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## Television as new media: Raymond-Millet's 'Télévision: Oeil de Demain' (1947) and the politics of French experimental TV

Anne-Katrin Weber

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**Keywords:** France, imaginary media, new media, television history

People using miniature-television devices in public places; professional meetings conducted via picture-phones; cars equipped with television screens; shops promoting their goods on television: these snapshots are taken from the 1947 short film *Télévision: Oeil de Demain*. Produced and shot by J. K. Raymond-Millet, *Télévision: Oeil de Demain* combines documentary and science fiction sequences as it simultaneously offers a depiction of television in postwar France as well as imaginative speculations of the medium's future developments.

While Raymond-Millet's work is virtually forgotten today, his *Télévision: Oeil de demain* has received some attention on blogs and internet forums, where the film has been applauded for 'predicting our present' since it shows, as one commentator put it, that '60 years ago, smartphones already existed'.<sup>[1]</sup> The film's sketching of coming televisual uses indeed appears as a rather precise forecasting of contemporary digital media with regard to the flexibility and hybridity of media technologies and their various consumption forms. In addition, the ubiquitous availability and accessibility to televisual communication promised in the film accurately imagines our own daily media use.

However, as I argue in this article, to understand Raymond-Millet's televisions as a mere prophesy of future media sustains a narrative that veils important aspects of television's social, political, and technical history concealed

by the film itself. Questioning the medium's 'newness' and futuristic appeal already transpiring in the movie's title 'Television, the Eye of Tomorrow', my paper thus proposes to contextualise the film and its imaginary of postwar television within the latter's own history.

Scholarship in the sociology of technology, media history, and media archaeology has argued that media fantasies constitute an important aspect of the history of (media) technology. As cultural visions and narrative patterns, imaginaries represent epistemological frameworks available to understand and interpret media at a particular age.[2] Therefore, Gabriele Balbi and Simone Natale argue, rather than evaluating the prophecies retrospectively with regard to their accuracy as anticipations, historians should 'explore the relationship of [media] prophecies to the culture of the time in which they are created'.[3]

Picking up this invitation, the article proposes a double contextualisation of Raymond-Millet's televisual universe. First, it discusses the hybrid media forms imagined in the film from a media archaeological perspective, and stresses that the idea of television as an assemblage of visual and non-visual media is not new, nor specific to the movie, but represents an important strand of televisual visions from the 19th century on. Under this light, the film's 'forgetfulness' with regard to television's past is a necessary strategy for creating a new media. The article then moves to the context of 'experimental' television in France[4] and argues that the film's enthusiastic depiction of television as yet to come exemplifies also a discursive strategy to veil most recent technological and institutional developments, in particular those linking French television to National-Socialist occupation. From this point of view, the novelty discourse is instrumental to conceal the many continuities between the National-Socialist *Fernsehsender Paris* (television station Paris) and postwar French television, and helps to conceive of television as *new media* unburdened by recent history. This reframing of *Television: Oeil de demain* within the televisual imaginary and the media's actual development in the 1940s complicates the idea of newness such as projected by the film, and stresses the importance of understanding the politics of the 'new' in 'new media'.

## Raymond-Millet's 'Report Into the Present ...'

Although he was a prolific author and producer, J. K. Raymond-Millet is an almost unknown figure in French cinema and his career still waits to be re-discovered. Similarly, little is known about the production and reception of *Télévision: Oeil de Demain*, which has virtually vanished from cinema histories.[5] While it would be a stimulating task to dig into Raymond-Millet's career and filmography, this article takes advantage of *Television: Oeil de demain* and its unknown cinematographic history in order to apprehend it as a source for discussing French experimental television.

Subtitled 'report into the present and the future,' *Télévision: Oeil de demain* is divided in two sections of roughly equal length. The first part (0' – 11.33') is shot in the studio of French National Television located at Rue Cognacq-Jay in Paris. It documents the broadcast of a Flamenco performance and follows its creation from the preliminaries in the studio to the televisual transmission via the antenna on the Eiffel Tower.

A voice over narrator introduces the artists' preparation behind the scenes, and follows them into the studio where the broadcast begins. Asking 'But where are we?', he enumerates the particularities of a television studio compared to a cinema studio such as the basic set design, the intensive lightening, and the use of immobile microphones. Presenting contemporary production practices, the narrator further insists on technical details such as the workings of the iconoscope, whose interior structure is unveiled and explained. He finally accompanies the television picture travelling *via* cable from the studio to the antenna on the Eiffel Tower, from where the signal 'flies away' and is received 'by the growing number of television set owners'.

