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Panel 1: *Media and Communication*

“A Media Anthropology: Greek TV News”

**Kondylidou Areti
PhD Candidate
University Paris III, Sorbonne-Nouvelle**

areti-kondylidou@club-internet.fr

Introduction

The significance of television these days is widely known and accepted. It is also considered common sense to the majority of spectators that TV News is, and has been for quite a long time now, an inseparable part of our lives. Greek society is not an exception of this international phenomenon. Greek TV was born in 1968, during the dictatorship, but it is from 1989, when private TV was born, that each channel, aiming to capture the largest audience, has largely invested in evening News. The evening News¹ became the main competitive field among the different channels. A new era on Greek television was inaugurated: Commercial TV was born. Of course, Greek commercial TV is governed by the same rules of the market that determines these days all mass media in the world. Since a channel like CNN was born, the world of information and the images of information have radically changed.

Our interest on Greek TV and more specific on the TV News are based on our PhD in progress, in the Department of Information and Communication, in Paris III, Sorbonne-Nouvelle, under the direction of Professor François Jost.

One tool for examining this aspect of TV News will be the anthropological thought. The Media Anthropology, or Anthropology of the Media, a new-born of the discipline, finds its way to the academic world. The first attempt of an anthropologist to analyse media was the study Hortense Powdermaker had undertaken concerning Hollywood films in 1950². Nevertheless, the term of Media Anthropology appears for the first time officially in 1969, during a meeting of the *American Anthropological Association* from a group of anthropologists, whose most important representative is Susan Allen³. Anthropology is considered to bring the sixth “W” in the existing five of journalism of information: the “whole”. Let not forget, though, the contribution of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, in the 30’s who were the first to inaugurate the use of camera by anthropologists, just like Franz Boas had done before them for the use of the phonograph. The use of technology concerning the image was until recently accorded to Visual Anthropology as a means of work. The first Media Studies considered media as a strong totalitarian medium that could put in danger people’s free conscience. This was H. Powdermaker’s idea, but it was also believed by

¹ Concerning the four channels that will interest us on this paper, the evening News start on NET channel at 21.00, on MEGA at 20.00, on ALPHA at 20.00 equally and on ALTER at 18.45.

² Hortense Powdermaker, (1900-70), *Hollywood the Dream Factory: an Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers*, 1950, Arno Press.

³ See more details in : Mihai Coman, *Pour une Anthropologie des Médias*, PUG, 2003, page 6.

the theorists of the Frankfurt School, mostly Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. A different approach in media was attempted by the British cultural studies, with Stuart Hall, John Fiske, Ien Ang in the 70's: for the first time, attention was not attributed only to media production but also to media reception. "Rather than consumers, audiences were accorded recognition as active producers of meaning."⁴ Marshall McLuhan takes one more step to accord importance on the power of the medium itself⁵. Anthropology was encouraged to open its horizons towards media through the work of Palo Alto, Edward Hall, Dell Hymes, Erwing Goffman, Victor Turner, Richard Schechner. More recently, the work of Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan was of great importance, introducing to the study of media the "Media Events"⁶. The Media Anthropology is now days represented in the States by a team of Anthropologists that have very recently (2002) edited two books using for the first time the term of the discipline on their titles: "The Anthropology of Media" and "Media Worlds, Anthropology on new terrain"⁷. For the European continent, the only edition entitled in French "Pour une Anthropologie des Médias" appeared in 2003 by the Roumanian anthropologist Mihai Coman⁸. In his work, he insists on the relation of myth and rite⁹ with media, and examines the mythology and the symbolic role of media today, criticising the American approach, above mentioned, to be restricting Media Anthropology to the study of "us" and "others" and to an ethnographic fieldwork of reception¹⁰.

