethnographic studies. Belonging to the tradition of cultural studies, media ethnography highlights the importance of social and cultural context. In my study, the importance of context is widened to the history of media experiencing. The framing of television viewing is crucial in the study. Besides the television experiences of individuals, it also relates to the institutional, political and economic history of Finnish television. However, the experiences, in their own words, of ordinary Finns lead the narrative. With the help of narrative texts, the researcher is able to get into the narrator's worldview and mentality. Narrative folklore, oral history, memoirs, life histories, legends, humorous anecdotes and gossip can be put in a dialectic relationship with literature, mass communication and official historical writings.

One of the contextual macro-narratives of the post-Second World War Europe are the different modernization processes. Television as a technological and institutional medium operates within the sphere of these processes of society and culture. The modernization process of the 1960s, when the economic structure of Finland changed and the

<sup>1</sup> The study concerns the arrival, diffusion, and integration of television and its changing technological and cultural role and impact on the everyday life of the Finns and their worldviews during the period from the mid-1950s to the twenty-first century. Besides the institutional, economic, social, and cultural narrative of the Finnish television, there is also an analytic chapter about the changes in Finnish TV viewing in the study. The objects of research are (1) the role of television as an everyday commodity and the impact of television on the (2) worldviews and (3) social interaction of Finns. The discussion of television in social intercourse is divided into the study of changes in family viewing, gender preferences, and social life outside home. More about the study see also Kortti & Mähönen, 2009.

characteristics of agrarian society disappeared dramatically, was exceptionally speedy, even relative to the scale of all of Europe. In the late 1950s, however, the majority of Finns still lived in rural communities. Before the 1950s Finland was the least developed country in Scandinavia,<sup>2</sup> but by the early 1970s it had assumed the typical form of most industrialized societies in the world. The Finnish gross domestic product grew sevenfold between 1956 and 1973, for example.

The role of media, particularly television in this development is unquestionable. As it spread aggressively in the United States in the 1950s and in Europe mainly in the 1960s, television influenced not only communication but also a new social life.<sup>3</sup> Being at the heart of postwar modernism, it offered models for living and for taking part in an increasingly consumption-oriented lifestyle that was mostly private and revolved around family. Television was 'part of the grain of everyday life' (Silverstone, 1994: 22). And you cannot underestimate the role of television being 'the window of the world', 'both magic carpet ride and university'. When studying TV audiences, television has to be considered as a part of highly complicated national and international changes in economy, politics, and technology.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Written reminiscences as media ethnographical data

"The first television at my home was purchased 23 August 1967 when I was 13 years old. I have carefully written about it in my diary." (Female, born 1954)<sup>5</sup>

In media ethnography, the data are usually collected through interviews and participant observations. Television audience studies have mostly been carried out using surveys, interviews (individual or group, themed or informal) and observational analyses. There are several problems with these methods. For example, in the interview situation the chances of 'remembering wrong' are higher than in independent writing, where you are able to use your own archives, such as personal diaries and photos. In observational research, the privacy of the home and the small number of subjects involved in family research may, for example, make the observer's presence conspicuous (see, for example, Lull, 1990: 178). Written accounts, as Christine Geraghty (1998: 148) states, may offer a greater degree of control for the respondent than the spoken word of the interview. Thus, particular and rehearsed written information can be more appropriate for the researcher than an interview. The use of written ethnographic data has not been employed much in

<sup>2</sup> Finland's economic growth in the postwar period was extraordinary. The average annual rate of real national product growth by country was 5 percent in Finland in the 1960s and about 3.3 percent in Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

<sup>3</sup> More about the social uses of Finnish television from the late 1950s to the mid-2000, see Kortti 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Like many other European nations, Finland saw strong advocacy for making television a public, noncommercial medium. In the end, however, the compromise arrangement patterned itself after the British system, in which there was both a public and a commercial station. The result was a hybrid system, in which some programming was purely public, while other programming was commercial, much like in the United States. Under the circumstances, Finnish television was diverse, but of high grade in the standards of the time: the balance between educational and entertaining, commercial (i.e. American) programs was good. The Finnish experience differs especially from the other Nordic countries, whose television remained advertising free until the late 1980s.

<sup>5</sup> All the citations in this article are from the research data mentioned and they have been translated from Finnish.

television studies, although the emergence of cultural studies significantly increased the interest on the media use of 'ordinary people' in media studies in the 1980s. There are only a few studies that have used letters (e.g. Ang, 1985) and television diaries (e.g. Gaunlett and Hill, 1999) as source material. On the other hand, the use of online data (fan sites and different Internet platforms, for example) has increased significantly in media studies in recent years.

Still, there are very few studies that have used written recollections in television audience studies. In fact, the use of *oral histories* is overall quite a rare phenomenon in ethnographic media studies. In Finland, mostly because of The Finnish Literary Society (SKS) and their Folklore Archives, there are remarkable resources and tradition for using these kinds of data. The SKS (est. 1831) has collected oral tradition, personal narratives and memories in a number of different ways since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are also other cultural institutions which organise collection campaigns across the country and also actively maintain their own respondent networks. And, first of all, the variety of people writing for these inquiries is relatively wide; not only 'elite' or older people, but also younger generations participate in the campaigns. Despite the wide range of ethnographic material, the data as resource material is basically the same. Actually, in Finnish, 'oral history' is translated as *muistitieto*, meaning 'memory data'. Hence, also written data is often categorized under the oral history research data in the Finnish history and folklore studies.

Combining the approach of ethnographic television studies with the oral history tradition could be seen as quite natural. Like oral historians, the cultural studies tradition is interested in everyday life. Actually, the roots of both traditions lie in the 1960s and the 1970s. In the discipline of history, the rise of oral history was a part of the so-called postmodernist turn and 'history from below' trend. Cultural studies also turned to explore how and what common people make of the media messages. It is no coincidence that the oral historian Paul Thompson (2000: 104–5) sees Richard Hoggart's classic *The Uses of Literacy* (Hoggart, 2009 [1957]), which has been considered a starting point in cultural studies, as an oral history study. The aims of cultural studies are similar, only with minimal interest in the historical context. Oral history research data are closer to the methodologies and theories of folklore studies, but my social historical approach is founded on the ideas and results of ethnographic television audience studies.