Overall, the informative 'making of' format embraces a didactical approach that offers an optimistic narrative on a new medium allegedly available to all. In this sense, *Télévision: Oeil de Demain* resembles educational films about television, such as Telefunken's *Schreibendes Licht* (1936) and the more commercially-oriented RCA production *Television* (1939).[6] Like these films, it endeavours to explain the fundamentals of television technology and simultaneously presents an idealised view on recent developments in the field of televisual research that conceals experimental television's many technical and financial problems.

Indeed, as in other European countries, the development of a postwar French public service is rather slow.[7] In its first year of operation after the war, the French broadcaster produces ten hours of programming a week,

with airing limited to the Paris region.[8] In 1947, the broadcasts are expanded to twelve hours, to reach 50 hours a week in 1958.[9] In 1948, the 819 lines system is officially adopted as standard, a decision that fixes important technological parameters facilitating further development, while simultaneously protecting the French television industry from English and German competition, whose television standards are fixed on 405 and 441 lines respectively.[10] The national broadcaster's name change from *Radiodiffusion française* (RDF) to *Radiodiffusion-télévision française* (RTF) in 1949 translates the medium's slow but steady recognition. However, RTF is still far from operating on a nationwide scale: only in 1952, a second television transmitter is erected in Lille covering the Northern part of France, and by 1959, 70% of the French territory receives a television signal.[11] Furthermore, in 1954, only 1% of all households in France own a television set;[12] at the end of the decade, this number would slowly increase to 13% (by comparison, in the United States, 88% of households own at least one receiver in 1960).[13]

### '... and the future'

*Télévision: Oeil de Demain* fades out these and other difficulties and promotes an idealised version of French television, whose enthusiastic tone is exacerbated in its second section drafting the medium's potential forthcoming uses. This second part is introduced with a voiceover comment: 'Have you ever thought about all the things henceforth possible?' Through numerous humorous scenes set in a nearby future, this part depicts a universe in which television has penetrated every aspect of daily life (11.33' – 23.44'). The various televisual applications are presented in a sequence of separate short sketches that describe in detail their technical and social functions as a means of entertainment, information, or surveillance.



One of the central scenes shows how, thanks to the setup of cameras all around Paris, the daily work of the police force will be radically transformed: instead of patrolling the streets, the officers follow ‘the life in the capital’ on television screens in their headquarters. Hence, the thief exiting a store can no longer escape, but is tracked by the omnipresent gaze of the surveillance system and easily seized by officers. Another story introduces a private detective who uses television to track down his client’s wife who ran away with her lover – the client’s best friend. Stepping down from the plane in New York, the wife is captured by the detective’s camera, which transmits her live image to the betrayed husband. Other short sketches tell the story of television as a means of communication for private or commercial use: the small handheld portable device replace newspapers and air ‘the information broadcast, or the political comment, the fashion show, or the sports bulletin’, while the television set at the travel agency replaces the paper catalogues and invites potential clients to ‘televisually’ visit vacation destinations. In the form of picture-phones, television will enable two-way communication, at times providing most intimate sights when the young woman, stepping out of the shower, has forgotten to turn off her telephone-camera and reveals herself naked to the caller. Finally, television will serve as entertainment media and transmits serials, dance performances, and other leisurely programs.

The sketches’ comic moments derive from the devices’ novelty that provokes confusion and improbable misuses. The elderly, ill client at the travel

agency asks to see tropical destinations in order to cure his cold; the driver in his car who watches the traffic information in the vehicle's built-in set produces an accident because he listens to the latest car crash statistics; at home, the bad tuning of one's television set produces intrusive pictures suddenly appearing in the neighbour's apartment.

This section, overall, celebrates the future prospects of television. Not without humour, television is framed as the latest of all modern media forms yet to come, offering revolutionary tools for immediate and ubiquitous communication that appear to be 'just around the corner'. Indeed, in contrast to other films from the period, which depict television within distant science-fiction universes,[14] *Télévision: Oeil de Demain* integrates its televisual gadgets into an otherwise very 1940s looking city. Yet the film also highlights television's novelty, emphasised through the devices' exceptionality: its *mise en scène* and narrative confer television the role of a simultaneously available *and* extraordinary medium and, staging its pluriform machinery, put forward the televisual object as an index of technological and scientific modernity and progress.

