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II. "Direct Broadcasting Satellites the debate in Switzerland"

by Bernice Timm Dörig

Vorwort

Frau Bernice Timm Dörig, geboren als US-Bürgerin, durch Heirat gewordene Schweizerin, schrieb unter Leitung von Dr. Roger Kahle, University St. Louis, Missouri, USA, ihre *MA-Thesis in Media Communications*. Diese These befasst sich besonders mit dem *Direkten Satelliten-Rundfunk und der Diskussion darüber in der Schweiz*. Die Autorin hat für unser Bulletin eine Zusammenfassung ihrer Untersuchung und deren Resultate in ihrer Muttersprache geschrieben. Wir hoffen, dass unsere Leser sich dafür interessieren werden, wie eine frühere Wirtschafts-Journalistin (bei "Fortune") und Neu-Schweizerin die Diskussion um das TEL-SAT Projekt und die Medien-Gesamtkonzeption beurteilt.

Florian H. Fleck

How Switzerland Is Evaluating the New Television Technology:

The Debate Concerning Direct Broadcast Satellites and the Formulation of an Encompassing Media Concept as Indicators *

The impact of technological advances, the "new electronic media," in communications is only beginning to be felt, yet alone analyzed. Switzerland itself is an ideal study subject for the field of technological television developments since it is a small, strongly democratic, multilingual, and multi-cultural nation with a high per capita income and a highly developed technology. The paper aims to present and analyze how Switzerland is attempting to deal with the implications of technological developments in communication before the innovations are simply in place. While the discussion of television as it exists and is viewed today in Switzerland is a necessary departure point, its current form is no longer the complete picture. The key to discovering how Switzerland and its culture is or will be affected by television in the future lies in the philosophical debate currently occurring on the place of the "new electronic media." In this thesis, the

* This is the title of a master of arts thesis in Media Communications, which was submitted to Webster College (University), St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A. (Geneva, Switzerland branch), done under the direction of Dr. Roger Kahle. The research for the study was completed by mid-June 1982.

electronic medium most discussed is direct broadcast satellite television, but the field of new technologies includes such other developments as expanded cable TV including two-way systems, videotext, videodiscs, and home computer setups.

It should be noted that what are often referred to as the "new communications" are, perhaps, not really new. What is new is the technology that allows a change in delivery systems or combinations of equipment. The implications are great because the technological know-how has developed faster than a clear picture of how each society or society in general will employ the techniques. John Wicklein expresses the situation and what must be done about it quite clearly in his *Electronic Nightmare*:

The point is that the technology of the new communications is not all that complicated. We can understand both the technology and its implications, and we can make informed and sensible decisions about how it should be used.

In a field that is broad and changing rapidly, we may not be able to capture each piece of the new technology and fit it neatly into a Master Plan. But if we keep our eyes on the communications *services* the electronic developments can provide – regardless of whether they are provided by the Mark IV Fiber Communications laser or the Mark VIII Light-Emitting Diode – it *is* possible to do some Master Planning.¹

Switzerland is in a period of concentrated and widespread debate and discussion concerning just this subject. What type of an electronic media – direct broadcast satellite system – should this country have and to serve what needs? Is it possible or desirable to have an encompassing media strategy for the nation? By following these debates which have mainly involved the proposal of the company TEL-SAT to provide direct broadcasting satellite television programs and the work of the commission requested by the Swiss government to prepare a comprehensive media concept (Kopp Commission), one can begin to formulate an idea of how Switzerland has been affected by television in the past and how it hopes to use television in the future. The discussions are far from over but the contents of them – the oppositions, interplay and arguments themselves – tell much about Swiss society and its relation with the electronic media.

