WATCHING TELEVISION:

A CONSIDERATION OF SOME

POSITIVE PSYCHO-SOCIAL FACTORS

by

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ABSTRACT

Numerous research in recent years has indicated the pervasive influence of television. This thesis offers an alternative perspective on the relationship between viewer and television. The conciliatory view developed throughout the thesis surveys and examines some positive implications that television may bear on the social and psychological domains of the human personality.

The debate between the proponents of both popular and high art on the question of intellectual stimulation and advancement in leisure activities is assessed. The view of television that is suggested emphasizes the ritual dimension of human involvement in the television experience. Television's possibilities and capacities for provoking social verbal exchanges, for getting people together to watch significant events, for creating common bonds among members of a community are considered.

The psycho-social analysis provided elaborates on and evaluates the validity of the notion that television fosters social isolation, intellectual apathy and a taste for the ephemeral. Findings in psychology testify to the cathartic properties of television experience for various categories of viewers. Its contributions in terms of behaviour modelling, socialization and as a provider of fantasy, even escapist material, are examined.

Two analytical models are presented to emphasize the crucial but generally undervalued role played by the individual in decoding, interpreting and processing the meaning(s) embedded in television messages. (Instrumental to this view is the belief that the individual does not merely respond to exterior stimulation, but rather is an active interpreter of information, symbols and messages directed at him/her. In this sense, television's "effect" cannot be predicted from manifest content alone.

The thesis concludes by acknowledging the prospects offered by emerging television technology, and its potentials for social communication. The urgency of understanding the language of television necessitates the incorporation of "media literacy" classes to the academic curriculum. By instructing children, and adults as well, to be discriminative and selective with regards to television entertainment programs, and by stimulating the integration of valuable information presented via this medium, we can ensure the proper ordering and effective utilization of the multitude of messages to which we are all subjected.

DEDICATION

A mes parents,

Anita et Claude.

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PREFACE

For the past thirty years television has occupied an increasingly prominent place in western society. Correspondingly, many critical social scientists and communication analysts have looked at this technology and presented observations that are not flattering to the medium.

This thesis attempts to re-evaluate the viewer/television relationship in more positive terms. My interest in the matter grows out of a concern with the development of the personality, specifically the role of social and technological environments in the formation of one's cognition and behavior. As a student of communication, I had never really been fully satisfied with the widely publicized and often cited studies that disapproved strongly of television. Much was said about its effects on aggressive behavior, formation of values and attitudes, emphasis on material possessions and stereotyped sex roles. A good part of the blame leveled at television was, and still is, related to its tendency to mold the "natural reality" in exaggerated or distorted ways.

Studies along these lines, besides puzzling me, motivated a probe into their validity. For instance, even though I acknowledge the fact that television significantly affects people's perception of reality, I was not at all comfortable with the conclusion of many highly regarded studies. How could one single element be assigned so much responsibility? Although television occupies a prominent position in today's world, I

just could not assign every malaise of our society to the influence of television. Other factors had to be assessed.

It is with these considerations in mind that I develop my argument. I approach the medium as an expression of socialization. Television is regarded as <u>one</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> institutions that impart knowledge, information and entertainment to society. In this transaction, the viewer, far from being a passive receiver, manifests a degree of selectivity, discrimination and control in processing the material to which he/she is exposed, a point frequently discounted, in the myriad studies of television's negative impact.

Some brief comments on the orientation of the following chapters will help the reader further understand the scope and procedure of this study. Chapters one and two provide an historical and theoritical background on which I later base my arguments in defense of television. I reconstruct the technological evolution that fostered the emergence of television, and then explore the debate between the proponents of both high culture and popular culture.

The third and fourth chapters are, for me, the key segments of the thesis. It is here that I develop at length my conception of television as a cathartic element in the restoration of one's psycho-social well-being. I attempt to address the most forceful critiques of television by opposing them to my own findings that draw from the literature of psychology, sociology and communication research. In so doing, I wish to present

sufficient evidence to support my contention that it is doubtful that one can ever deduce all the effects ascribed to television from its content alone. The psychological and social characteristics of the viewer, often discounted in many recent studies, have to be considered instrumental variables in any study of human behavior. In addition, chapter 4 considers a number of noteworthy functions that television may fulfill for certain categories of viewers.