## Heterogeneous images

In the film, television's novelty and remarkable future possibilities depend first and foremost on its properties as a medium of 'liveness', simultaneity, and ubiquity. While a few sketches in the second part of the film stage the televisual reception of what appears to be a movie – underlining thus television's function as a means of distribution for pre-recorded content – most of the short stories as well as the film's first part insist on television's capacity for immediate transmission at a distance. The live production of a performance that is broadcast over the Eiffel Tower's antenna (in the movie's first part), just as the emergency call between the 'Minister of the Colonies' and the homeland in prevision of a hurricane (in its second section), celebrate 'liveness' as the medium's present and future specificity.

William Uricchio has dubbed this 'ideal-typical' form of immediate communication as 'the televisual', understood not as a particular technology but a 'horizon of expectations' shaped by modern telecommunication based on simultaneity and immediacy.[15] Connecting 'distant points in real time',[16]

the televisual as a fantasy and a technological project constitutes an epistemological framework formed in the nineteenth century also determining Raymond-Millet's depiction of 'seeing at a distance'.

The representation of the televisual in *Télévision: Oeil de Demain*, however, complicates straightforward definitions of television's identity as a live medium insofar as it depends on its remediation in film. As Jay D. Bolter and Richard Grusin discuss, such 'representation of one medium in another'[17] either stresses the mediation at play, and thus result in 'hypermediation', or, on the contrary, veils the process of mediation, making it appear 'transparent'. [18] In *Télévision: Oeil de Demain*, the remediation is first and foremost at the service of television and respects the regime of transparency: similar to a display-window framing the passer-by's gaze without being itself seen, the film puts forward television's multiple potentials, without highlighting its own mediality.

The transparency of the filmic presentation is nevertheless disrupted on several occasions when the dependency of the imagined tele-visions on cinema becomes evident. The immediacy of communication is a product of cinematographic procedures including cross-cutting and the use of special effects that allows to 'paste' an allegedly televisual image into the television screens. This 'mise en abyme' of a moving image within the moving image stresses the materiality of the televisual picture (created on film) and its correspondence with the cinematographic picture.



Fig. 1



The multiscreen apparatus used by the police force to track the thief in the streets of Paris represents a telling example for this idea. The disposition of nine television screens within one single shot highlights the complex construction of the televisual images that appear ‘glued’ onto the film, revealing their indebtedness to cinematic special effects – and not to televisual liveness. In other words, the multiscreen device – but also the picture-phones or handheld television sets – stress the cinematographic origins of the movie’s televisual machinery and point to the pre-recorded nature of an allegedly simultaneous image (Fig. 1).

## Heterogeneous machines

This composite character of the cinematographic representation of televisual pictures echoes the composite materiality of television imagined in the film. Assembled from various components including telephones and radio sets, the televisual devices appear as bricolages with multiple identities. Their material heterogeneity results in a plurality of applications, and implies complex definitions associating television with contemporary media technologies and their functions – communication, entertainment, collective or private reception.

Consequently, in Raymond-Millet’s work, the common denominator ‘television’ embraces at least three different media uses. First, television is envisioned as a two-way communication device, the picture-phone. As such, it perfects the telephone by adding visuals to the transmission of the human voice. Second, television functions as a portable hand-held device offering ubiquitous televisual access. Third, television sets in the domestic setting anticipate Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘mobile privatization’ since they broadcast pictures from places ‘never seen by a man’. Big screen television, built-in television in cars, and public surveillance systems round off the futuristic portrait of televisual uses.

This conception of television as a hybrid media echoes earlier media prophecies described from the late nineteenth century on. Presented in popular press and literature, the drafts for televisual communication systematically rely on technological clustering leading to new uses of previous machines.[19] Most famously, the *Téléphonoscope* described in Albert Robida’s science-fiction novel *Le Vingtième Siècle* (*The Twentieth Century*, 1883) constitutes ‘the supreme perfection of the telephone’ and allows its users not only

to hear but 'simultaneously to see' their interlocutor.[20] Various other uses of the televisual novelty, which Robida includes in his description of the daily life of a wealthy family in 1950s Paris, include the telephonoscopic 'theatre at home'; a 'retrospective theatre' bringing back to life long dead actors thanks to old recordings; a big-screen news media; and a surveillance tool. Conceived as a perfection of earlier communication and entertainment media, Robida's devices are highly flexible tools for audiovisual transmission.