Our thesis on this paper, even though brief and fragmentary, is registered on the field of this recent discipline that brings together Anthropology and Media. Our approach will treat the depiction of the community's mentality¹¹, Greece in our case, in its proper media. We believe that Greek television is structured according to Greek mentality's particularity¹². We

⁴ In: Askew Kelly, Wilk Richard, *The Anthropology of Media*, London, 2002, Blakwell, page 5.

⁵ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 1964, Mentor Book, and
The Medium is the Message, 1967, Bantam books.

⁶ Daniel Dayan, Katz Elihu, *Media Events*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992.

⁷ Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, Brian Larking, *Media Worlds, Anthropology on new terrain*, University of California Press, 2002. For the: *The Anthropology of Media*, see: note 4, see also a PhD dissertation entitled: *Mass Media Anthropology*, by Francisco Ossorio, 2001, Department of Anthropology at University of Chile.

⁸ See note 3 for the Mihai Coman's book. We also mention the recent work of Stéphane Breton, anthropologist and visual anthropologist: *Télévision*, Ed. Grasset, 2005. It's a series of articles first published in the magazine *Esprit* in 2003.

⁹ For an approach to rites and media, and media rites, see also: Kondylidou Areti, *La télévision dans les Rituels Funèbres Grecs*, (to be published), participation on the conference: *Malemort, Deuil et revenants dans les Balkans et dans le reste de l'Europe*, XVIIIème Atelier du Réseau Fer-Eurethno, du Conseil de l'Europe, 10-12 Septembre 2004, University of Cyril and Methode, Veliko Tirnovo, Bulgaria.

¹⁰ See, the article at the magazine: *L'Homme, Revue Française d'Anthropologie*, n° 167-168, 2003, p. 350-352: Kelly Askew, Richard Wilk eds, *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader*, By Mihai Coman.

¹¹ For the role of community in Modern Greece, see the work of Michael Herzfeld.

¹² Another approach of an "Anthropology of a report" (Anthropologie d'un reportage) through the study of body language in TV images and its relation to Greek mores: Kondylidou Areti, *Images des corps en douleur: le cas*

will have the opportunity to abort only one aspect: the importance of individuality and the disbelief towards anonymity that characterises Greeks and their television.

For the purpose of our PhD, we have recorded one week's evening News on four different channels (end of November to beginning of December 2004¹³), we have analysed the way all four channels structure their News and the various (and often similar) techniques used to gain market share ("eyeballs"). This comparative method aims to examine how each channel, one public (NET) and three private ones (MEGA, ALPHA, ALTER) present the same topics: their priorities, their exclusivities, their similarities and differences. However, our specific interest is focused mainly on social issues and the way they reflect Modern Greek mentality. On this paper we will not be interested on the agenda setting of News and its priorities, we will not examine the content of News and its significance for the particular case of Greece, but we will take a look on the role of non-anonymous personality in Greek TV News.

Greek Television: an "eponymous" TV

The English language, like all languages derived from Latin, contains many words of Greek origin, but often the meaning does not coincide with the meaning of the Greek word today: a case in point is the word "eponymous", which in English means¹⁴ "being the character after whom the stated book, play, etc. is named: *Hamlet is the eponymous hero of Shakespeare's play Hamlet.*" Eponymous in Greek means the opposite of anonymous therefore we choose to use it in that sense for the purpose of this paper.

What do we mean by "eponymous television"? Why would Greek TV be any different from others? And what is the exact meaning of the opposite of anonymity in terms of television?

We will study the phenomenon in three different media functions on Greek TV News.

d'un reportage à la télévision grecque, Journal for Studies in Ethnology and Anthropology 2003, p. 323-333, Ed. Aius, Craiova, Roumania.

¹³ In fact, we have recordings that start on the 29th of November 2004 and finish on the 9th of December 2004, but not in all four channels. Those recordings wouldn't be possible without the help of friends in Greece therefore some lacks in the corpus are quite understandable.

¹⁴ According to: Longman, Dictionary of Contemporary English, Longman Group UK Limited 1987 (Second Edition).