As in cultural studies and ethnographic television audience studies, my study looks at the social use of television and television as a commodity shaping everyday life. However, my perspective is different from that of cultural studies in the sense that I am interested in the social historical significance of television in the everyday life of the Finns. You could say that this kind of approach is seminal – not only in Finland, but also internationally. Besides the use of written reminiscences as data, a social historical approach to television viewing is also rare in ethnographic television studies.

Besides the historical approach, one of the main differences in this project, compared to the early ethnographic television studies, is the emphasis on the context affecting and interacting with the television experience. In folklore, the cultural context is considered to be as necessary as source criticism in the study of history. Contextualization must be both cultural and social historical. In particular, the folklorists who refer to the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur (see, for example, Ricoeur, 1981) have highlighted the significance of context in the use of oral history.

Although communication scholars have done media ethnography since the 1960s, the most fruitful studies on Finnish media use have been done by folklorists and sociologists. One of the very few Finnish researchers interested in television audiences, especially from the point of view of cultural studies, is the sociologist Pertti Alasutari (see Alasutari, 1999; Alasutari et al., 1991). National broadcasting company YLE has also published academic anthologies that have included analyses of Finnish television viewing and the role of television in the life of the Finns in the late 1980s. They were influenced by the growing interest in life stories especially prevalent in sociology at that time. Since the early 1990s, the research on Finnish television audiences has been more sporadic and published mainly in the YLE yearbooks. My study (Kortti 2007) was the first historical approach and comprehensive study on Finnish television viewing.

## 2.1 The data

The corpus includes two written reminiscences. The name of the first data set, a written collection, is "Elokuvan ennen ja nyt" ("Cinema in the Past and Present"); it was collected by the Finnish National Board of Antiquity in 1996 (6,800 pages, 845 respondents). One part of the memoirs concerns television, and it has not been analyzed previously. The sample of the total data is 246 respondents (65 men, 181 women). About 90 percent of the respondents were born before 1955. To cover the experiences of the younger generations as well, the media memories of students were collected during a course on media history in the University of Helsinki during the autumn of 2005. This data consist of 87 respondents (32 men, 53 women, 2 unknown), mostly born in the early 1980s.

The themes covered in both datasets were: respondent's profession and home location, reasons for buying a television, the first television viewing experiences, choosing television programs, the impact of television on interior decor, television and changes in the way of life, television's impact on hobbies and social intercourse, television and video, etc. In the student data collection, there were also questions about digital television and media convergence.

One problem with the first data was that some of the questions were ambiguous. For example, the conclusion of a question may be the same with both negative and positive answers. It is crucial to set the 'right questions' in written folklore questionnaires as well. As Paul Thompson (2000: 200-29) has emphasized, the reminiscer must be led to relate his or her personal life and experiences. The questions must be straight and simple. In addition, many of the questions prompted the writer in a problematic way. For example, parts of some questions were suggestive and brought forth certain themes. However, this problem was taken care of when collecting the second dataset with the students, as I was able to formulate the questions personally.

Second, it is important to recognize the potential influence of social desirability in the participants' responses. For instance, some writers want to underestimate the impact of television in their everyday lives, while nevertheless mentioning many examples of such effects. Some forms of watching may thus be culturally more acceptable than others. On the other hand, how people evaluate their television watching is itself a research result. The writers are also giving impressions about their families, professions, genders and neighborhoods through their text, which is problematic for the quantitative results collected

by the research software (Atlas). The mere number of mentions does not tell what the text is about and whom it concerns. In addition, the student data are problematic in the sense that the narratives are written by very critical, well-educated people, not by ordinary youth (which can be seen as both a challenge and an asset). Therefore, the written accounts have to be analysed as *interactive* presentations of selves and groups, not necessarily as facts.

Third, the data have some structural deficiencies. As shown earlier, the sex and age distribution is unbalanced. Also, people from the northern parts of Finland are underrepresented. However, the regional and occupational diversity is a clear virtue of the data. In addition, the writings of the students supplement some of the aforementioned deficiencies in the older data, mainly by covering the more recent trends in media consumption. The two datasets also make it possible to study a lengthy time scale: people born before the 1940s also wrote about the television experiences of their parents and grandparents, while the youngest writers are still in their early twenties.

Last but not least, the mere size of the two datasets offers great potential for analysis: it would have been impossible to collect all these media experiences by interview. And many of the writings resemble diaries in their elaborateness and personal tone, making the data possibly more reliable than oral accounts.

### 3. Transforming worldviews

"My grandmother, who died in the age of 85 in 1962, had a cozy armchair in the best spot in front of the television, close enough for her to be able to see, despite her cataract. She used to watch and listen to all the programs, not having the strength to do much else. Television announcers and regular faces became her "friends" whose greetings she would answer to. She was dazzled by the changes in the world, though it was not that long since grandfather had tested her nerves by corroding his trousers' knees when he was building crystal radio receivers. Like old people tend to do, grandmother kept rocking in rhythm so that, in the course of the evening, her chair would travel slowly but surely towards the TV set. When the broadcast ended, grandmother's nose almost touched the screen, and she would stretch her arm to switch off the television, saying "the world has turned again..." (Female, born 1943)

Television has turned global into local in many ways. One outcome of this is the way television unites the world (global village metaphor) and makes it possible to experience global events in real time. In the early days of television this informative dimension was particularly important, because in Finland, for example, television spread rapidly into places where information gathering was still largely tied to the social behavioural patterns and cultural conventions of agrarian communities. Radio had, of course, made similar features available even at an earlier stage, but the visual aspect of television provided much more. Besides news, nature and educational and other informational programs, television entertainment familiarized viewers with the customs of other nationalities, especially the American way of life. It should be kept in mind that television not only provided the model for modern international and consumption-oriented way of life indirectly, it also affected through television commercials directly.