In their study of imaginary media quoted above, Balbi and Natale take Robida as a prime example for the way media prophecies build upon existent media, in this case the theatre and the telephone. For the authors, Robida demonstrates that media innovation is intrinsically linked to media history: the anticipation of new media is based on 'old' technologies.[21] Media archaeological work focusing on television before the broadcast era similarly underlines the hybrid nature of imagined devices: as Doron Galili argues in his study of Tom Swift novels depicting televisual devices in 1914, 1928, and 1933 respectively, the boy inventor's tele-*visions* participate in the 'continuously changing intermedial context' from which they emerge, for instance sound film or x-rays.[22] Televisual liveness and the transmission of audiovisual content thus hinge on audio/visual media playfully combined.

### René Barjavel's *Cinéma total*

Raymond-Millet's film does not directly refer to this broader archaeology of television as intermedial assemblage, but acknowledges in its opening credits its indebtedness to a 1944 essay by René Barjavel. Titled *Cinéma total*, this short text celebrates in its own way hybrid media forms.

Subtitled 'Essay on cinema's future forms', Barjavel anticipates in this short text the development of cinema towards an ultimate – 'total' – audiovisual representation. Conceiving of the medium's past and future history as an unfolding of singular events leading to its final form, Barjavel paints a portrait of cinema's different stages. Cinema's history, he asserts, will come to a close

[w]hen it will be able to present to us protagonists in relief and color, and perhaps with odors; when these protagonists will free themselves from the screen and the darkness of theaters to take a walk in public squares and in everyone's apartment.  
[23]

René Barjavel is today mostly remembered for his science-fiction novels and film scripts. His *Cinema total* has received some attention from film historians observing that it has served as an inspiration for André Bazin's article 'Le mythe du cinéma total et les origines du cinématographe', which in its revised version would become one of the most famous pieces of Bazin's anthology *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma*.<sup>[24]</sup> Obviously familiar with Barjavel's text, Bazin borrows the notion 'cinéma total' for his paper first published in November 1946 in George Bataille's *Critique. Revue générale des publications françaises et étrangères*, without however acknowledging the origin of the employed formula.

For Raymond-Millet's film, one chapter of Barjavel's media utopia is particularly relevant since it serves as a direct inspiration for the movie's science-fiction scenes. Titled 'Cinema and the airwaves', the chapter examines the 'upheaval' caused by the 'conjunction of three technologies that today remain embryonic: radio, cinema and television'.<sup>[25]</sup> As 'fatal as the encounter of two rivers streaming down the valley', the 'junction' of cinema and broadcasting technologies is thought to 'transport the images everywhere'.<sup>[26]</sup> Consequently, Barjavel suggests, 'there will be domestic receivers for family pleasures, handheld receivers as small as your lighter for people on the road'.<sup>[27]</sup> Barjavel's futurist media universe further includes a description of holographic transmissions that literally 'stroll' through our apartments:

[a]t home, total cinema, which for a short instant had been the receiver's and its screen's prisoner, will escape and wander through the apartment. The bourgeois in his armchair after a filling meal will project the virtual image to his feet, on the carpet, or on the table, or somewhere in the room, in between the parquet and the ceiling.

One turn of the knob too much, a caprice of the device, and the image, crossing walls, will take a stroll in neighbor's apartment. No longer will we have to defend ourselves solely against noise, but also against unsuitable visions. Some careless people will let their set shout images. Already at sunrise, a badly tuned television news programme will let dance its news on our quilt. <sup>[28]</sup>

The domestic receivers and handheld devices as well as the holographic 'wandering' pictures appear in Raymond-Millet's movie, together with the voiceover narration that briefly cites literal quotes from Barjavel's texts. More than just an 'inspiration' as claimed in the opening titles, Barjavel's essay thus serves as a first-hand source for the film's script (Figs 2, 3).