Plan of Research

Because the field of new communications technology and its application is relatively young and because this subject was researched in a foreign (to the author) culture situation, it was recognized that extensive research in background material such as Swiss culture and politics, satellite broadcasting history, and international legal conditions was required. Since the subject matter itself is diverse and touches on many fields, this background material is considered an essential part of the finished paper. With this solid base of understanding available both to the author and to the eventual reader, the two specific examples of the TEL-SAT debate and Kopp Commission report could be discussed intelligently. According to the classifications made by Claire Selltiz, Lawrence S. Wrightsman, and Stuart W. Cook in *Research Methods in Social Relations*, this report is a "formulative or exploratory study," the purpose of which is "to gain familiarity with a phenomenon or to achieve new insights into it, often in order to formulate a more precise research problem or to develop hypotheses."²

The two principal tools chosen for investigating this topic were documentary analysis and depth interviews. Given the early stage of the topic and its rapid and changing developments, it was essential to gather as much current information as possible. Emphasis was placed on analysis of reports: those from the government, international bodies, the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, interest groups, and from TEL-SAT and the Kopp Commission itself. While historical reference works and books were invaluable in assembling much of the background information and giving philosophical interpretation, since the emphasis of the paper is on Switzerland's current interaction with the television technology, recent information from newspapers, magazines, television and radio program discussions was also sought.

Certain peculiarities regarding the practice of documentary analysis in a foreign country should be mentioned (The author is an American citizen by birth, a Swiss citizen through marriage). The first need is to discover where any source material can be found and then how it is possible to obtain what is desired. Simple logistics can be formidable. Secondly, especially since the subject matter for this topic is in the process of formulation, the chances that research materials needed have been translated into English is slight. Therefore the majority of the immediate documentation exists only in the French or the German language. In dealing with such material, especially when philosophical ideas are being presented such as in the Kopp Commission report, the author attempted to translate with care to capture the nuances present as well as the literal meaning.

The technique of the personal interview was employed because of the developmental nature of the topic and the desire to obtain current feelings, reactions, and information from some of the major participants who are either helping formulate Swiss policy or who have a large stake in its evolution. Two separate types of interviews were foreseen: in-depth discussions with principals, such as a representative of TEL-SAT or the Department of Transportation, Communication and Energy, and shorter interviews based on a more standardized questionnaire used with selected groups who had been asked by the Swiss Federal Council to respond to the TEL-SAT concession request. Interviews were done in English when possible, in French sometimes and in German through interpreter's assistance.

The in-depth interviews proceeded as planned. The order of the interviews was more important than first anticipated, as material obtained from one often led to additional questions for the next. In each case, interview questions were composed for the specific interview, considering the nature of the participant's role in the topic: questions posed to a representative of the Department of Transportation, Communication and Energy had a different emphasis than those posed to someone at the International Telecommunication Union, though subject areas often crossed. Specific clarifications and updating of data were also covered, especially when the author already possessed rather full documentation of a more philosophical nature. In all cases flexibility had to be maintained based on the responses given to the first questions posed.

The shorter interviews centered on a more standard questionnaire dealing specifically with the TEL-SAT request did not proceed precisely as planned. The questions were prepared for use before and in-depth interview took place at the Department of Transportation, Communication and Energy. During this interview the author learned the full details of the process of consultation undertaken by that department concerning the TEL-SAT proposal. The procedure is discussed in one thesis chapter. Its importance for the methodology is that the request for opinions from the various interest groups included a questionnaire which covered quite sufficiently the type of information sought in the questionnaire written by the author. Moreover, since the various interest groups had responded to the government formally about the TEL-SAT request, they preferred to have that position be representative of their views. Therefore, the author's questionnaire was used much more selectively and responses to the government's consultation process became the basic source material. It must be emphasized here that as the responses to the government have not been officially published, the government did not release any of them to the author. However, through direct contact with some of the

interest groups and through other sources, a representative sample of replies was obtained for study.

An exploration of a subject in its formulative stages has no obvious end. During the researching there were indications that one or another decision was to be made or a report issued, but delays often occurred. Since the research was more concerned with the process of what Switzerland is doing and how it sees this new technology taking a place in the country's media, a definitive decision, for example, on the TEL-SAT project, was not required. However, with the issuance of the Kopp report in spring 1982, a whole new process began in Switzerland. A second phase of debate about the Kopp proposals and the actions required or desired is evolving slowly and deliberately. Government action on the TEL-SAT application may or may not be slowed by this debate. It seemed appropriate to present in June 1982 the findings of, perhaps, the first stage of Switzerland's confrontation with the new broadcasting technology and its place as part of a formal media concept. The thesis ends with the mention of additional research possibilities, some growing very definitely out of the state of flux of the topic.

