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Pandemic Television

Television Industries in the Midst of COVID-19

The Covid pandemic is probably one of the events that most of us would like to forget, or at least not revisit. Although it has been largely framed by the media as an epidemiological problem and a health threat, from the point of view of the media industries, and the culture as a whole, it is a very unique and, in its own novel way, fascinating situation. Therefore, this special issue of *Illuminace* is dedicated to television, which was one of the few media in the period in question to experience a rise in viewership, a growth in public trust in many parts of the world and, as a result of unexpected socio-economic factors, was also forced to transform the industrial strategies for the production and distribution of television content. And because television cannot be separated from its socio-cultural context and from its audiences, there have been changes in viewing practices and programme preferences. It is not possible to say at this point how permanent these changes will be. However, we know from research and analysis of media landscapes already underway that changes are indeed taking place to a greater or lesser extent, and that the probability of linear and non-linear television returning to pre-pandemic strategies is becoming less and less likely.

At the same time, there is a natural need in society to start again, better, without the pandemic constraints of everyday life. This tendency is doubly true in the field of live culture, which has been looking for alternative ways of existing during 2020–2022. Among other things, for example, by hybridizing with television, which has helped many cultural projects to bridge the multiple lockdowns and limitations of public life. The impression is therefore that we should turn our attention to those areas of culture that could not be realised during the pandemic in the forms to which we were accustomed. This issue therefore represents a targeted effort to record the processes affecting a medium that has seemingly not suffered particularly, although it has been affected by COVID-19 in a major way. In doing so, we deliberately present examples of local strategies of national television cop-

ing with a global event. These case studies and analyses of television broadcasting, its production and distribution, are firmly anchored in a specific temporal-geographical framework, but they nevertheless reveal how flexible television as a medium can be, and how crucial its capacity to adapt is for engaging with television audiences.

News themes and framing of the COVID are explored in *Framing Pandemic News. Empirical Research on COVID-19 Representation in the Italian TV News* by Andrea Miconi, Simona Pezzano and Elisabetta Risi. In addition to focusing on the framing and content of news coverage, they also note the socio-political context of the course of the covid pandemic in Italy, one of the most affected countries in Europe at the time. Fact-making and fictional programmes are the focus of the Spanish-Israeli comparative study *#QuedateEnCasa: How Did the Argentine and Spanish TV Industries React to the Outbreak of the COVID Pandemic in 2020?* by Concepción Cascajos Virina and Pablo Mendez Shiff. Both authors discuss the similarities and differences between the Argentine and Spanish television industries, which, despite similar cultural aspects, approached the representation of the pandemic in different ways. Tatiana Hidalgo-Marí and Patricia Sanchez also explore the representation of covid-19 in Spanish fictional TV production. In an article entitled *Spanish TV Fiction in Times of Pandemic: Nuclear and Transversal Stories about COVID-19*, she discusses in detail the thematic-content structure of Spanish series thematizing the pandemic and their relation to ongoing events. Florian Krauß's latest contribution also focuses on content trends and production-distribution aspects. In a case study of the German series *Drinnen*, he presents the adaptation mechanisms of the German television and film industry in the early days of the pandemic. The paper *Fictionalizing the COVID-19 Pandemic "Instantly": A Case Study of the German Comedy Drama Drinnen — Im Internet sind alle gleich* demonstrates the necessity of media adaptability in times of societal crisis and the ingenuity with which audiovisual professionals can solve seemingly intractable situations.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to be over, but its impact on the cultural and creative industries is immeasurable. Naturally, it also affects television, and it would be a shame to ignore it. That is why we also consider it necessary to note and remind ourselves of the ways in which the media relate to our everyday reality in times of crisis, how they represent it and how they communicate these circumstances to us.