1. *Deus Ex Machina*

By watching the evening News recorded for our research, we have realised that on all four channels there is an obvious tendency to criticize the *res publica*, the bureaucracy, the function of public service (concerning taxes, health care, public transport...) All the mistakes or mistreatments of the law are exposed in a way that dramatically victimizes citizens. But what is peculiar is the resolution of the problem: in a miraculous way, as soon as a certain case is broadcasted on the evening News, just like a “*Deus ex machina*” a minister appears “live” to solve it. The journalist, cast in the role of lawyer, rehearses the charges against the responsible authority, whose representative has already been contacted, has agreed to appear in public and to take charge of the case. This method is quite effective since Greeks lately call upon journalists to challenge governmental rigidity in the flexible and effective TV way¹⁵. As a result, the reliability of the state has been undermined, the government, as an organised ensemble does not inspire confidence; on the contrary, trust is channeled to “men of power”, to individuals instead of action groups. The governmental team is put out of order, the functional mechanisms of authorities and laws are cancelled and journalists, hand-in-hand with politicians, non-anonymous, therefore “eponymous” people take power in their own hands. The power of “eponymity”, if we can be allowed to invent the term!

A case of that kind was the one that MEGA channel screened on the 30th of November 2004: a young disabled boy whose financial aid from the government had stopped. The story was also treated by the morning show of the channel, by the journalist N. Kakaounakis. As a result, on the 1st of December 2004, that is 24hours later, during the evening News of MEGA channel, we learn that the boy’s problem has been taken care of and resolved. On the next day, another case has been miraculously resolved by MEGA channel: N. Kakaounakis in cooperation with the minister of Interior, N. Panagiwtopoulos (ex-journalist), manage to find a solution for a family of 8 children who owes an important amount of money to the public service.

Greek people do not trust the anonymity of state procedures therefore they prefer to have someone they know take over their case, someone who has already been recommended by someone else...and so on. This is no news to Greek society; on the contrary it is quite

¹⁵ See the case of a disabled person that called MEGA channel, in order to be filmed having difficulties to circulate on the streets of Athens, MEGA channel, 4/12/04, it was the report for “MEGA THEMA (SUBJETC)” topic of the day. For this topic, which is quite new, small written announces are aired during the evening News asking people to call a number so that MEGA channel’s journalists’ will investigate and solve their problems.

characteristic of small societies, where the sense of community is still strong¹⁶. There is a saying in Greek that claims that “any stone you raise, there’s an acquaintance below it”, in order to show the small size of the country and the strong “eponymous” relationship between people. It is quite obvious that TV News is based on the same pattern or at least functions akin to this. Greek people, even though they accuse Greek governments, have a personalised point of view of politicians as individuals, especially if they take measures on a case that concerns them¹⁷.

2. Journalists-Judges

We couldn’t help but realise that this tendency of personifying the News is also depicted on the journalists’ attitude. Anchors often conclude information by their own opinion on the subject. Sometimes their comments concern ethics or morality, or they make proposals as to solutions or even make judgements distinguishing right from wrong¹⁸. The anchor, whose personality is tied closely to the presentation of each channel’s evening News, is therefore not only presenting but interpreting the news and more than that he/she is making judgements¹⁹. But what are the parameters behind these judgements? The journalist always takes the side of what is supposed to be the viewers’ public opinion. He/she speaks the viewers’ language, in contrast to the politicians’ formal language and owes the TV audience an “easily digestible” version of things. That way the distance between people from both sides of the screen, viewers and journalists is limited and the audience is easily identified on the anchor’s discourse.

The public appreciates the journalist’s personal indication, since he will consider the fact that “Hatzinikolaou said that” or “it was aired on Evangelatos’ News”. N. Hatzinikolaou,

¹⁶ The feeling of belonging in Greek people is largely associated with the region of origin, the “particular country”, (ιδιαιτερη πατρίδα) as Greeks call the town or village of their origin. The strong feeling of the local belonging has always been characteristic of the Greek identity and created powerful local communities. Often the feeling of local belonging exceeds the feeling of national identity. Therefore, relationships in the interior of a small community are always “eponymous”, reinforced sometimes by family bonds.

