



Television culture

For a long time, the criticism of television has been part of the received ideas which make up the often narrow mental universe of intellectualism. The cliché of the cultural worthlessness of television has become so widespread, that we could quite rightly suspect that it was not completely innocent, particularly when intellectuals, who have railed against junk television so much, waste no time in hurrying along to any TV programme they have been invited to. As time goes by, the indignation of a profession, which it seemed television was taking something from, has calmed down a little. The facts end up imposing themselves on dogmatism. And whether we like it or not, television is a phenomenon which has played a central role in shaping the mindset of our societies.

Television imbues events with a social nature: what is shown on TV is what socially exists. Hence the desperate efforts of a number of citizens to have their moment of fame on television, in other words, their moment of social recognition. Some have even killed to achieve it.

For many citizens, television is the main—or only—source of information; in other words, a very powerful vehicle for socialisation. We could say that television generates a kind of cultural infantilism: as a result of the medium, children know about many things which previous generations only found out about when they grew up, but many remain at this stage throughout their lives. Before, however, they didn't even get to this level.

Television tends to trivialise everything: events and ideas. Events, because, even the most important only remain headline news for a few days to be immediately sidelined by another historic event. It doesn't hierarchise: sometimes, a small local event and an international conflict deserve the same television coverage, and this seems to occur with ideas—television grudgingly takes on board thorny subjects, television is very generous with the person appearing on the screen, provided that he or she doesn't try and hog the limelight or remains unaggressive.

Television contaminates the other fields of the production of social discourse. We only have to look at way the written press has evolved to see that all newspapers have been aware of the impact of audiovisual style.

Television is the creator of the symbolic. The "medium" in itself has been a symbol (the end of its era is probably just beginning; this is why we can stage exhibitions about it). A symbol of social integration, but also a symbol which has jumped across borders and, as a counterimage, has had a great deal to do with the process involving the loss of social consensus; in the countries of Eastern Europe, for instance, when the Berlin Wall was still standing. And it also produces a small social mythology.

Television fosters a culture of common sense in which almost everything loses colour. This is borne out by the wall of the most well-known presenters from around the world: they are all clone-like, the dominant image is that of the right-minded person who transmits confidence to societies who have comfort as their benchmark.

Television has substantially altered political behaviour. In the age of television, democracy has gradually changed from a representative system to one which sounds out opinion. The leader issues his messages to the citizenry and awaits their reply, through opinion polls, in order to modify his strategy and, if necessary, his position.



Television has had an impact on social habits. The loss of narrative ability is probably one of the most noticeable consequences of a family life in which the television has assumed the role of the main focus of everyday life.

Because of all these things, it could be said that there is a television culture; because of all these things, but also because of another: no matter to what extent the medium is the message, television remains an instrument through which major cultural contributions have been made. In order to make these contributions, it is necessary to master the language and have something to say. In spite of the restrictions of a television which remains in the hands of a few (political power and some sectors of economic power) some people have known how to turn it to their advantage.

TV World is about all these things: about the way in which television works on reality; of the staginess of everything which appears on television, even live programmes; of the surprise event as the revenge of reality upon the built-in reducing and simplifying inertia of television; and of the interplay of signals and references between television and other forms of expression of this era, particularly film and video.

There isn't a single way of making television, or a single way of viewing it. This is one of the conclusions which *TV World* seeks to highlight. Television's tendency to fake reality, to manipulate opinion, to blur conflict, to trivialise ideas and references, to demobilise societies, and, therefore, to facilitate the work of those in power, doesn't detract from the fact that large quantities of information circulate through television, and that television has made it possible to recognise the problems of countries which didn't previously exist, or that it has contributed to wresting the monopoly of the word from the hands of priests, religious people and the military. We only have to compare societies before and after television to see that, only from a melancholic point of view (and from a certain haughtiness which intellectualism finds it hard to shake off) can it be thought that life was better without television. I don't like Benidorm either, but thanks to Benidorm seaside holidays are no longer the privilege of the few. Something similar is happening with television. And, what is more, from time to time, we come across good programmes. Programmes we didn't even know existed.