

'Discovering Film on Television: fragments from the RTÉ Archives'

Project description

In recent years, television broadcasters have moved to make their archive holdings publicly available to researchers and to the general public. This opening up of archives and promotion and dissemination of archive content has prioritised access to and engagement with broadcast material. Such initiatives - whether externally funded – or as part of broadcaster policy has led to increased attention being given to the archive material and also to the ways in which archival moving image can be used. It has also called attention to what has been retained, what has been partially preserved and what is missing altogether.

As well as recognising that broadcast material can be used to better understand our historical past and to trace the history of individual programmes, it can also be used to help explore the relationship that exists between television archive material and other visual forms, specifically, film. Unlike broadcast archives which frequently retain as much footage as possible - much of which has been publicly broadcast - material produced by the film industry which relates to the making of cinema and to discussions around film and cinema is harder to track down. Such material is rarely generated as part of the filmmaking process and is often compiled afterwards or added to the DVD release of the film as 'making of' features.

Researchers in the fields of television and film studies have often focused on one medium or the other, in recognition of the different cultural imperatives, funding structures, and dissemination methods of the two industries. But as well as showing films on television, television is also a site where film and cinema is discussed. Reports of film festivals, interviews with actors and directors, discussions about violence and realism, and the impact of film and cinema in rural and urban centres, are all topics frequently covered on television.

In film studies, the turn to film history and the acknowledgement of the importance of production, reception, exhibition and audiences suggests that it has never been more important to recognise the value of the film-related material held within television archives.

This research proposes an initial exploration of the Irish national Broadcaster RTÉ, which has digitised a great deal of its archival material and which is also contributing items and metadata to the EUscreen project, a European initiative which brings together moving image material from different European broadcasters.

This research is structured around a number of key research questions:

- What were the regular programmes broadcast on RTÉ on film and cinema? What topics were discussed and explored in the programmes?
- What stars and directors are interviewed about their film work and what does this suggest about the importance of film and cinema to Ireland.
- Is film and cinema used as a means to discuss other issues – e.g. censorship of film and the permissive society, violence on the screen and the behaviour of children?
- How can these programmes be used to better understand the relationship between television broadcasters and the medium of film?

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Research into this material will help explore the interconnectedness (or otherwise) of the two industries, and will shed light on the debates about film and discourses about cinema which are being relayed through the broadcast medium. It will also explore just how much remains of these programmes within the RTÉ Archives.

Preliminary research into the RTÉ listings guide from 1961 and 1965 has indicated a number of broadcast programmes about film and cinema in the broadcaster's early years. The listings also usefully indicate the regular screening of films as part of the Saturday night programme, with a marked preference for Westerns and older Hollywood films.

As well as exploring the kinds of films being broadcast, this research will focus upon the regular film programme 'KINO: The World of Film' which began in 1965, was hosted by popular broadcaster Gay Byrne and was broadcast every second Thursday. As well as using the RTÉ listings to explore the broadcasting of this programme and its scheduling, the broadcast footage which remains will also be viewed. Although preliminary research indicates that very little of the footage survives, the detailed listings will be used to map the history of this particular programme and to identify its themes, concerns and focus.

This research will also draw upon the knowledge and expertise of RTÉ Archive staff. It will be essential to discover as much information as possible about the production and broadcast of this and other similar programmes, and research will be supplemented by further research within the library at the Irish Film Archive

While the focus here is Ireland and the relationship between film and television captured within RTÉ Archives, this approach – using moving image material from a broadcaster to discuss a nation's film and cinema heritage - could be usefully applied throughout European broadcast archives and offer increased understanding of the practices of both television and film history and of using archival material within these disciplines. This work is particularly relevant when considering how we construct our knowledge of broadcast programmes when little remains of the programmes themselves.

Workplan

This project will require time to be spent at the RTÉ Archives in Dublin, the National Library of Dublin and the library at the Irish Film Archive in Dublin. There will also be writing up time within Belfast.

Research will focus on the opening decade of RTÉ, the 1960s, and the programme identified, but may also include other programmes which explore film and cinema, as well as taking note of the films screened by the broadcast every week. This proposed programme of work is intended to offer some preliminary findings based upon the material available and within the time constraints of the project.

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Activities: (dates are approximate)

October 2015

Continuing work on the RTÉ listings guide held in the National Library Dublin
Approx. 4 days: 2 research trips

End October 2015

Preliminary visit to RTÉ Archives to explore the catalogue and find some basic information about 'KINO: The World of Film.' 1 day.

November – December 2015

Further visits to RTÉ Archives to view the broadcast material which remains from the programmes 'KINO: The World of Film' and to explore stills pertaining to the programme and other associated programmes. Visits as required to the library at the Irish Film Archive, Dublin.

Approx. 4 days to be spent looking at this material. 2 research trips.

January – February 2016

Writing up findings into an article to be published.

Curation of findings into a virtual exhibition to be hosted on RTÉ Archives website

Presentation of findings at relevant conference and FIAT / IFTA event (September / October 2016)

Proposed budget

Travel:

Return train travel between Belfast and Dublin for 5 research trips: 175 euros

Travel around Dublin as required: 60 euros

Accommodation:

Dublin for research trips: 130 euros per night x 4 nights total 520 euros

Subsistence: 40 euros per day for approx. 9 days. 360 euros

Conference attendance costs

Approx. 1200 euros for travel and accommodation to relevant conferences within Europe e.g. NECS and FIAT/IFTA event

TOTAL: £2315

Outputs

As well as presenting the research findings at a FIAT/IFTA event and completing a written report which will be made available on the FIAT/IFTA website, this work will also be published and presented in a variety of ways. A journal such as the *New Review of Film and Television Studies* would allow for findings to reach scholars in both film and television studies. Alternatively, an online open access journal such as *Frontiers in Digital Humanities: Digital History* which includes a sub section on Cultural Heritage Digitization would allow for greater dissemination beyond the reach of a print journal. A third alternative could be the online journal *VIEW: Journal of European Television History and Culture* which would place the findings within a broader European context.

Possible conference dissemination would be at the annual NECS conference which is the conference for the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies.

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In addition to this dissemination and publication activity, it is also the intention of this project to showcase this content for the benefit of broader audiences. RTÉ Archives already highlight key items from their archive on their own web pages, and the intention would be to curate some of the studied content into a mini-exhibition which highlights key findings but also reveals the usefulness of the archive material to film and television studies. Using the material in this way will demonstrate the practices of film and television research and how archive material can play a central and exciting role within this process.

Communication and dissemination activities timetable:

- Article to be completed for submission to a specified journal by Autumn 2016.
- Paper submitted to NECS 2016 or 2017 to present on research findings at appropriate FIAT / IFTA event in late 2016
- Curation and presentation of findings either as a virtual exhibition or a written piece for the RTÉ Archives website Spring 2016.