Fig. 2, 3

For Raymond-Millet as well as for Barjavel, the future (or futurist) media environment is first and foremost characterised by media convergence and the permeability of different devices, practices, and industries. In Barjavel's text, the metaphor of merging rivers, as well as the associated semantic field ('junction', 'alliance', 'synthesis') highlight processes of mixing, mash-up, and commingling, that find expression in Raymond-Millet's multiplatform television existing in close interdependence with other media forms and uses.

Locating their media fantasies within cinema and television history, respectively, Barjavel and Raymond-Millet thus both describe a futurist medi-escape where the frontiers and identities of given media forms are elastic and

malleable, if not completely dissolved. As in earlier tele-visions, their multi-form media are built upon pre-existing technologies, which they actualise and improve: their spectacular ‘new’ media derive from ‘old’ ones. However, *Cinéma total* as well as *Télévision: Oeil de demain* avoid contextualising their prophecies within a broader perspective of 19<sup>th</sup> century imaginary media, which bloomed in books and drawings and similarly portrayed multiform media created upon ‘obsolete’ machines. And both works renounce to describe television’s recent technological and institutional development, and to confront their imaginary inventions to contemporary scientific innovation.

## Interwar technologies

Indeed, several of the allegedly futurist dispositifs in *Télévision: Oeil de Demain* are developed from the early 1930s on, and, although not (widely) commercialised, they are discussed in the specialised and general press, and presented to large audiences.

In France, early experiments with television start in the late 1920s. Reflecting the widespread enthusiasm for the new technology in techno-savvy milieus, the French Television Association launched the journal *Télévision. Revue mensuelle de phototélégraphie et de télévision* in 1928, a publication that covered televisual research at home and abroad. Aiming at the general public, newspapers and magazines discuss the medium’s progress realised in Europe and the United States. Furthermore, television is exhibited in Paris and other cities.[29] These exhibitions include demonstrations of small receivers, large-screen television systems, and two-way television communication devices.[30] During the 1930s, private enterprises organised regular experimental broadcasts designed for the amateur community. Combining live content with ‘télécinéma’, the scanning and broadcasting of filmed footage, the television system transmits a crude moving image over short distances. In 1933, the French postal agency set up a first official studio at the Rue de Grenelle in Paris; from 1935 on, official regular broadcasts air on 60, and later 180 picture lines until the outbreak of the war.[31] Television is thus a technical reality in the 1930s already, albeit in rudimentary form.

Furthermore, while the distribution of television receivers remains limited, some of the devices depicted in Raymond-Millet’s film actually do exist. For instance, the hand-held devices included in *Television: Oeil de demain* to highlight the ubiquity of televisual reception (on the streets and in cafes) have

a – fragile, but existent – counterpart in reality. In the early 1930s, at least one French inventor pursued the path of developing a micro receiver dubbed the ‘Visiola Brami’. Much like the device depicted in Raymond-Millet’s work, this apparatus, praised as ‘the smallest and most compact of all known television sets’, fit into one hand[32] (Fig. 4). In 1936, French Engineer Marc Chauvierre developed the slightly larger ‘Visiodyne Baby’, whose name directly refers to the miniaturisation of technology.[33]

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dans ces condensations d'eau une suppléance complète à l'absence des pluies. Dans la plupart des régions du littoral de la mer, ces phénomènes font partie essentielle du climat. Leur bienfaisance s'étend assez loin dans les terres. Avant que la science, soit par le refroidissement artificiel ou la détente des gaz et des vapeurs, ait mis au point des appareils, ce moyen pour ainsi dire naturel de collecteur d'eau aura toujours une certaine faveur par sa simplicité et par sa supériorité économique. Un tel sujet valait d'être traité. Il fait l'objet des préoccupations constantes de M. le Résident général du Maroc, M. Lucien Saint, et de toute l'attention de M. Guinand, secrétaire général au ministère de la Guerre. On comprend toute cette sollicitude quand on sait l'épouvante affligée des années sèches du Sud Tunisien et les entraves que le manque d'eau met à notre expansion coloniale. Aussi, bien que le travail soit ardu pour sa réalisation pratique, y consacrerai-je encore mes efforts, afin de conserver à l'hygiène sociale ce beau fleuron de la santé humaine.

Docteur E. PASTEUR,  
Médecin Colonel  
à l'Hôpital militaire du Val-de-Grâce.