According to media sociologist John B. Thompson (1995: 199, 189), media act as mobility multipliers by enabling people to experience something that would otherwise be out of their

reach. Furthermore, the media makes this possible so that it is not necessary travel physically. The media also feed people's imagination, in particular because the media-transmitted experience is indirect. Individuals can more than ever perceive themselves in the position of the other – in a new situation that may be completely different from theirs. Thompson claims that the invention of television emphasized the notion that media gives individuals access to experiences that transcend time and place – experiences that are simultaneous and are not face to face communication.

Thompson's idea is related to cultural theorist Raymond Williams' notion of mobile privatization, which is the result of broadcasting. Mobile privatization paradoxically combines two different but deeply interlinked tendencies of modern urban industrial life: mobility and increasingly independent family life. Williams (1975: 26) sees broadcasting as part of the triumph of durables in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Besides television, the car has also contributed significantly to mobile privatization. Television and car are analogous in the sense that various socio-cultural meanings are attached to both of them (Tichi, 1991: 7). Television used to have a similar status as the car, and both of them can be perceived as leading objects of postmodern society (Silverstone, 1994: 87). In Finland, both spread strongly at the same time in the 1960s:

"The first TV set was purchased into our home in 1965. I recall it, because it happened at the same time as our first car was bought and I got a driving licence – two major events! Perhaps the purchase was influenced by the fact that our neighbours already had a telly, but a more significant reason was the possibility of widening our worldviews – we could sit there like guests." (Female, born 1925)

Television is undoubtedly among the most important technological applications to have changed people's worldview. Upon its arrival, television posed a potential and distracting threat to family life, but it also had potential with regard to education and socialisation (Silverstone, 1994: 101). The ideas of the Enlightenment, which the Finnish philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright (1997: 22) has called *scientific worldview*, have prevailed in the Western worldview for centuries. They have been associated with a strong technological dimension whose influence has escalated rapidly especially from the 20<sup>th</sup> century on. To put it simply, worldview can be understood as bodies of scientific knowledge about the world; it can, however, be understood more broadly. The Finnish historian of ideas Juha Manninen (1977) defines worldview as a practice of life: worldview is manifested in people's relationship to their past and future, their possibilities, their personal and societal life, etc. In cultural studies, worldview as a theoretical concept has been understood as a perspective, a viewpoint to culture. Folkloristic worldview analyses consider it crucial that the worldview has a necessary connection to people's experiential reality – that is, to the ways in which the bearers of the worldview express themselves in representations (Knuutila 1989: 172). In investigating these representations, the prolific material is oral history.

In this article, worldview is mainly considered from the perspective of people's relation to culture and society and their history, taking into account how television has influenced on the socio-cultural notions of individuals. An altered perception of foreign countries and their cultures was important especially in the early days of television. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, television has lost its position as the leading transformer of worldviews to other electronic media, especially the Internet. However, having a strong foothold in Finland well before television, press has retained its position.

The importance of television as the transformer of the worldview of the Finns can be presented as follows:

	<b>ERA OF SCARCITY 1956–1987</b>	<b>ERA OF AVAILABILITY 1987–2001</b>	<b>ERA OF PLENTY 2001–</b>
<b>WORLDVIEW</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-TV as ‘the window to the world’</li> <li>-Modern modes of consumption</li> <li>-American way of life</li> <li>-Collective events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Satellite and Cable TV</li> <li>-Local-global</li> <li>-The flood of news and information</li> <li>-Music TV aesthetics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Internet as the challenger of TV</li> <li>-Global-local</li> <li>“Information overload”</li> <li>“Anarchistic aesthetics” and reality TV aesthetics</li> </ul>

Table 1. Television and worldview

The Finnish television is divided, according to media scholar John Ellis (2000), into three periods. The first period, from the 1950s to the 1980s, was the *era of scarcity*. This was the phase of the development of public service broadcasting. Television tended to present definitive programming to a mass audience. The second phase, the *era of availability*, lasted until the millennium, and it meant the explosion of channels and programs through cables, satellites, and videos. Television became an important vehicle for transmitting and creating postmodern culture. Now we are living in the *era of plenty*, which is linked to the increase of channels, digitalization, (technical and economic) convergence, and effective global media markets. In Finland, this means, roughly speaking, the years 1956 to 1987 (era of scarcity), 1987 to 2001 (era of availability), and 2001 onward (era of plenty).

Next I will introduce the examples from the material on which my research results were based.

### 3.1 A window to the world

“I often wonder how things happen far away and you can see them at once and straight from the scene of events. Technology is certainly amazing.” (Female, born 1924)

An apparatus enabling to see life on the other side of the world had been predicted decades before television was invented. For instance, a cartoon by George du Maurier in the *Punch* magazine in 1879 depicted parents watching their daughter playing tennis in Sri Lanka while talking to her on the telephone at the same. The French artist Albert Robida forecast in his drawing from 1882 that people would one day be able to view distant wars safely from their homes as the images would be projected in people’s livingrooms (Wheen 1985: 11–12).

As early as the end of 1880s, with the invention of cinema and telephone, people started envisioning a device through which world events and ceremonies could be followed in real time. Indeed, television ended up being the supreme device for transmitting great world events and spectacles. It was a part creating the society of the spectacle (Debord 1983). Alluding to media philosopher Marshall McLuhan’s famous idea that *media is the message*, the French cultural theorist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1998: 127) pointed out in 1970 that what is being transmitted, assimilated and consumed from television – and all of mass

media – is not so much some given spectacle but rather the potential for all types of spectacles. In this respect, television has defended its position till the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Even in the age of the Internet, big news and sports events and national rituals are best transmitted via television.