Summary

As briefly indicated before, the study first presents an overview of Switzerland – its political structures, culture, current broadcast system, legal basis for broadcast regulation – as well as a summary of satellite technology and international legal accords and their application to Switzerland (Chapter I). The paper then concentrates on the debate and discussion which have evolved since the May 1980 application request of the private commercial company TEL-SAT to the Swiss Government for a concession granting the use of the Swiss satellite spaces to broadcast television programs directly to receivers (Chapter III). Chapter IV concerns the work of the *Commission d'experts pour une conception globale des media* (The Kopp Commission) as it relates mainly to the field of electronic media.

The research material seems to indicate that television in any of its developmental forms is seen as a tool to serve the people, not as something that should simply be a product to be consumed and to benefit the presenters. The opinions offered to the Federal Council by the interest groups – the cantons, political parties, union, business, church and consumer groups, media oriented organizations including the SBC – in the consultation of interests procedure dealing with TEL-SAT were varied and often opposing, but the concept of television providing a "service" was strong.

In commenting on the benefits and concerns related to a Swiss satellite project that Swiss groups have discussed, it must be remembered that some feel the detriments are so great that direct broadcast satellite television (DBS) should not be pursued. The majority, however, are more concerned that the form satellite broadcasting takes reflects the needs of Switzerland and its pluralistic society. There may be various ideas as to these needs, but the emphasis is on the electronic media serving the population. What is especially interesting is that groups for and against TEL-SAT both reflect a definite concern that Swiss culture with its diversity be maintained and strengthened; they fear too much commercialization and penetration of advertising influence even when they support it as the best method for developing DBS. Restraint coupled with supervision are perhaps the key thoughts regarding the new technology. Perhaps it is because the Swiss do value their "Swissness" that they have been able to maintain it and outside influences, such as foreign media penetration, have not unduly homogenized the culture. The comments of Christopher Hughes on this situation in his book *Switzerland* seem relevant:

... one must notice the countervailing phenomenon of what we may call cultural incapsulation: the citizens of Geneva, for example, like those of Zermatt, have an extraordinary ability to lead their own life-style as unaffected by the foreigners as if the intruders were ungainly birds, flapping, noisy, messy even, but irrelevant.³

Economic benefits could very likely be realized from a TEL-SAT project. The area around Basel is convinced of this, as are branches of the tourist industry and electronic industries, filmmakers, and those involved in associated activities. If the Swiss image could also be transmitted to others in a positive manner, this would be considered useful. Moreover, some groups welcome the existence of TEL-SAT because of its potential for breaking the radio and television monopoly as it currently exists. No one wants a second TEL-SAT monopoly created, however, which is why TEL-SAT has prudently lowered its channel request number.

The concern about who handles technical transmission of satellite broadcasts is very real. A strong feeling exists that programming and transmission should be kept separate. As the new electronic media are developing, the dividing line is often indistinct. For example, is originating data which the PTT then transmits a step into programming? Whether the mixed association with the PTT that TEL-SAT has proposed will allay these concerns is not yet certain.

The difficulty some groups have with the establishment of commercial private television control in contrast to a more public control revolves not only around the philosophical basis expressed in many of the position

papers but also around the almost uniformly held belief that commercial advertising oriented television leads to less quality and singularly mass audience appeals. Those who are worried would probably agree with Wicklein's comment about U.S. television, applying what he says to what would happen in Switzerland:

Actually, television gives the people what the commercial establishment *thinks they should have*, to condition them to consume the products, services, and ideas that will guarantee continued profits for their companies and perpetuation of the profit-making system.⁴

Evaluating the TEL-SAT proposal is further complicated by the contradictory situation in which TEL-SAT states it will bolster and foster Swiss culture and society and at the same time indicates the majority of its reception audience will be located outside Switzerland. When the original proposal was made, that figure was eighty percent; recent estimates run as high as ninety-five percent.⁵ Many Swiss find it difficult to view this project as resulting in *Swiss* satellite television. One might regard the project purely as a business venture, but then the decision would have to be made regarding correct use of the Swiss satellite "parking spaces." In discussing the needs programs should fulfill, especially how programs can help the integration of Swiss society that is often mentioned as desirable, both TEL-SAT and its opponents lack concrete examples. If any could be given, everyone might be able to discuss the effects of program types more realistically. The narrow-casting format recently put forward by TEL-SAT may offer benefits to Swiss society; in voicing their programming concerns, the consulted groups did not address themselves to this facet.