## UN NOUVEL APPAREIL DE TÉLÉVISION LE VISIOLA BRAMI

### ÉTAT ACTUEL DE LA TÉLÉVISION

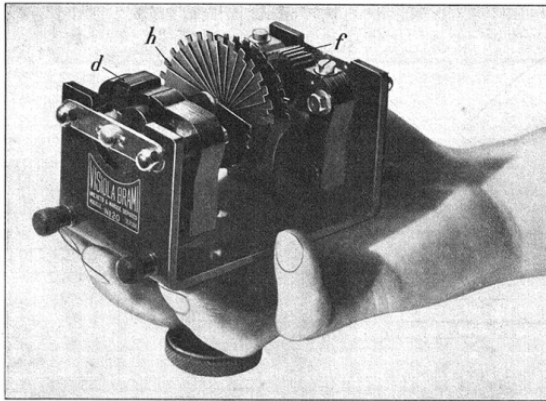
Si l'on voulait faire aujourd'hui le point en matière de télévision, on constaterait que malgré les grands progrès accomplis, bien des difficultés restent encore à

vaincre pour que cette nouvelle application de la science entre définitivement dans nos mœurs.

Car il faut bien l'avouer, la télévision n'en est qu'à ses débuts.

Avec les transmissions actuelles d'images explorées

Fig. 1. — L'appareil Visiola.  
d, moteur d'induction. — f, synchroniseur à roue phonique. — h, Miroir à miroirs. (L'appareil complet tient dans le creux de la main.)



Droits réservés au Cnam et à ses partenaires

Fig. 4: Hand-held television (Bercy 1933).

A major event for French television and the media's recognition by the broad audience was the 1937 Paris World's Fair, where French Postal Services as well as National-Socialist Germany organised television demonstrations, including demonstrations of 'visiotéléphonie'.<sup>[34]</sup> The French exhibition, overall a 'rather modest'<sup>[35]</sup> affair compared to the elaborate Nazi exhibit located in the regime's pavilion, also included two television-telephone booths installed in 'very close proximity'.<sup>[36]</sup> When Raymond-Millet staged two-way television in his film after the war, the technology had thus been known and shown for over a decade. What is more, these devices perfectly illustrate the medium's material hybridity, which constitutes a main characteristic not only of imaginary devices but also of actual television research. The early development of televisual systems indeed often combine components from different media technologies: from the late 1920s on, the imaginary of composite media objects finds its correspondence in concrete machines.<sup>[37]</sup>

## French television during the Second World War

Returning to Raymond-Millet's film with the brief digression into television's technical history in mind, the film's novelty discourse appears as questionable. In Raymond-Millet's media universe, machines and predicted uses are not as new as they pretend to be insofar as the film's anticipatory gesture actualises literary blueprints of tele-*visions* as well as concrete devices. Doing so, it participates in a broad televisual mediascape, where media fantasies and engineers' drawings coexist: it anticipates potential television forms in order to sustain its own attraction as a media text. In this sense, the veiling of a media's past is a necessary aspect of the novelty discourse, which, as Tom Gunning has argued, is inherent to the history of technology more broadly. According to Gunning, the quality of newness, and the astonishment, amazement, and marvel provoked by it, is an essential 'mode of reception' for technological artefacts, shaping their significance as a symptom and symbol of modernity.<sup>[38]</sup>

However, in the case of Raymond-Millet's film and within the context of French media history, the emphasis on television's newness to the detriment of a historical contextualisation bears an additional signification related to the medium's fate during the war. The movie not only veils the long 'prehistory' of television, but it also ignores the immediate past of French television

under National-Socialist management during the occupation. This short but important episode is concealed in Raymond-Millet's story despite its chronological proximity with the events, and although the studio infrastructure, in which the film's first section is shot, was partly set up by the Germans.