In the early days of television culture, the metaphor “the biggest window in the world” was frequently used in television set commercials. Other slogans were for example: “A looking glass through which the viewer becomes a modern Alice”; “The greatest show in the world”; “All the World’s a stage”; “The answer to man’s ageless yearning for eyes and ears to pierce the barrier of distance”; “It is both magic carpet ride and university”; “Television cameras will be your eyes and will topple the tower of Babel” (Tichi 1991: 13).

In the early days, Finnish TV set commercials, too, presented television as a device that united the viewers with the world surrounding them in a concrete way. This appeared in two ways: with the help of television, the external world enters the home, or television transfers the viewer to the world outside. The slogan included: “The home is the centre of events... that’s where the Philips TV is at”; “You’re involved in the focus of both entertainment and news events”; “Each moment the waves of ether bring sound and image from near and far. They also bring the world events to You, to Your home.” However, the world at home myth disappeared from TV set commercials after the early years.

In one of the few studies (Helsti 1988) on early Finnish television viewing in which similar oral history data was used as in the present study, nature and cultures of foreign countries, international politics – particularly wars – and sex rose as the most important topic areas. All of these were unpresetended to most Finns, especially in the rural areas. According to a television survey conducted in Lapland, northern part of Finland, in the 1960s (Nordenstreng et al. 1970: 20), most viewers considered it very important that “television brings the rest of the world closer.”

To the question when and why their TV was purchased, a respondent replied: “In 1969. We live in the countryside and we don’t read the newspapers, so television gives us the news, commentaries and connections to the outside world” (female, born 1928).

On the other hand, the Finnish agrarian historian Juha Kuisma (1990: 34–35) contradicts the view that television would have been “the lens for investigating the world from the couch at home.” Instead, this lens merely filtered urban and consumption oriented image to rural households. TV programs and commercials provided housewives in developing areas with instructions for how to make themselves as urban and beautiful as models. To a certain degree this holds true. The truth is not that simple, however, as there were also television commercials targeted to the rural population, such as fertilizer and farming equipment commercials (Kortti, 2003: 303–310). The world-expanding nature of television was attractive throughout Finland.

Television made it possible for an increasing number of urban people to form an opinion of foreign affairs – which used to be sailors’ privilege (Helsti 1988: 82–83). “A window to the world,” television was considered to have beneficial qualities for the workers in the cities, as the working class was becoming more privatized and family-oriented. The working class, too, considered television a “modern miracle” that provided models for even for new identities especially for working class women (Alasuutari & Siltari 1983: 66,

92). Foreign affairs became closer and it was possible, for instance, to attend royal weddings on the couch at home. Television provided access to news ranging from moonwalk to the funeral of the long-standing president of Finland Urho Kekkonen. In the first data set, many respondents emphasized the import of television in widening their worldviews:

"At least to me, television has given a lot of what I wouldn't know otherwise, such as all the nature films. I wouldn't have become acquainted with experiences of other nations, concert, and so on if it wasn't for television." (Female, born 1916)

According to a study conducted in 1968 (Tiihonen, 1969), television was already considered the most important and also the most reliable news media. Those, who used television as their main news media, were often of the lower educational level. Electronic media were the most significant news media among the farmer and worker population in a study (Haapasalo 1976) comparing the Finns' perceptions of the media in 1965 och 1975. Television was a particularly important news source among the rural population. The influence of education was also marked: the more education a person had, the less significance television and radio had as a source of news. In other respects, too, the importance of electronic mass media as a source of information was greater among agrarian and working class population. The same applied to the arts and entertainment functions of the mass media. Research also showed that television's standing had become stable by the mid-1970s – it had ceased to be overrated and criticism towards it had increased. Also, another study (Haapasalo et al. 1977: 67) showed that television had slightly lost its standing as the news media, and radio and newspapers had regained theirs especially as local news media. However, with regard to news from abroad, television was considered by far the most important media.

It is nevertheless slightly surprising that there are relatively few recollections of important international news events that have later gained mythic proportions, such as the murder of president Kennedy in 1963 (8 mentions) and the moonflight in 1969 (5 mentions). To be sure, Kennedy's murder is depicted as a big shock. There are, however, only sporadic mentions of other major news events of the 1960s, such as the Vietnam War, presidential elections, French student riots in 1968, Czechoslovakian occupation, and the famine in Biafra. Of the news events considered most important in their time in an interview survey (Haapasalo 1974: 12–20), the Vietnam War alone is mentioned in the first data set. There are no mentions of the Chilean coup d'état or the Watergate scandal, for instance. Even if there are few recollections of major international news events in the first data set, the power of television was however noticed:

"Through television, the Vietnam War, May 1968 in France, August 1968 in Czechoslovakia, the genocide in Biafra, and the moonwalk of American astronauts were instilled in my mind and my worldview." (Male, born 1943)

The students in another data set reflect on their television experiences through significant events as well. One student even recalls one milestone in Finland's recent history from when she was three years old:

"I guess my first television memory is the funeral of President Urho Kekkonen in 1986. I don't remember in detail what went on, but perhaps I remember best that he was such an

important person in the Finnish society and that my parents were shocked. I don't even remember my parents' opinion of that thought-provoking and controversial person, but I understood enough to get the impression that a particular era had come to an end. During the funeral of President Kekkonen I sat on my usual place on the living room carpet amazed by what had happened. At that time, my grandparents were temporarily living with us, which certainly added to the fuss over the topic at home. For them, President Kekkonen was a more important figure." (Female, born 1983)

By contrast, the death of the Prime Minister of the neighboring country may have had a different effect:

"Another memory dates back to 1986. As I woke up on Sunday morning I went into the living room to watch children's programs. I was alone in the living room while the rest of my family still slept. Just as the children's programs were supposed to begin, an extra news broadcast began instead. Sweden's Prime Minister Olof Palme had been murdered. I thought the broadcast would last just a few minutes and that the children's programs would be on next. But that's not how it went. I was watching the extra news broadcast in my nightgown, waiting for it to end. Eventually, my father woke up, say that probably the children's programs would be canceled for that morning. That Sunday morning was a very bitter disappointment." (Female, born 1977)

Many students remember the year 1986 through big news events (for many it represents the time of first television memories). Perhaps the most important international event from that was mixed with fiction in the mind of one six-year-old boy:

"My first strong memory is related to a situation in which I was alone with my big sister and her friend who were looking after me. The science fiction series The Tripods and the McGyver episode in which a nuclear power plant was on the verge of exploding were on in a row on television. Both of them, but especially the latter, bring back traumatic memories, since this took place in 1986, I think, just after the Chernobyl accident. It could also be concluded that the news on Chernobyl would have had a strong impact, but I don't have any clear recollections of that." (Male, born 1980)

In other words, the writer had experienced an important mediated event in which the "risk society" (Beck 1992) was lifting its head.