The proposal or, more precisely, the advent of DBS in Europe poses international questions not yet completely defined or solved. Some see this as a problem that should restrain Swiss satellite development, others as an obstacle to handle when it practically manifests itself. It is interesting that often groups who support TEL-SAT as a means to fight the "blanketing" of Switzerland by foreign programs do not see the contradiction in their unconcern that Switzerland's satellite offerings will have their major audiences located in other nations. TEL-SAT has often stressed being first, and supporters usually cite this as a definite benefit for Switzerland, but no group seems to have addressed the issue that being first does not mean other countries are going to terminate their plans for DBS systems.

Finally, the absence of a sound legal base in the form of a constitutional article followed by a law on radio and television and the lack of a complete Swiss media policy often were cited with concern. Sometimes it seems organizations were inclined to use the legal situation and (then) awaited

media concept report as convenient dodges to taking more definite positions. Nevertheless the concern is real and justified if one wants to make the technology work for the society.

The Kopp Commission in its report issued in spring 1982 offers direction for the broadcast media in various sections. The Government's mandate to the Commission did not request specific review of concession applications before the government, nor did TEL-SAT exist when the Commission itself was formed. The situation of satellite television was, therefore, discussed in the context of over-all media policy, but the specific TEL-SAT concession application was not singled out.

Nowhere in the main report does the Commission urge the quick development of direct satellite broadcasting. Earlier in its report, the Commission, as a type of academic exercise, structures two very different models which it feels could achieve the media policy objectives. One model is based on a managed and democratically controlled system, sometimes called "ecologic." The other is a system of free competition, called a pragmatic model. The Commission does not take a position on the two presentations but offers them as "instruments of orientation" presenting contrasting views on how to arrive at the same goal. The "ecologic" view believes the market place only causes concentration of interest groups and dependence on advertisers. Therefore careful government control is needed. A national independent media commission would distribute broadcasting concessions and the SBC would split into autonomous linguistic parts. Satellite television is rejected because such a "technical giant" is not needed by a country the size of Switzerland, and because the Swiss do not require this avenue for more program diversification. Advertising is basically opposed, though if absolutely necessary for financial reasons should be limited to supplying forty percent of finances.⁶ In the free competition system, the model assumes the market system works and should be extended to the electronic media. The SBC would remain as today but would not be too concerned about local programs. Other television and radio competition would exist with the government granting concessions for regional television and radio. Cantons could grant local broadcast concessions. These would have a minimum of regulations. In this model satellite television would be developed as quickly as possible; the PTT would remain in charge of transmission. Of the five satellite channels, the SBC could have one and the other four could be leased to private, mostly Swiss companies.⁷

As academic exercises, the models are interesting. It is doubtful that the Swiss system of compromise in decision-making would allow for either extreme. In a discussion before the report was released, Kopp Commission Chief of Staff Franz Zölch stressed that the Commission believed television served a clear and strong function in society. The

difference between television in the U.S.A. and in Switzerland would likely stay that way.⁸ Private television would have to have program obligations which would be difficult for a purely commercially motivated organization to fulfill.

This study summarizes the documents and the viewpoints of the Kopp Commission report. One of the major purposes of the report is to stimulate public discussion of the problem it discusses, and in the weeks following its issuance this goal does seem to be being reached. Widespread discussion of media direction in Switzerland is occurring. The ultimate influence of the Kopp Commission's report is difficult to quantify ; as a tool for ordering the decisions needed to control the expanding communications sector in Switzerland, it is most certainly valuable.

The one obvious result, then, of both the TEL-SAT concession application and the issuance of the Kopp media concept report has been the stimulation of media discussions. Consciousness of the developing fields in media technology has also been increasing through product displays and purchase encouragements. For example, the 1982 World Cup Soccer matches in Spain caused numerous descriptive advertisements for video recorder sets to appear in Switzerland. The Kopp Commission has pinpointed that one of the greatest needs in Swiss society today is to introduce sufficient education about the media in order that the populace can use media forms to advantage rather than be simply passive media consumers.