In 1940, the National-Socialist occupation of Paris transferred the existing French television infrastructure – comprising among other things a television studio and a sound/image transmitter at Eiffel Tower – into German hands. At first, the German forces showed little interest in the available technology, and in 1941 planned to dismantle the Eiffel Tower antenna for material procurement.[39] After various interventions by the industry and the broadcasting sector aiming at preventing the demolishment, it is decided to rescue the infrastructure and to establish a German-French television station. While the reasons for this decision remain partly obscure, it translates the political willingness to help German manufacturers implementing German television technology and standards abroad.[40]

The existing studio at the Rue de la Grenelle inaugurated by the French postal services in the early 1930s is judged being too small, and several new locations, among others the Palais de Tokyo, are considered. In August 1942, a former entertainment venue, *Magic City*, is finally designated to serve as the new studio. In addition, a hotel located behind the venue at Rue de Cognacq-Jay is transformed into the administration's offices.[41]

In cooperation with the French industry, the *Fernsehsender Paris* ('Television Station Paris') finally airs between May 1943 and August 1944.[42] Copying the model of wartime television in Germany, the program targets first and foremost soldiers recovering in hospitals and a few private homes in possession of a receiver. Aired in German and French, the broadcasts are constituted of filmed footage and live performances.[43] The *Fernsehsender Paris* operates on an important budget and renews existing facilities, which eventually lay the foundation for the postwar public service depicted in Raymond-Millet's film. Indeed, the German contribution to French experimental television is not negligible: as historians Monique Sauvage and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson highlight, 'at the liberation, French television is paradoxically in a better state than in 1939'.[44] Veiling the continuities between wartime and postwar television, the movie thus brushes aside this German heritage in French broadcasting, which includes studios and administrative offices, technical equipment, as well as a team of experienced collaborators.[45]



The clean cutting of postwar television from the medium's war-driven developments is nonetheless not unique to Raymond-Millet's film, but recurrent in contemporary sources. A 1945 paper in *La Nature* titled 'Où va la télévision ?' states that 'the experimental French station, operated at the Champ de Mars in Paris by the Radiodiffusion Française, has resumed its broadcast, which was suspended during German occupation'.<sup>[46]</sup> Similarly, in an overview on the current state of television in France published in the same journal in 1947, no reference is made to *Fernsehsender Paris* and the German heritage.<sup>[47]</sup> Raymond-Millet's anticipation therefore participates in a broader discourse launching a new media unburdened by the weight of its own history. Aiming at celebrating national achievement and technological modernity in the early years of postwar recovery, it pursues the goal of re-writing television's history from scratch by suppressing any reference to one central but problematic actor in French television. While this tweaking of French television's historiography would be readjusted in subsequent scholarly work, it also stands as a reminder that newness is not a characteristic of new things *per se*, but rather the result of narratives and collective representations seeking, in this particular case, to revise the political entanglements of an old new media.

## **Conclusion: Imaginaries and materialities in television's history**

The lacking information on the production and reception of *Télévision: Oeil de demain* makes it impossible to estimate its impact as a cultural object for contemporary audiences, and to evaluate whether the strategies of projecting television's newness were operational at all. For French television history, the film nevertheless constitutes a valuable source insofar as it subsumes – and presents with great care – the contemporary media imaginary on televisual transmission. As I have shown, its multiple sketches on future television forms actualise major strands of television's discursive construction, including the paradigms of liveness and hybridity, which date back to the late 19th century. Conceived simultaneously as an anticipation (in its second part inspired by Barjavel) *and* a record of an emergent media (in its first part shot in the Parisian television studio), it furthermore functions as a pictorial archive of French television in the mid-1940s and a trace of studio production practises of the time.

From a historiographical perspective, *Télévision: Oeil de demain* reveals the importance of a contextualisation that takes into account the imaginary, as well as the technical and institutional history. Since the film alleges its indebtedness to Barjavel's essay on cinema's future and posits itself within the universe of literary prophecies, it introduces itself first and foremost as a projection of fictional televisual forms. However, even a short detour via television's technical history documents the plurality of actually developed devices in the 1940s, and invites further investigation into the medium's little known interwar/wartime development. The unearthing of such artefacts as visio-phones or the Visiola Brami points to the proximity of the imaginary and the material in television's history. These devices confirm that hybridity and intermedial assemblage not only characterise imaginary media, but also actual televisual forms, which were promoted within different institutional and political contexts. Laying emphasis upon television's existence as a discursive and a material object, such a broad contextualisation finally provides the necessary framework to critically reflect upon the film's construction of television as new media.