The news was not only mentioned as the most important program in the first data set, but they it was also one of the most important motives for acquiring a television in the 1960s. It may have been purchased simply in order to see a specific and expected news event:

"We bought our first television in June 1969 because of the moonwalk." (Female, born 1940)

However, television's weight as evidence was not necessarily highly regarded:

"Naturally, we watched the moonwalk together, but aunt Amalia (as we were allowed to call the mistress of the house) firmly refused to believe that the men really were on the Moon." (Female, born 1922)

Of all the media, television in particular has a ritual-like tendency to bring people together to participate in the national and global collective events. These kinds of events are usually distant live broadcasts that have been planned in advance. Such events (the Olympic games,

coronaries, funerals, moonwalk) are always exceptional interruptions to the routine existence, and they allow the general public to participate the public life more perfectly than at other times (McQuail 1997, 90–91).

In addition to the special routines in the home (e.g. when is the TV switched on, or how are the children put to bed), the rituals of television viewing are linked to the ways in which imagined communities, such as a “nation,” are being created. The term *imagined community* was coined by the historian Benedict Anderson (1983), who used it in his research on the origin and spreading of nationalism. It has been discovered that the notion also fits the symbolic function of media consumption. In a way, the media make the concept of *nation* fictitious and ritualistic.

“The royal wedding had to be seen. Charles and Diana getting married! We didn’t have the video yet. I had a job at the lost property office back then. Among all of that stuff, there was a black and white portable TV set someone had left in a taxi, and worked well enough. It was a bit dreary to watch a fairy wedding in black and white. We laid a tablecloth on the coffee table and cleaned the rest of the backroom where we brought the TV set. We bought cakes to go with coffee. The ladies from the archives attended the wedding as well. There were not too many customers. Some of them were amused when they realized we were watching television. The office manager went home to switch on the video recorder. In fact, the manager watched the entire wedding ceremony at home.” (Female, born 1935)

According to the media scholars Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992, ix), these kinds of media events are directed to certain central values or collective memories. Commonly, these spectacles relate an idealized version of society: i.e., where the aspirations of society lie, rather than what the society really is like. Live broadcasts of annual festivities and events, in particular, direct the horizon of expectancy to the future. A typical Finnish example of such media events is the live broadcast from the Independence Day reception:<sup>6</sup>

“We went to the neighbor’s to watch television. [Name omitted] was the first to buy a television around here in the late 1950s. I remember it was a spectacular to watch the Independence Day’s Reception at the Presidential Palace from TV. But we didn’t dress up when went to watch TV at the neighbors. When program ended, the lady of the house served all the guests coffee and buns.” (Female, born 1935)

In the early days of television, consideration should also be given to the so-called baby boomers, who were not only large group of young people but also susceptible to the political and cultural impulses of the 1960s. For them, television was an important channel for presenting the new worldviews. Because television had such a great influence on uniting the nation, it gave rise to heated debates especially towards the end of the decade. In the 1960s, television, together with periodicals, created the new public sphere. The mass media provided the baby boomer generation with the means to express their worldview. As the

<sup>6</sup> The Independence Day reception at the Presidential Palace on December 6 has dominated the viewer ratings overwhelmingly for decades. The idea of the program is, in short, that the presidential couple receives Finland’s political and cultural elite and diplomats from embassies in front of the television cameras, after which they are filmed dancing. In addition, some of the guests are interviewed. The most important issue are, however, the evening dresses and coiffures of the female guests.

Finnish social historian Jorma Kalela (1988: 43) puts it in his study on the working class way of life and the mass media: "In the 'new' way of life, mass media comes across as a societal institution that generates social cohesion without local ties."

In a very early stage, the news function of television may also have been a way for TV salesmen to get people to purchase a television:

"We were by no means among the first who got a television in this village. I wasn't particularly interested in it, and I didn't care so much for movies, either. They were tried hard to sell us a television. An electrician who was working at our home even gave us a TV set for test use, but we didn't want it. He had diligently tried it many times before the day when President Kekkonen came back from the Note Crisis<sup>7</sup> negotiations in Novosibirsk in 1962. The electrician in question dropped by and brought us a television, saying 'Now you will see President Kekkonen give a talk. He knew this would work, because dad was a supporter of President Kekkonen and the Note Crisis was a serious incident. At least my parents were afraid that it might even lead to war. And with this excuse the television was allowed to stay in the house for test viewing, but then dad did call the electrician to come and get the television away.' (Female, born 1942)

The news flow is currently manyfold compared to previous decades. Indeed, a number of students speak of the abundance of media supply, which may cause 'news and media overload.' As it has been so many times pointed out in the field of media history, new things do not replace the old ones but rather comes on top of it:

"I don't think the Internet use as such has had a very big influence on my television viewing or newspaper reading. I think the net has in a way given me more things to read instead taking away the old ones, like for instance *Helsingin Sanomat*,<sup>8</sup> from my reading list. Sometimes I feel that I'm living in a real media overload and that there is no way I can digest and learn all that I think I should." (Female, born 1975)

As a news source and a worldview shaper, television is today used more and more in conjunction with other media. The influence of the Internet, in particular, is strong. While television's arrival seemed to have a decreasing effect on radio listening, radio preserved its position as a news and entertainment media. Many people also used both television and radio, as is the case with television and the Internet today. However, previously television and radio use were much more regulated by the time of day, because there were hardly any television broadcasts, including the news, during daytime.