An examination of traditional models of analysis used to assess television's impact on viewers is presented in chapter 5. The marked comparison of intent between the early models of media analysis, and more recent ones, presents additional opportunities to regard television as a social institution, and treat it accordingly. Moreover, the argument will consider the possibility that television can be, in certain instances, a stronger model for imitative learning than real-life observations.

In the conclusion, I briefly summarize propositions that comment favorably on the viewer/television interaction. Recent technological developments in the industry further reinforce the fact that, far from being an exhausted medium, television is on the verge of becoming the ultimate source of information, entertainment and education. A personal professional concern with the latter issue, leads me to propose the incorporation of classes about critical analysis of mass media to the academic program of secondary schools.

There are several aspects regarding the method used throughout the text which should be stated at this point. First, because of the nature of the argument, I will offer numerous conclusions within the course of the text. These will not necessarily be repeated in the closing chapter. Also, I felt it was instructive to uncover how the various technical components of television, such as the transmission of sound and image over long distances, came about. It is hoped that this will reveal commonalities television shares with some of its forerunners, namely radio and film, and thus contribute to a better understanding of the historical/technological factors that made television so influential.

I also realize that I have repeatedly used pronouns solely of the masculine gender when signifying both sexes. I trust that such a use will not bear any discriminatory connotations, but will rather be seen in the context of more traditionally accepted terms like 'mankind' and 'man'.

Much of what follows, I am aware, will undoubtedly be controversial. Writing positively about television, at a time when several Inquiry Commissions express a strong reserve vis-a-vis the medium's consequences, is risky. Nevertheless, I have tried to collect enough, albeit varied, data to render plausible my basic assumptions. In defending television, I have also directed several counter-attacks at a source that represents the most ambitious synthesis of the negative effect hypothesis: Jerry Mander's frequently cited book, _Four Arguments_

For The Elimination of Television. In this sense, I could have very well titled my thesis "Four Arguments For The Defense of Television", as my senior supervisor once suggested, somewhat facetiously. If I did not, it is only because I do not feel Mander's misleading work merits such attention.

It is certainly not my intention to disprove all that has been said and written on television's effects. At best, I am offering what, I hope, is a fruitful re-consideration from a rather neglected perspective. In this sense, the central organizing theme will evolve around various arguments pertaining to the potential benefits found to be fundamental in a majority of people's viewing behavior.

I. Historical Considerations

> The manner in which human sense perception is organized,
> the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined
> not only by nature but by historical circumstances as
> well (Benjamin:1968)

Unlike many other significant inventions, television cannot

be associated with an individual or a group of closely related

developers, nor is it the result of concerted research into a

specific area. It represents the culmination of a long series of

technical achievements that reach as far back as the early

1800's. The growth of the constituting elements of television

can be seen as a result of the industrial revolution, an

occurence which prompted a migration toward major work centers.

The increasing interdependence of markets and emerging needs of

social communication played a crucial role in the development of

television technology.

A number of radical transformations in the entertainment

sphere were brought about by the industrial revolution. During

this period, entertainment forms of both middle and working

classes evolved away from the official channels of the church

and state, to a greater degree than ever before. The disposable

income of the emerging middle-class, coupled to a larger amount

of free time, altered the nature of the artist/creator's work.

The latter, who used to be confined to the requirements of the

church and state, saw a whole new market open up. The artist

became increasingly more interested in working for middle-class clients who, because of their number, requested far more productions than the two leading authorities of the time. The consistency of entertainment needed, along with attractive financial remunerations, were certainly determinant factors in the creative orientation of the artists. The emerging 'artistic products' concentrated on reflecting the positive characteristics of the in-group, the one for whom the performance was made, and moreover, underwent a fantastic proliferation both in terms of volume and of diversity of production.