¹⁷ See, Michael Herzfeld describing all Mediterranean rural people’s “amoral familism”: “to put personal and family interests over general moral considerations” in: *Anthropology through the Looking-Glass, critical Ethnography in the margins of Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 35.

¹⁸ It is what François Jost calls “the evaluation of the event by the anchor”, see: *Introduction à l’analyse de la télévision*, Ed. Ellipses, 1999, p. 82, and his/her capacity to “communicate the suitable feeling for an information”, p.83: 3a, “Identification and Intimacy”.

¹⁹ On that occasion, we mention a new TV show on ALPHA channel called « Differences », in the sense of disagreements. It is broadcasted from Monday to Friday at 18.45 and presented by Eliza Vozemberg. She is a lawyer, now playing the journalist as well as the judge to virtual processes that aim to resolve citizens’ problems. We mention the similar shows on the French channel TF1 by Julien Courbet, “Doubtless” and “The 7 capital sins”, who denounces and resolves with the help of lawyers the problems of citizens that prefer TV from courtrooms.

ALPHA channel's anchor, on the 1st of December 2004, during a discussion on the air with his colleagues who appear on “windows²⁰”, is commenting on the situation of politics at the time by the following: “Why do I believe that this situation arranges G. Papandreou?” On the same day, N. Evangelatos, the anchor of ALTER, commented on T. Erdogan's winning award for being the European of the year: “With everything that T.Erdogan is up to, calling him the European of the year might be doubtful!” On the 2nd of December 2004, on MEGA channel, the anchor Mara Zaharea, makes her own comments concerning two cases where citizens denounced the malfunction of the emergency numbers of hospitals: “Yesterday Ladies and Gentlemen, in Katerini someone lost his mother because none was answering the hospital's number, today in Athens there was none to answer the emergency number of EKAV and a 5 year old boy was lost. It is certain that the Ministry of Health has to see what's really going on with this matter.” On the next day, she gives us her point of view concerning the screening of the film about Alexander the Great, that provoked controversies at the time: “By the way, the fact that this film is discussed so much, one thing is certain: the profit is on the producers!”

We are no longer at the stage of “I saw it on TV” therefore it's true²¹! TV is quite credible of itself, but Greek TV needs “eponimity”! The criterion of plausibility and transparency is not as much the medium, that Greeks often accuse and criticize just like they do for their government, but the personality of the individual. To paraphrase M. McLuhan's idea who believed that “the medium is the message” we believe that in this case the “individual is the message”²². It goes without saying that for the image of a “TV persona”, a term familiar to Greek audiences lately, can evolve on both ways: the same journalist might be synonymous to seriousness for some and to populism for others.

3. “Windows”

Last but not least, another way for “eponimity” to prove its importance on TV News, is the existence of the famous “windows” that appear on the screen in order to allow someone's intervention who is not on the same studio at that time. Far from being a Greek media invention, it is widely used, often abused, by all Greek channels during the News. It is used for interviewing either politicians, or specialists on the topic concerned, or even for the

²⁰ We will refer later on this paper on the role of “windows” in Greek TV News.

²¹ See, in Greek, the book of Maro Douka, *Karre Fix*, 1976, where an old woman, Marianthi, is amazed by the miracle of TV, and accuses her daughter of consuming a bad coffee, since it does not pass on TV: “Απόδειξη, δεν τον δείχνει η τηλεόραση, ποιός τρελός θα έπινε αυτό...”

²² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1964, chapter 1.

journalists of the same channel that are called upon to give their personal vision of current events. Everyone looks at his camera and all of them face the viewer. The windows vary from one or two, to as many as six at a time. Is it the joy of being in crowd that McLuhan describes? Is it about the significance of numbers²³? Sometimes, the number of speakers called to testify exceeds the number of windows appearing on the screen therefore speakers are presented alternatively.