"We still listened to the radio a lot, though listening had shifted to morning and daytime. In the evenings we used to watch television. Still, we listened to the news and weather forecast on the radio, too, occasionally. It was the same with radio plays and children's programs. It wasn't until the 1980s that our radio listening decreased. Of course, television didn't become the only source of information and worldview shaper, even if it was important. Of the electronic media, the radio remained." (Male, born 1920)

<sup>7</sup> The Note Crisis (Finnish: *Noottikriisi*) was a political crisis in Finland. The Soviet Union sent a diplomatic note on October 30, 1961, citing an article of the FCMA treaty (Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, also known as the YYA Treaty) referring to the threat of war. The Note was linked to the Berlin Crisis of Cold War.

<sup>8</sup> The biggest newspaper in Finland.

It should be kept in mind that, compared internationally, the press has had, and continues to have, a vital role in the media consumption of the Finns. There are numerous newspapers and magazines published and read in Finland, which suggests that perceiving of the world through media is not limited to the electronic media. However, the Internet has opened new opportunities for counter- and alternative media, which has also entailed international features. This has made the late modern public sphere more fragmented, but it has also enabled one to perceive the world past and beyond "official" communications:

"Growing up from a child to a young adult, my attitude to the media changed. As a child my stance toward the media was probably just passive media consumption, for example viewing TV programs without further contemplating the messages or teachings embedded in them. When I watch children's programs today, I notice how they teach children for instance about good and evil, or how they teach a certain worldview. So, my attitude to the media has become more critical over the years. I think I became more critical towards the mainstream media, in particular, during my high school years, when I started finding a lot of information about issues that interested me from the Internet. There are several alternative medias in the Internet, whose reports bring forth issues that mainstream media doesn't necessarily talk about, or who at least view events from a different, and often considerably more humane, perspective. Instead of everything written in the papers or said in television being true, it was just some people's opinions on and views of issues concerned." (Female, born 1984)

Television probably continues to be among the most important news media for many decades. The generations to whom television has been the most important media will remain influential for a long time still, and they will also hold on to their media routines. In any case, television has certain features that are not available in the Internet, especially in terms of live news reports on the events of the world, the most important being communal. Unlike in a virtual group, the events of the world can be experienced in a physical group simultaneously through television, which was discovered in connection with major news events of the 2000s, such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. On the other hand, the Internet showed its strength during another major disaster, the Asian tsunami, in which the Internet was the most important source of information for the families of the victims of the flood. The social media also played an important part in the Arab Revolutions of spring 2011. From the news function perspective, it seems likely that the mutually reinforcing effect of various media will continue and that different media do not decimate one another or merge into one meta media – at least in the near future.

### 3.2 Television as a teacher

A number of people point out in the data how they have learned to read and speak English with the help of television (in Finland, as well as in other Nordic countries, foreign-language programs are subtitled, with only children's programs being overdubbed):

"Many parents considered children's television viewing harmful, but at least for me the moments spent watching television have been mainly beneficial. Because I was watching a lot of English-language television programs, I learned to speak the language at a very early age. I already knew some English when I went to the first grade. I also learned to read at the age of five, of which I personally give credit mainly to television. My parents didn't have the

energy to read the subtitles of the foreign-language programs for me, so I had to learn to read myself." (Female, born 1981)

Some of the parents realized the educational function of television, as well as the ability of television to preserve national culture:

"I lived in Cyprus until the age of nine, and what I remember the most of that time is television. My parents made sure that I and brother were sent video tapes from Finland, with Finnish-language programs recorded on them. They considered that our Finnish skills would stay in better shape this way. There was one Finnish TV-series we thought gave us a realistic impression of how it was in Finland, how people speak and behave in Finland, and how Finnish people differ from people in Cyprus." (Female, born 1984)

Television's prospective educational uses were already included in the afore-mentioned visions of Robida from the 1880s. Educational programs were also part of Finnish television repertoire from the early days on. The worldview-broadening effect of television was not, however, particularly important for the educated urban population, because information could also be obtained from elsewhere. Additionally, certain groups of "high cultural capital" shunned television at first, considering it an uncultured and worthless entertainment medium. Contrary to O'Sullivan's (1991: 166–167) survey on British television viewing in the 1950s and 1960s, education of children was not the motive to purchase a television in Finland, which may be indicative of the trust in the Finnish education system.

However, people did find cultivating and educational television programs as well. A Licentiate in Medicine, born in the 1950s, recounts:

"Programs such as language programs, current affairs programs and news were selected on the basis of their usefulness. On the other hand, I also chose lighter television series, but I hardly ever watched Finnish entertainment programs." (Female, born 1954)

Language programs, in particular, are mentioned as important educational television programs:

"One was above all others, namely 'Doprivester', which was the first Russian language course on television. I was completely carried away by the program. I did watch all other course as well, but they were not as good as that first one. In recent years I haven't been able to follow them anymore, because I've become hard of hearing. I used to watch other language courses as well, like Italian, Spanish and English, of which I never learned anything, however. But I had plenty of joy from (and use for) my Russian skills on package holidays. (Female, born 1918)

The utilitarian point of view of educational television programs increased with the arrival of the video. Children's videos, too, showed educational potential:

"I still remember some of the information I gathered from the program *Once Upon a Time... The Americas* (Il était une fois... les Amériques). And when we discussed the American history in school, I benefited greatly from having watched the program. Because of the program, I knew something about themes ranging from the South American Indian cultures through the discoveries to the ending of slavery in America." (Female, born 1984)

Besides children's videos, other fictional videos increased the educational utility:

"As a child, I used to watch videos for hours on end, again and again. One factor affecting good English skills was watching, for example, the *Star Wars* movies about a million and six hundred times. It was inevitable to learned the dialogue by heart." (Female, born 1984)

In the late modern period, learning from the television is more penetrating than it was for the previous generations. For the 'atomized generation,'<sup>9</sup> television and other media appliances have always been present and have always had an important role.

