ALGORITHMIC PUBLIC SERVICE TELEVISION? EXAMINING PUBLISHING STRATEGIES IN VOD SERVICES

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Until very recently, the distribution of audio-visual content has solely been the product of human decision-making processes. In the film industry, for instance, studio executives routinely make decisions regarding when and how widely a film should be released. In television, scheduling has been the primary organisational logic through which broadcasters have sought to attract viewers (particularly in commercial contexts) and/or deliver public service values (specifically in public service media [PSM] contexts). In each instance, the way in which content is distributed (when, where, how widely, for how long, in what order, etc.) has been the result of human decision-making processes.

Whilst human decision-making still plays an integral role in the distribution of television content, we are seeing a growing number of algorithmically-driven distribution systems and practices. These algorithms aren't only shaping the texts themselves (e.g. informing what should be commissioned, how the content should be shot, how those shots should be arranged, and so on). We contend that the increasing automation of distribution has a profound impact on storytelling and narrative at a much higher level. This higher level, meta-narrative is essentially what Raymond Williams famously called "flow" (1976) which, he maintains, is the 'defining characteristic of broadcasting' – it is the overall composition, sequence and experience of television.

Broadcast flow is constructed through a human, creative practice that Ellis describes as "the art of scheduling" (2000) and in that sense it can be considered a text in its own right (Bruun, 2020). However, as television is increasingly consumed via video-on-demand [VOD] platforms such as Netflix, BBC iPlayer and DRTV, and as these platforms increasingly make use of algorithms to automate the prioritisation and personalisation of content, what happens to this notion of "flow"? In other words: what happens to this meta televisual narrative? The increasing automation of television distribution raises other important questions too. What algorithmic systems are being used? To what extent are they being used? How much of this prioritisation and personalisation can be attributed to algorithms and how much of it can be attributed to humans? These questions are relevant to the industry as a whole but are of particular concern for public service broadcasters who must ensure that these algorithmic systems still deliver PSM values.

The goal of this panel is to instigate a discussion around these issues by considering these questions from three different perspectives. First, Sørensen will consider the tension between the technical characteristics of VOD algorithms and PSM obligations via a case study of personalisation in Danish DR's online VOD platform: DRTV (Sørensen, 2020). Secondly, through a case study of British BBC iPlayer, Kelly will discuss some of the key methods for studying VOD interfaces, the extent to which these approaches can be used to identify the distribution and

publication strategies of such platforms, and how these platforms contribute to the datafication of public service media more broadly (Kelly, in press). Finally, Lassen examines these increasingly automated distribution and publication strategies through the lens of policy and regulation, and in doing so considers how these algorithms have been (or should be) informed at the level of institutional policy in order to ensure that they deliver traditional PSB values (Lassen & Sørensen, in press).

JP Kelly is a lecturer in television and digital media at Royal Holloway, University of London. His main research interests include the datafication of the television industry and the impact of new media technologies on storytelling practices. He has published work on these subjects in journals including *Convergence, Television & New Media,* and *Critical Studies,* as well as contributing chapters to edited collections such as *Ephemeral Media* (BFI, 2011) and *Time in Television Narrative* (Mississippi University Press, 2012). His monograph, *Time, Technology and Narrative Form in Contemporary US Television,* was published by Palgrave in 2017 and examines the impact of digital technologies on storytelling practices in 20th Century TV.

Jannick Kirk Sørensen is an Associate Professor in Digital Media at Aalborg University Denmark. Since 2007 he has researched the implications of personalisation and algorithmic recommendation for both the idea of public service media, and its praxis. With a mixed background in Media Studies and Human Computer Interaction design he researches this question as clash between formal descriptions and the actual embodiment of intentional media communication such as public service media. He teaches Algorithmic Content Exposure for computer engineer students at Aalborg University, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Julie Münter Lassen is a research assistant in Media studies at University of Copenhagen, Denmark. In 2018 she defended her PhD, which dealt with the development of the multichannel television portfolio of the Danish public service broadcaster DR. Her ongoing research focuses on the interplay between media institutions, media regulation, and media usage particularly with regard to the public service media. She teaches courses concerning media industries, and usage of film and media at the University of Copenhagen.