Away from the sacred arts

Up until the middle of the 17th century, the social order in Western civilization was rather rigidly structured. Long established divisions of classes had a nation divided into "those of mattered" and "those who mattered not". The former -state and church- lived at the top of the social pyramid and had their arts, entertainment forms and leisure activities "tinged by the sacred" (Mendelsohn,1980:14). By contrast, the "others" with very little economic power at their disposal, were extremely limited in the frequency, duration, participation and extent of their pastime activities. Village-bound, the peasants developed a sparse, local and largely invisible culture that came to be known as folk-culture by interested social scientists.

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Even though the vernacular arts and entertainment forms had an aesthetic code that was distinct from their elitist counterparts, they nevertheless shared a major similarity . Both were manifestations of human pleasure-seeking behavior. For example, Mendelsohn notes that from the earliest antiquity "entertainment has functioned consistently to provide pleasurable reassurance to audiences by satisfying their deep-felt desires for distinctive reflections of their own lives"(Mendelsohn, 1980:15). This reflexive attribute of entertainment spectacles can be seen as a functionally operative way of expressing group solidarity, be it sacred or vernacular. At the same time, it serves an equally cardinal point, in that it acts as an agent of demarcation among the classes by exhibiting desirable features of the in-group , and conversely undesirable projections of the out-group.

Italian sociologists have investigated this social utility of leisure activity by examining its historical development. Pizzarno for instance, notes that since the industrial period, leisure can be treated as a source of ethical values that develop as a counter-system to those of the prevailing ruling forces. Alberoni also remarks that it was not uncommon in times "when orientations to traditional values (were) eroded by mobility and rapid rises in living standards, (that) these values (were) replaced by those directed towards emulation and imitation of the better-off" (Alberoni, 1967). But the crucial element in the Italian scholars's view is that this emulation,

this borrowing of values from the upper classes, was _not_ compatible with the borrower's group situation in the industrial society. On a sheer leisure level, the working-class needed to develop activities that would highlight values that it had created, appropriated and diffused to its national social class members.

Thus, the dynamics involved in entertainment activities suggest a need in the participants to be depicted, reconfirmed, as being on the same side as a group (Burns,1967:763). This "conjunctive" dimension of the process, to use Levi-Strauss's term, is believed to stimulate unity where no other means of achieving this commonality among members exists, such as in contemporary industrial society. Again, Mendelsohn provides a good illustration of this by contrasting the social functions of the English "ballad operas" to the "Grand operas" of 18th century Italy (1980). While the latter was seen as reinforcing the value system of a persecuted aristocracy, the English ballad was not only putting the common man on stage but was also making fun of elitist-minded Italian compositions.

Ascension of The Bourgeoisie

When the technology and the economy of the industrial era attracted peasants into major work centers, few people anticipated the cultural significance of this wide-scale migration. Now possessing structured free time and, above all, a disposable income with which they could obtain their own kind of

entertainment, a significant fraction of these former peasants became a new, fully participatory force in the social structure of Western Europe from the 17th century on. But as can be expected from any major social and/or technological innovation, there were some losers too. For an important number of those urban migrants, the move towards big industrial centers soon made them urban proletarians, living at the subsistence level and with very little disposable income. It is thus imperative to recognize that despite the considerable benefits that the industrial era was offering to the peasants, the idyll rapidly turned into a survival struggle for many of them.

Where traditionally there had basically been two social roles, the emerging bourgeoisie permitted the growth of a number of middle-class roles that audiences attending theatricals, wanted to see portrayed. This visibility given to various social groups was causing a great deal of concern to the state, which saw this matter as a definite threatening force to its authority.

Whether or not the state -and the church to a certain extent- agreed with the attitude of the bourgeoisie, the latter was gradually becoming a competing element in recruiting artists, composers, painters and novelists. Furthermore, the new social class now had sufficient resources to influence the form, content and range of what was being produced for it by the suppliers of arts, information and entertainment. The extent to which entertainers were affected by the services required by the

new clientele, is evident through the transposition of their status from servant to the state to that of a free professional/entrepreneur available for negotiable 'contract' work. Those who could supply arts and entertainment discovered that their business had a better chance of success if they addressed themselves to the middle-class publics. Private performances, previously reserved for the aristocratic groups, were thus moved to larger rooms accomodating more people and...drawing bigger sales.