"My own television helped me shape my own space which I used – or, rather, where I closed myself in – so that I was able to learn about the world and myself. However, I don't believe I would have learned so much and so critically if I hadn't attended school like a good boy and read books. But it was television that taught me to know myself, which I think has been immensely useful. It also taught things I don't like. It showed models that should be avoided. It introduced me the masses that I definitely didn't want to be a part of. One had to be wiser, more knowledgeable, more unique, etc. Just in recent years have I been able to relate to television and its concepts of man neutrally enough. It is a pity indeed, but I went through my teenage years in front of the television instead of hanging out at the mall or in nice hobbies. (Male, born in the 1980s)

Cultural scholar John Hartley (1999: 38–47) has called television a 'transmodern teacher,' meaning that television combines modern, postmodern and even premodern themes. In other words, even if television teaches in a postmodern way through complex references, it may also act like the Medieval Catholic Church.

On the other hand, with the development of television, the contents of television programs have become more elaborated and challenging. According to Steven Johnson (2006), popular entertainment programs on television demand much more cognitive work from their audiences than they did before, and many of their narrative strategies, for example, would previously have been allowed in avant-garde settings only. An old popular cultural media, the cinema – not to mention computer games or the Internet – is also "making us more intelligent."

In terms of transforming the worldview in the fields of both information and entertainment, the new media have in part taxed the share of television. The Internet, in particular, has partly replaced television and may be causing the above-mentioned information overload:

"For me, the computer may have become an even more essential piece of equipment than television. I listen to music on the computer, even if I bought it as CDs. Sometimes I also watch tv-series and movies on the computer, but the main focus is still on the increased use of the Internet. The endlessly entertaining Internet forums are often enticing, as is chatting with friends in real time. The Journey Planner familiarized me with Helsinki, Wikipedia stores huge amounts of information, and Google has already become dauntingly important. At moment, e-mail is by far the most central element in my life. Sometimes it is scary to open my own e-mail, because it has become such an important tool that it brings with it an

<sup>9</sup> The concept of atomized generation refers to a nuclear- or mosaic-like generation; the smallest parts move vibrantly and dynamically in the field of cultural phenomena. Atomization can be presented as a large-scale process that cuts through a generation. The freedom and requirement of choice are characteristic of the life of the atomized generation. In Finland, the concept is used by the scholar Mikko Salasuo. See Salasuo (2006, with an English summary).

extra amount of stress and rush. It is also a bit too easy get stuck in the Net; occasionally one tends to get wrapped up in it like it was an addiction." (Male, born in the 1980s)

The student cited above had captioned the theme handling the issue as "Instruments of Coping." The self-reflection of young people seems highly sophisticated, as many of them truly contemplated their relationship with television and television's influence on their worldview. (To be sure, this aspect gets emphasis in the material, because – as mentioned before – most of them are studying the subject.) The television culture of in the era availability and plenty has raised them in a different way than the preceding generations, and they have also been influenced by the growing globalization.

### 3.3 The global MTV generation

As regards the young atomized generation, the metaphor of television as a "window on the world" is linked to the increased internationalization, one part of which is the globalization of the media. Having been one of the most frequently used buzzwords of the 2000s, a great deal has been written about globalization during the past 15 years or so. For television, globalization means, above all, internationalization and convergence of media economics. From the perspectives of television viewing and worldview, globalization is connected to the increase in the number of channels and programs internationally and, in particular, to the tendency of younger generations to travel and live abroad: the atomized generation has a much wider perspective on the media and television than previous generations. From the perspective of their perception of the world, they are – in this respect, too – highly reflexive concerning what and why they view on the television.

In the context of television viewing, globalization is a highly complex concept – especially in view of the relationship of global and local. The threat scenarios of the homogenizing effect of the international media, raised by the postmodernists, have not necessarily been realized, as the media reality has not totally eradicated the social reality. Instead, local cultures tend to reshape the forms and technologies of global mass media. According to television scholar Ien Ang (1996: 159–161), the integrating effects of globalization, of which the media is one sector, should be seen as conditional rather than real.

The definition of the relationship of global and local is much more straightforward now than it was a few decades ago, because today it is way more frequent and natural to get acquainted with other cultures in a concrete manner. Mobilization is a part of globalization, being one of its most coveted values, as sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1998: 2) points out. He claims that free mobility has rapidly become a stratified factor in the late- and postmodern eras. Several students have indeed spent time abroad and have therefore become acquainted with televisions of other countries:

"It is important for me to keep track of current affairs while I'm living abroad. I have acquainted myself with local media in order to understand the new culture and environment better. Following the media has felt like a natural way get access to a foreign society." (Female, born 1981)

Not only have the students had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with different kinds of television cultures, but television has also provided a means for better understanding of foreign cultures:

"Italian television is an integral part of my media history. I have already lived more than two years of my life in Italy, where I use media in a completely different way. I like watching television in Italy; even in Finland I prefer watching Italian television (via the Internet) and listen to Radio Italia. Television's role in my knowledge of the Italian culture has been vital. It is easier to take part in conversations and to understand jokes when you know what people talk about. I don't think it is as important in Finland, because it doesn't greatly affect my social relationships if I didn't watch television. I also buy magazines regularly while in Italy, because they cost just one euro and one learns the latest buzzwords from them!" (Female, born 1982)

The purpose of following foreign media is to get a wider picture of the events of the world. Satellite and cable channels, Music Television (MTV) in particular, have been a major influence on the worldviews of those born in the early 1980s (MTV Europe was launched in 1987). The aesthetics of MTV has had a crucial role in creating a medialized culture, a media reality governed by popular culture and a popular public sphere. These have been involved in creating a kind of shared global universe of meanings, through which it has been possible to construct one's own worldview and self-image.