This need for a media education process in the complex and more informationally oriented society of the '80s has clearly emerged ; if the actual steps can be carried out to provide this education, its realization may be more important for Swiss society than any of the "practical" decisions now being debated. Throughout the TEL-SAT consultations and within the Kopp report itself there exists a tension between the potentials the new communications techniques might offer and what results they will really achieve and for whose benefit. An informed public who perhaps better understands how media function and how different types could be employed to reach specific goals is likely to "use" media more wisely and critically and not be manipulated by it. Wider education on media functioning should result in fuller participation in the formulation of media decisions.

TEL-SAT itself has not called for public education on the media, but from a practical standpoint, it has had to do a certain amount of "educating" about direct broadcast satellites in order to have its concession application understood. A number of groups responding to the consultation process mentioned a lack of competence in discussing the implications of the project. The Kopp report places the educational needs on two levels : better training for people who will be involved directly in media

production and increased knowledge for children and adults in Swiss society about media functioning. In its final section of recommendations to the Federal Council, two of the "measures to realize immediately" concern media education.

In all the discussions of why a country should have DBS and especially what purpose the satellite broadcasting should fulfill, an interesting, though not a new, idea has often been noted: a European satellite channel. Though not directly related to Switzerland's media development, it is a logical extension of the situation of border-crossing programs caused by overlapping "footprints." In this case, however, the satellite channel would be specifically designed to reach as large an area as possible in Europe and would be established with the consent and possible aid of the receiving countries. To a degree such a channel could be the logical extension of Eurovision, depending on who was running it, and the European Broadcasting Union in the summer of 1982 began running some tests on European programs.

In mid-1982 the idea was just that. It has support in various circles, especially within the academic community concerned with European studies. Professor Henri Schwamm of Geneva is one of its strong proponents. To revive and revitalize the European idea and present material without individual nationalistic bias, some outlet is necessary. A DBS channel could serve this purpose. He mentioned that in March 1982 the European Parliament adopted a resolution suggesting the creation of a European editorial board to feed a fifth channel.⁹

Technically, the easiest way to make a European channel happen would be for one or perhaps two countries to donate one of their allocated channels. Whether any would be willing to do so has not been investigated. Just as the idea of how or should DBS be used in individual countries is being debated, the concept of a European channel will face much questioning. Governments want a voice in what is presented to their populations, but in this case, too much individual national interference would eliminate the whole purpose of a European channel.

In what way the Swiss may become interested in a European broadcasting channel is as yet not clear. The decision to become involved, however, will not be made without internal discussion of the situation, a continuance of the media questioning currently underway. After following the decision making processes concerning TEL-SAT and the formulation of the Kopp Commission report, the author is tempted to wonder if consultation does not go to extremes. Then, however, the Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare comes to mind, and one must remember that, while slow and often plodding, the tortoise did win the race. Similarly Switzerland shows a valid concern about the effects of media, especially the developing electronic media, on its population. Understanding these

developments and directing them to serve agreed upon goals is the surest way for this small nation to retain its uniqueness, though the process itself is laborious.

Research Implications

The subject matter presented in this paper introduces a number of topics, many that are open-ended and present possibilities for additional research. Some of these topics develop naturally from the current status of particular communication questions in Switzerland ; others have occurred to the author during the research process as communication study areas useful to pursue. For purposes of organization, subjects for further research are here divided into three categories, though, of course, a particular topic might be alternatively classified depending on research emphasis. The three areas are as follows: effects research, legal research, and diffusion of innovations research.

Since this paper has found that the majority of those canvassed in Switzerland on television development are concerned about the effects of television, both program content and number of programs available, on Swiss society, a focused study on Swiss programming as it currently exists could reveal important information to be considered in program planning for the future. Specifically, the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation is supposed to serve the diversity of the nation. Does it accomplish this task, and if so, how?

A second possible topic in the effects area would not necessitate Swiss residence. Narrow-casting is being discussed as the answer to individualizing the mass television medium. Is this claim justified? A study of a particular community where narrow-casting is available from the standpoint of its effects on viewer use of television is needed. A possible related topic deals with the specific influence of advertising on program quality. A study of the situation developing in Italy, where more advertising is being seen by viewers in 1982 than was available in the '70s due to the introduction of private commercial outlets, could provide concrete data on programming trends when market oriented systems compete with not-for-profit channels. To succeed, such a study would have to specify very exactly criteria for judging program quality.