Insofar as the basic pleasure-seeking function of entertainment was concerned, changes were not that drastic. What was a significant breakthrough however, is the fact that for the first time a large public could have performances created for itself, and consequently, the artist/entrepreneur's survival depended on his ability to deliver the new representation required. Being at the source of this new market[1] the bourgeoisie found itself obliged to develop popular culture forms such as the music halls, in order to insure that the newly adhered values would be met and responded to, according to middle-class standards, and not those of either the state or the peasantry.

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[1] One is tempted to speak of "mass" markets but this concept will only emerge later in the industrial revolution and will be used first in a mass-production context. Contemporary usage in electronic media, is only analogical and carries with it the pejorative suggestion that mass communication means "mass production of minds". The term "mass" in itself is meaningless unless it is qualified: the mass of people who do such and such, the mass media of information, entertainment and so on.

The bourgeoisie was not just a political threat to the established governing bodies. From a cultural standpoint, the wealth, knowledge, and number of these people accounted for the plethora of entertainment that was generated within their own social class. For once, a public had some power, some say, and most importantly, the necessary structures to bring forth news, information, and entertainment from outside the official and constraining channels of the state and church. It became apparent with the widespread diffusion of the press -which incidently created numerous points of conflict between the two factions- that the "fight was predominently a battle against authoritarian rulers fully aware of the dangers to which they were exposed by the free dissemination of unorthodox opinions and ideas" (McBride,1980:8). An examination of the technical innovations that engendered the development of television as a mass communication system further demonstrates this trend away from the authority of the central governments.[2]

Historical Technological Roots

The reciprocal relationship between social change and technology renders the emergence of television a truly "logical" development. The product of a long tradition of technical research, television today is viewed as an amalgam of innovations in several fields: electricity, telegraphy, radio,

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[2] This trend however is only applicable to Western countries. In U.S.S.R. and other socialist countries, television is, and has always been, owned and controlled by the government, and does not allow for unorthodox ideas to be propagated.

photography, and motion pictures.

But like most other modern achievements television did not come into existence simply because it happened to be discovered. One perspective of its development contends that it derives from the powerful instrumentation that was elaborated by the U.S. Armed Forces in their assigned task of defending and expanding the American corporate empire globally (Schiller, 1973:175). Another focus presents television as a direct by-product of a rapidly growing and changing social system in need of a novel, unifying mechanism to offset the added pressures to which the individuals were subjected (Williams, 1974). Still others, McLuhanesque in their analysis, like to think of this technical creation as a natural material extension of some of man's most basic faculties.[3] Regardless of the view adopted, the developmental route of television cannot be traced unilineally. A host of tightly connected factors have been influential in preparing the ground for its emergence.

Even though it has been stated that social change and technology are interdependent variables, for the purposes of analysis, it is still feasible to isolate technology. Two conceptual frameworks are worth considering. First, that of technological determinism, where technologies are conceived as self-acting forces , which create new ways of life, new conditions for social change. Recent analysts, such as Innis

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[3] As McLuhan writes : "All media are extension of some human faculty psychic or physical"(1967:26) . This notion can also be found in Edward T. Hall's <u>The Silent Language</u>.

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(1951), McLuhan and Carpenter (1960), can be alligned with this view. For them, changes in the dominant means of communication are instrumental in the major shifts in the history of human culture. The second position, also envisages research and development as being self-generating, but only in a marginal way and out of the priorities of the moment. Only what is seen as functionally serviceable for a society is integrated and allowed to provide materials which will in turn modify existing ways of life. Raymond Williams assesses this transaction in terms of a symptomatic technology (1974,14).