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## Notes

- [1] Until recently, Raymond-Millet's film was accessible in its totality on ina.fr, but the platform was required to remove the work due to copyright issues. Henceforth, the excerpts have also vanished from the various blogs and websites discussing the film's predictions.
- [2] See for instance Marvin 2003; Albera 2010; Kuitenberg 2011. Natale & Balbi (2014) offer a brief and useful historiographical discussion of scholarship on imaginary media.
- [3] Natale & Balbi 2014, p. 207.
- [4] I borrow the notion 'experimental television' from Gilles Delavaud and Denis Maréchal who use the notion to refer to television's 'pre-institutionalized' period (1920s to 1950s). Delavaud & Maréchal 2011.
- [5] Raymond-Millet's career, and in particular his work in the French colonies, is mentioned in Le Roy 2001, who discusses the holdings of colonial films in French archives. The movie itself seems to have left almost no traces in contemporary newspapers: on [retronews.fr](http://retronews.fr), the French national library's database for digitised newspapers, only one newspaper announces the soon-to-come screening of Raymond-Millet's film: *L'Aube*, 30 October 1947.
- [6] *Schreibendes Licht* is held by the Deutsches Technikmuseum archives, Berlin; the RCA movie is available online: <https://archive.org/details/RCAPrese1939> (accessed on 18 January 2019).
- [7] For the history of French experimental television, see Brochand 1994; Delavaud & Maréchal 2011; Gaillard 2012, Sauvage & Veyrat-Masson 2012.
- [8] The Paris region corresponds to 19% of the entire population. Gaillard 2012, p. 41.
- [9] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- [10] Fickers 2006.
- [11] Gaillard 2012, p. 43.
- [12] *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- [13] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

- [14] See for instance *Things To Come*, William Cameron Menzies, 1936.
- [15] Uricchio 2005.
- [16] Uricchio 2008, p. 287.
- [17] Bolter & Grusin 2000, p. 45.
- [18] *Ibid.*, pp. 20-51.
- [19] For an inventory of televisual devices in nineteenth century literature, see André Lange's website <http://www.histv.net> (accessed on 18 January 2019).
- [20] For a complete description of this device, see chapter five in Robida 1883.
- [21] Natale & Balbi 2014, pp. 206-207.
- [22] Galili 2015.
- [23] Barjavel 1944, p. 9.
- [24] See Wall-Romana 2012, pp. 209-211. See also the email exchange between Laurent Le Forestier and André Gaudreault/Philippe Marion published as a supplement online to Gaudreault & Marion 2015: <http://theendofcinema.com/p-218-2/> (accessed on 18 January 2019).
- [25] Barjavel 1944, pp. 59-60.
- [26] *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- [27] *Ibid.*
- [28] *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- [29] Brochand 1994, pp. 535-536.
- [30] In May 1932, John Lodgie Baird organised a demonstration of his two-way-television system between the offices of the newspaper *Le Matin* and the *Galleries Lafayette*. 'M. Louis Roulin, ministre du commerce et des P.T.T. est venu hier au 'Matin' inaugurer un poste de 'visiotéléphonie', *Le Matin*, 20 May 1932, frontpage.
- [31] Sauvage & Veyrat-Masson 2012, pp. 24-31.
- [32] Bercy 1933, pp. 306-311. See also the photographs on [http://www.earlytelevision.org/general\\_radio.html](http://www.earlytelevision.org/general_radio.html) (accessed on 18 January 2019).
- [33] Hémardinquer, June 1937, pp. 39-42. See also <http://www.earlytelevision.org/visiodyne.html> (accessed on 18 January 2019).
- [34] Hémardinquer 1938, pp. 137-139. For a discussion of television at this World's Fair and for photographs of the German visiophone system, see Fickers 2008.
- [35] *Ibid.*, p. 298.
- [36] Hémardinquer 1938, p. 139.
- [37] For a discussion of interwar television's constitutive hybridity, see Weber 2014.
- [38] Gunning 2004, pp. 39-60.
- [39] Truckendanner 1999, p. 107. For an exhaustive account of this episode of French television history, see also Winker 1994, pp. 371-414 ('Fernsehen im besetzten Frankreich, 1940-1944').
- [40] Truckendanner 1999, p. 107.
- [41] *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- [42] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- [43] Winker 1994, p. 391.

[44] Sauvage & Veyrat-Masson 2012, p. 37.

[45] Truckendanner 1999, pp. 114-115.

[46] Adam 1945, p. 91.

[47] Serve 1947.