We wonder though, especially in cases where journalists-colleagues working on the same channel appear to discuss “on the air”, what can possibly be the reason for this apparently pluralistic dialogue. The division of duties and the distribution of roles for the preparation of the evening news are only natural. But isn’t the anchor’s role to be the representative of the channel’s News? His/her colleagues are presented to be the specialists on certain issues, but doesn’t the anchor know exactly what his colleagues-journalists are supposed to say²⁴? Isn’t it all well prepared in advance? Therefore, what need does the presence of other journalists meet? First of all, it creates the feeling of being informed by one specialist for each topic. At the same time journalists and viewers are accomplices to an apparent democratic procedure of plurality where freedom of speech and opinion are respected and even demanded. The presence of this “crowded” screen contributes to a feeling of diversity of opinions, which is absolutely erroneous.

Let’s see the use of “windows” in all four channels on the same day, on the 1st of December 2004. ALPHA channel is the one that uses the most this technique: N.Hatzinikolaou discussed with his colleagues through “windows” 11 times during the evening News. We should mention the fact that in ALPHA channel every journalist’s name is written at the bottom of the “windows”²⁵. MEGA channel is also using this method, less though; on the same day, we saw M. Zaxarea 5 times on “windows”, which did not include only journalists of the channel but also men of politics. Two more times, we saw fragments of Kakaounakis’s morning show, on “windows”, and two more times we saw another method

²³ See note 3, the chapter 11 about « Numbers »: “In theatre, ball, stadium or in church, the individual is happy by the presence of others. The pleasure of being in crowd is a feeling of joy that results from the multiplication of numbers, a fact that used to seem suspicious for a long time to the most educated members of the occidental society” (page 132, on the French translation).

²⁴ At that point we can remind the idea of Stéphane Breton who believes that on TV, “we watch the speech” rather than hear it, we watch it because the image on its own doesn’t mean a lot on TV without the speech: in *Esprit*, January 2003, “On parle à la télé”, p.218.

²⁵ We can consider that a transfer of the written press, where every journalist signs his article. For the transfers of the written press to television, see: Jost, Introduction à l’analyse de la télévision, p. 78: “les titres ressemble a lot at their “cousins” of the written press...” and Jost Fr. La télévision au quotidien: entre réalité et fiction, Ed. De Boeck Université, Bruxelles, Ina, Paris, 2003, p. 73 : « before being a human of images, the journalist claims to be believed on his saying, the images come just to reinforce his/her sayings.”

being used, the “screen into the screen”, where the report is introduced to the studio through a screen that the anchor is watching. Not all journalists’ names are mentioned. NET channel used 5 “windows” on that day without mentioning the journalists’ names either. NET is also using the method “screen into the screen”. ALTER is using “windows” mostly in one part of its evening News: “the voice of the citizen²⁶”. On that day, “windows” are used 3 times. Just like MEGA channel, on ALTER, journalists’ names are used only in case of four “windows” or more, where there is a debate on an important subject. ALPHA channel is proved to be the most “eponymous” of all four. Many journalists’ are presented every day and everyone’s name is always not only mentioned but also written. Equally, it is the only channel that reminds the anchor’s name at the beginning of the evening News.

T.V. audiences often comment upon the choice of people being regularly called by the same channel to give their opinion. Each channel has its own group of “eponymous” people always available to appear on screen. Isn’t this attitude responding to this same need for “eponimity”? As much for the journalists as for the viewers. Journalists want to become “eponymous” therefore they have to stand for an opinion. Spectators expect this of them, since they are “eponymous”, they should always stand up for that same opinion. The public knows in advance the speaker’s opinion and his discourse. “Let’s see what Kakaounakis has to say”. T.V. audiences often do not care so much for what someone has to say but are interested in seeing who will be called upon to express his/her point of view. For viewers “eponymous” people carry their opinions along with their image and the public doesn’t like surprises.