In a television series on the American Public Broadcasting System network called "Connections", James Burke raises some interesting observations on the way a given society sometimes integrates its technical mutations. He points out that after a technology is developed in one specialized area it will not be uncommon to see that same technology go on and have its most significant impact in a totally different sphere. However, it is inappropriate here to attempt to determine whether the technical components of television were more prominent in their original fields of development than they happened to be within the "aggregate" of television. So many diverse technical components enter into TV, that it is impossible to attempt to pinpoint any single technique as being the most instrumental. In any case, what this contingency indicates, is the fact that television as we know it, would have probably never been thought of as a communication system had it not been for the successes that were

attained in other independent but related areas.

The fundamental characteristic of the pre-electronic era resides in the strict dependence of the communication networks on those of the transportation systems. Furthermore, the communication networks were nothing but a complementary activity, a by-product of various modes of transportation: stagecoaches would carry passengers and mail; railroad tracks would help set up telegraph lines as an alternative to the postal service, which was already closely instituted around the train system. Space was the major impediment to keeping a transportation and/or communication system fully functional. For example, an event could lose its significance, because its transmission over long distances would be meaningless by the time destination was reached. [*] Only with the coming of telegraphy and telephone would communication systems break free from the constraints of space and time and open the way to the potential of the electronic era.

As an autonomous energy source, electricity had advantages that were closely related to contemporary industrial development. It permitted mobility and transfer in the location of power, in addition to a flexible, efficient, rapid, and controllable manpower-like potential. Consequently, it directly affected the location and concentration of industries along with the detailed organization of the factory. The bulky steam engine

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[*] One can also consider the inherent physical limitations of earlier signaling systems such as semaphore, drum, smoke and heliographic.

could now be discarded as electricity facilitated the engineering of multi-part processing techniques and equipment as early as 1880, and has never ceased since to help develop even more complex energy sources (Williams,1974). Mumford suggested in his discussion of electricity that this later form of energy was much more efficient than coal in long distance transportation or steam in local distribution because it could more easily be transmitted

> without heavy losses of energy and higher costs. Wires
> carrying high tension alternating currents can cut
> across mountains which no road vehicle can pass
> over...Moreover, electricity is readily convertible into
> various forms: the motor, to do mechanical work, the
> electric lamp, to light, the electric radiator, to heat,
> the x-ray tube and the ultra-violet light, to penetrate
> and explore, and the selenium cell, to effect automatic
> control (1934:223).

As a form of communication, electrical telegraphy had been suggested as early as 1753 (Williams,1974:16). It was only though with the establishment of the railways -themselves an outcome of the booming industrial development- that some utility was found in developing the telegraphic system in order to facilitate international trade. It was in the heyday of this period that, for example, the transatlantic cable was laid down, in the mid 19th century.

The transition of telegraphy to radio, which occured around the turn of the century was perceived as a technical and scientific accomodation to an increasingly complex social system. It was now practically possible to "bridge the gap in time between communication and response despite the handicaps of

space" (Mumford,1934:239). Its appeal as a significant new social form of communication began in the immediate post-war period of the 1920's, at a time when the social network had undergone considerable transformations. A similar merger took shape in the discovery of cinematic productions. Ever since Daguerre invented photography in 1838, numerous attempts had been made at creating on film, the illusion of movement. When it finally came through in 1894, it proved to be a tremendous step towards the conceptualization of television.

Practically speaking, by the early 1900's the stage was set for the coming of television, as most of its constituting elements were available and ready to be merged. It was known since 1842, that Bain had conducted fairly successful experiments for transmitting pictures by wire in his laboratory. Also, a real "tour de force" had been realized by Caselli in 1862, when he transmitted pictures by wire over a considerable distance (Williams,1974:17). With such a technically productive background, one can almost say that television, as a communication system, was foreseeable decades before its actual advent.

The remarkable progress in the production areas of the industries and in the new social forms that were evolving parallel to the technical improvements, had a significant impact on society. A profusion of needs and possibilities developed along with a meaningful elaboration of the communication systems which emerged as a direct outcome of those demands. It certainly

would be misleading to think of television as something that was created simply because it was needed. Despite the fact that the latter point cannot be dismissed outright, it would definitely be more accurate to interpret television as the product of a complex technical conjunction that allowed for its production.