"MTV's music videos have turned out to be the most important television experiences of my youth. When I visited my aunt in Helsinki I was allowed to watch MTV and Sky Channel all night, which was a great independent viewing experience, similar to watching Miami Vice. I was a huge Madonna fan and I could wait till the small hours of the morning to see Madonna's video 'Papa Don't Preach.' I was seventeen and went to evening high school when MTV started showing in our house. When I was alone at home in the mornings I kept the channel on all the time, and in the evenings I was watching it in my room before I went to bed. Our other television, a black and white set, was in my room, and it was fun to watch and wait for Madonna's controversial 'Justify My Love' video that was aired only at nights. These days I watch MTV irregularly and mostly its playing in the background instead of the radio." (Female, born 1975)

A number of respondents were not pleased with the fact that the Music Television that revolutionized their childhood and adolescence had been split into national MTVs (after MTV Europe, MTV Nordic was launched in 1998 and MTV Finland in autumn 2005):

"Nowadays MTV provides the background noise almost everywhere. And it's a big joke to watch the reality shows that they show, like Pimp My Ride and Jessica Simpson's shows. I was really annoyed when MTV became MTV Finland. I think it somehow ruined the whole Music Television, or at least the image I had of it since I was very small." (Female, born 1982)

Music Television's development is indeed interesting from the perspectives of globality and locality. In a sense, the spread of MTV was a kind success story of global media, which had real cultural-imperialistic impact. With the notion of locality, MTV has lost its appeal because, for example, it is not any longer possible to experience a sense of unity with the rest of Europe. In the 1990s, reading a letter sent from Finland was still heard all through southern Europe.

In television history, the relationship of global and local has mainly related to the ways in which different cultures view supranational programs from within their own perspectives and to the ways in which television transforms public into private at home. Television, which has been essentially supranational since the very beginning, has also had an important socio-historical role in shaping national cultures.

#### 4. Conclusion

It has been argued that, in the eras of availability and plenty, television is no longer a collective medium but rather is a part of a segmented post-Fordian market and consumption world in which identities are switched like channels. The student narratives tell another story, however. People seem to like viewing television as members of an imagined community as well as physically in the same space with others, sharing experiences face to face. Indeed, collective viewing seems to dissolve the notion of the fragmentation of television. Certain television programs are increasingly ordered or downloaded – either legally or illegally – to be viewed in a suitable occasion, but it seems unlikely that this would put an end to the need to experience live broadcasts or watching television simultaneously with other people in other ways. Most people want scheduled programs from television to experience “old-fashioned communal” in the digital era, too. To be sure, the television and the computer are by nature different media appliances.

Still, after television has no longer been ‘new medium’, television has remained as an important news media and educator in the digital age – at least in the countries such as Finland. The overall result of the study is, that television remains a social and cultural medium in the era of availability and plenty. Despite the many technological and cultural changes in television’s history, most of the main features of television habits remain. First of all, unlike the visions of ‘the postmodern television’ forecast in the 1980s and 1990s (see, for example, Ang, 1996: 162–80; McQuail, 1997: 133, 137–8), television has not metamorphosed in the 21st century into an individual, highly segmented medium devoid of common social experiences. As in the era of ‘Paleo television’ (Eco, 1992), television is still a vehicle for sharing everyday life experiences, it is an object of discussion, and it provides models for living – albeit in different technological and cultural situations. Television is still watched together in the same room at the same time in the age of plenty. In some cases, as with television gossip, the medium’s ‘oral culture’ (see, for example, Fiske, 1987: 77–80), has found its way to online chat formats (multimedia platforms of programmes such as *Big Brother*) – television is even more social than before. Although the evolution of television technology has changed the ‘uses of television’ (Hartley, 1999), it is rather surprising, how conservative most people are around the tube.

The above conclusions, which differ from the common assumptions and forecasts of television, show the strength of this kind of ethnographical data. For media ethnography, reminiscences provide longitudinal research material. Unlike ethnographic media studies in general, with these kinds of data one can see the development of media use across the span of media evolution. The material provides excellent information that would not have been collected otherwise. Oral evidence makes for a history that is richer, more vivid, heartrending and true, as oral history classic Paul Thompson (2000: 117–265) puts it. Oral evidence can add something more pervasive and more fundamental to history. It has a triple potential: to explore and develop new interpretations, to establish or confirm an interpretation of past patterns or change, and – last but not least – to express just what it felt like.

The results also serve the decision-makers and visionaries who wish to sketch the future of television in the years to come. In a nutshell, to explore these kinds of phenomena in the history of media, oral history as a source material and methodology has proved a fruitful approach, allowing the reader to peep into the Finnish living room across the decades of television. As oral historian Alessandro Portelli (1997: 6–8) has stated, the goal of oral history is to make *both* the private life and everyday routines of people *and* their relations to public life and historical time visible.

Although there are some problems with the data (ambiguous questions, influence of social desirability, structural deficiencies), the television reminiscences of Finns provide a fascinating journey into the Finnish everyday (not only the weekday, but also celebrations and other occasional events) way of living in the postwar modernization/ postmodernization process. In the 1960s especially, when the spread of television was so unexpectedly fast, Finnish society experienced rapid structural changes in terms of urbanization, migration to Sweden and the formation of the Scandinavian welfare society. The world view of a Finn was on the move. Television played an important role in all of this.

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## An Ethnography of Global Landscapes and Corridors

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The chapters presented in this book draw on ethnography as a methodology in a variety of disciplines, including education, management, design, marketing, ecology and scientific contexts, illustrating the value of a qualitative approach to research design. The chapters discuss the use of traditional ethnographic methods, such as immersion, observation and interview, as well as innovative ethnographical methods which have been influenced by the new digital culture. The latter challenges notions of identity, field and traditional culture such that people are able to represent themselves in the research process rather than be represented. New approaches to ethnography also examine the use and implication of images in representation as well as critically examining the role and impact of the researcher in the process.

### How to reference

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