Epilogue

Greek TV News is therefore “eponymous” News²⁷! The fact that even News is passed through a personified filter is relevant to the usual familiarisation of Greeks to society’s institutions. Jill Dubish refers to it on her study of Greek behaviour inside churches²⁸. She

²⁶ ALTER is separating the evening News in three parts: the “First subject” that starts at 18.45, at 19.00 the “Main News” to be followed by “The voice of the citizen” till 21.00 o’ clock.

²⁷ We would like to mention that in Greek the word “eponymous” is also related to “eponymo” which is the family name. Therefore, we consider that Greek TV News have first name and last name. This expression is familiar to Greeks by an advertisement about the chocolate “Lila Pause”, at the end of which the famous Harry Klynn, Greek comedian used to say: “σοκολάτα με ονοματεπώνυμο!” We also remind that the same comedian was one of the first to criticise Greek TV on 1978, on his satiric program “Χάρυ Κλυνν...για δέσιμο” with his song « Τελεβιζιόν ».

²⁸ Jill Dubish, *In a different place: pilgrimage, gender and politics at a Greek island shrine*, Princeton University Press, 1995, (see, page 96-97 in the Greek translation).

believes that Greek religious feeling is very strongly tied to images, and that Greeks are very much interested in public images, in the feeling of community and even inside a church they feel “completely at home” since they consider church as “familiar”. We tend to believe that Greek “eponymous” television is as familiar a place for Greeks as the church in their neighbourhood or their preferred coffee house.

The importance of anchor’s personality becomes evident by the fact that spectators follow their favourite journalists whenever they change channel. Just like the carrier of footballers, journalists often change “teams”. In contrast to football fans, TV viewers don’t believe in the “team-channel” but on the “footballer-journalist”. The Greek audience didn’t really watch the news of MEGA channel for so many years they watched the News of Hatzinikolaou. That’s why they continue to watch *his* News on ALPHA channel, even though there certainly is a difference in the agenda setting of news he used to present in the past. Evangelatos’ fans may have associated him with ALTER but surely they will “follow” him to his new TV shelter²⁹.

The personalised relationship that Greek spectators have with the TV News’ anchors, is marvellously depicted on a very interesting short-film documentary by Eva Stefani called “The Box³⁰”. The film shows an old lady and her everyday relationship with the anchor Hatzinikolaou. The old woman impatient for evening News to start everyday, is having conversation with “her Nikos”; she is touching the screen, talking to him during the News, asking him questions. She has a personal relation with the journalist.

Greek people feel the need of belonging to a “team”, to a community and this is no different for the case of their TV. Greek TV resembles Greek people. Greeks used to spend a lot of time discussing loudly about politics as a hobby, in the coffee house of their neighbourhood; the “kafeneion” is largely replaced, especially for older people, by the “kafeneion” of “windows” on their screen. The use of a technological medium, common to the whole world, is characterised by the specificity of his user. In times of globalisation, we realise that the apparent uniformity is superficial. The particular characteristics of communities persist to find their way to be expressed through new mediums, even through television.

²⁹ This journalist’s wife who is also a very famous TV persona, informs spectators through her show, that deals with famous Greek personalities’ private lives, if her husband has decided yet or not in which channel he will continue! Are the spectators asking the question, or is the journalists’ attitude that creates the suspense?

³⁰ The film received the price of the best short film on The Festival « Cinéma du Réel 2005 » that takes place every year in Paris, on the Pompidou Centre: “The box” (To Kovti), 11’, Greece, 2004, prod. Eva Stefani.

This is what obliges Anthropologists today to renew their tools of study and their fields of research, to take advantage of the interdisciplinary “*air du temps*”; to take a look at television as a not sufficient but important source of information. A simple confirmation of the conclusions on the field through television is not our intention. Through Media Anthropology we intend to observe the interaction between Greek society and Greek media.

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