Social Utility

The advent of a communication medium such as television required tremendous sums of money. Such financial imperatives could only be supported by already established sources. This partly explains why new technologies are often serving commercial purposes[5] sometimes political ideologies and, when the situation requires it, military ones. Despite the often-cited and criticized use of the medium by these agencies, the fact remains that it is because of the communication problems they were having in their respective pursuits that they saw the necessity to improve on the existing technology.

When Henry Ford started to mass-produce motor cars in 1909, the laying out of complex highway systems -and railway as well- had far reaching economic implications. It was imperative for the metropolises of those days to attract the largest possible

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[5] This is the essence of the marxist critique of the television system as it now functions. The critique argues that TV programming is centered around advertisement and contends that a show is merely a package that forces the viewer to attend the real content of television: the advertisement spots. This process is characterized as insidious. For more on the dominant forms of social control see Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization , Beacon Press, 1955 and One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964.

number of people within their boundaries in order to sustain the industrial momentum. Similarly, more specialized communication systems were sought because: a) there was a need for distribution and exchange of information and b) the commercial organizations felt the need to sustain a certain form of control over and contact with the people so as to maintain economic interests. Although traditional institutions like the church, school, family, and social assemblies facilitated the integration of the people into the community, they proved to be insufficient in the wake of the major modifications in the social organization that industrial expansion was causing.

Looking back several centuries, we can see that the proliferation of the press illustrates the development of a new technology serving the purpose of social communication. In the first place, the press very much served the same function as the broadsides did in the Renaissance.[6] In their way, newspapers were providing information and messages outside the official lines of the governing agencies. As Williams observes "for the transmission of news and background -the whole orienting, predictive and updating process which the fully developed press represented- there was an evident need for a new form, which the largely traditional institutions of church and school could not meet" (1974:21).

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[6] For an in-depth historical and sociological treatment of the broadside see A.L. Lloyd, Folk Song in England, Frogmore, England:Paladin, 1975 and Leslie Shepard,The Broadside Ballad, Herbert Jenkins, London, 1962.

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Numerous industrial developments of the early 20th century had considerable impact on the mobility of people: mobility both internally -since new and larger settlements could not accomodate all workers within the immediate periphery of the working place- and externally, as families often had to be broken up in order that certain members could join the work force. One consequence of the migration of people towards major centers of activity, was the necessity of maintaining, over distances and through time, a number of personal and cultural ties and connections that were of great importance to those involved. Despite the uses that people were making of photography, motion pictures, telegraphy, and telephone for social communication, the advent of broadcasting, and of television especially[7], proved to be a most powerful form of social integration. The invention of television then provided a means of long distance communication that did not depend, like the press, on printing and surface transport. Moreover, it would be available to the whole population at large -a truly mass medium of communication- without the requirement of literacy.

Mass media analysts would readily claim that, from a strictly mass communication perspective, the differences between television and radio are minimal. One could refer to the broadcasting similarities of the two media, whereby large, even national, audiences are offered a sense of human companionship and contact with performers. Or that both radio and television

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[7] In developed countries, television became a feature of daily life by the late 1940's or early '50's (McBride,1980).

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play a crucial role in the development and expansion of the "global village" paradigm by providing listeners/viewers a sense of immediacy in the sharing of world news and concerns. Theoritically, it is true, both have a lot in common. However, a significant distinction is revealed by the manner in which one interacts with either medium. While the radio listener can be reading, driving or working, the television viewer is wholly absorbed in his viewing, he is _with_ it. The disparity between the two media can also be described in terms of "foreground" and "background" activities. In this sense, the engagement required of the televiewer contrasts sharply with the use of radio as a background sound source. Furthermore, despite their analogous technical potential of diffusion, television has had a considerable impact on the nature of radio as a mass medium.