In effects research one of the desired goals can be to analyze the consequences of the messages sent by a medium. Certain groups in Switzerland seem to believe that local and regional radio and television can serve the population better from the standpoint of stimulating community involvement than can the mass media represented by national and mass satellite television broadcasts. Since local and regional radio and

television are going to be introduced into the country on a test basis, a study of a particular new Swiss station's impact on a local community should offer possible evidence concerning this basic concept that local-regional electronic media are "better." Does this type broadcasting indeed fulfill its supposed purpose of community involvement?

The developing field of satellite communications, especially direct television broadcasting, has caused a number of legal problems to surface. The major subjects revolve around the International Telecommunication Union's work assigning orbital spaces and the problems with border-crossing of direct satellite beamed programs, as introduced in Chapter I of the thesis. A study of several countries to see how each views the prospect of receiving direct satellite broadcasts from other countries, by choosing, perhaps, a developed industrialized nation, a developing nation, and an East bloc country is desirable to focus the growing intertwining of national and international communications policies. What international laws or policies are being advocated and for what national purposes? What could the end results be for "free flow of information"? UNESCO would be another logical site for beginning this research. The December 1982 UNESCO General Assembly endorsement of possible curbs on satellite television broadcasts coming from outside a nation's borders indicates the strong feelings this technology arouses and previews the coming international debate on this subject.¹⁰

Specifically in Switzerland, a study of the government's quest for a sound legal base for media decisions is necessary to explore the impact the legal base could have on media form and content. Alternatively, this study could focus on certain interest groups, such as unions or churches, to find why they want the legal base to be phrased in one way or another. How do they wish to have the legal base reflect the purpose they see the electronic media fulfilling?

Since the introduction of the new electronic media involves technical developments to such an extent, research in the area of diffusion of innovations is essential. From the material presented, it is evident that a certain distrust of technological developments in the electronic media field is present. Moreover, the Kopp Commission has singled out media education as the surest means for the population to use and benefit from the media and not simply be used by it. A project evaluating the methods chosen to educate the Swiss public and the results, both desired and obtained, is valuable to the understanding of the transfer of ideas. Since carrying out the Kopp Commission's education recommendations is in its formulative stage, this project would have to be of long-term duration.

Similarly once the Federal Council has decided who will use the Swiss satellite orbit positions and when, a study analysing the introduction of DBS into Switzerland by focusing on several villages is needed. What is

the typical attitude toward DBS before its introduction? How is this attitude being influenced and by whom? What is the reaction a year after DBS becomes available? Again, these would be long-term projects as it is unlikely a DBS system, Swiss or other European, will be in operation before 1986. In the interim, study could focus on the changes caused in Swiss society and the media by the elimination of the monopoly system for the electronic media, currently begun with the introduction of local and regional radio and television.

The suggestions in the three research categories are by no means all-inclusive, but point to what the author considers some areas which need further development. Since the subject matters interact and are often large in scope, individual research projects would probably achieve more specific results if severely limited in aim and range.

Footnotes – Bibliographic Sources

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⁶ *Conception globale des média*, Rapport de la Commission d'experts pour une conception globale des média. By Hans W. Kopp, Président. Bern: Département fédéral de justice et police, April 1982, *Tirage provisoire*, chap. 10, pp. 259–87 passim.

⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 10, pp. 288–306 passim.

⁸ Zölch, Franz A. Chief of Staff, «La Commission d'experts pour une conception globale des média,» Bern. Interview, 18 March 1982.

⁹ Schwamm, Henri. Professor, Institut universitaire d'études européennes, Geneva. Interview, 19 March 1982.

¹⁰ Pace, Eric. «UN General Assembly Endorses Curb on Satellite TV Broadcasts.» *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), 13 December 1982.

Einen Überblick über den Problembereich gibt unter anderem auch ein Beitrag des Redaktors, F. H. Fleck, zur Festschrift für Karl Bringmann: «*Satelliten-Rundfunk, ein neues Medium?*» In: «*Die Zeitung als Persönlichkeit*». Herausgegeben von K. Koszyk und V. Schulze. Düsseldorf, Droste-Verlag 1982, S. 353–364.