Indeed, radio has shifted from a national entertainment function to a system of diverse information ranging from news, traffic reports, time signals, weather reports, and the like. Radio, as it now operates, is essentially local, and even at times community, based. This small scale of broadcasting thus allows radio to be more attuned and responsive to the needs of specific audiences at different times of the day, depending on the activity they are engaged in. Television, on the other hand, at least to this day, aims at a much larger public. For instance, in Vancouver, a viewer without cablevision is only offered one local station compared to the two national networks which, although airing local newscasts and public affairs

magazines, fill most of their prime-time programming with entertainment fare sent out from coast to coast.[8]

It is interesting to underline the apparent dichotomy implicit in the television process. Initially defined as a means to ease the mobility quest resulting from the fragmentation of social life, the new broadcasting medium encouraged a home-centered way of living. To be socially participant and mobile, the viewer had to initiate this will from the confinements of his very own dwelling. Williams suggests the expression "mobile privatization" to designate this social interplay (1974).

Logically, one may be permitted to think of this privatization of social experience through television as a rather deceitful process where the consumer of this medium is subjected to a severe indoctrination. Some skeptics depict television as a literal intrusion into the intimate circle of family life already tangled up in a complex web of mass media influences (Bogart, 1958:99). This is a possibility...a remote possibility however, that does not stand up to practical analysis, as subsequent chapters will indicate.

In addition, we can hardly treat television as a totally revolutionary mode of entertainment. Although the form is novel, the contents though are not original in themselves. Certain elements of TV programs had formerly been aired on radio, while

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[8] For a more elaborate treatment of radio and television structural characteristics see Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, McGraw-Hill Book Cie, New-York, 1964 in particular, sections 30 and 31.

others were drawn from films. As McLuhan had pointed out, TV, as a new means of communication, was literally the extension of older forms -radio and film- and, most importantly, it included the former media's contents. Because of its inherent audio-visual nature, television had to rely heavily on what both radio and film had demonstrated to be popular subjects of interests in their respective realms of diffusion. So, not surprisingly, television started out by using those very same proven themes and formats; soap operas, dramas, music and information shows were some of the original constituents. Two types of presentation, however, received a particularly wide and enthusiastic welcome by the viewers: news and sportscasts. For the first time in human history, viewers were enabled to SEE, from their living-room, events as they actually occured. However, it is not so much the fact that people could now 'be with' an event that made television so appealing. Radio had been offering this same 'sharing' dimension almost from its inception in 1920. It seems to me rather that the sheer visual component brought forth by television must be perceived as a giant breakthrough into the broadcasting spheres. It allowed the viewer to witness the full spectrum of a public activity and in the process, diminish the traditional dependence on the narrator to make one's personal evaluation of the performance.

As has been the case in most technological advancements, when the world's first broadcasting service began in England in

1936[9], only the wealthiest homes could capture the magic of the new discovery. But the relatively cheap leisure alternative that television was offering quickly spread to those people who, despite the significant economic growth, still lacked independent mobility or access to the previously diverse places of entertainment and information. Mc Quail gives his support to this view and suggests that, in Western countries especially,

> because of the social structures of modern society, most individuals are deprived of important material satisfactions and do not attain rewards commensurate with their economic efforts. In this situation, therefore, a system of compensating satisfactions is set up via identification with stars and through escapism facilitated especially by TV fiction. This implies that the function of TV is to compensate for the insufficiencies of industrial society, which would otherwise fail to achieve the integration of its economically weaker members (cited in Cazeneuve, 1974:214).

The danger with an argument of this type however, would be to limit its adaptability only in terms of a society with high productivity and a complementary highly unequal distribution of power. Such a perspective would be short-sighted and would certainly not present the whole picture.

The next chapter introduces television as a form of popular entertainment and thus assists in the demystification of the conception of television as solely an integrative agent into modern social life.

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[9] From the British Broadcasting Corporation's transmitter at Alexandra Palace in London, some 13 hours of programs were offered weekly to approximately 10,000 TV receivers. See W.A. Belson, The Impact of Television: Methods and findings in program research, Archon Books, Conn., 1967:212.

II. Television as A Popular Entertainment Form

> ...society was seen as a vast mass of isolated
> individuals... social change, technological development,
> division of labour and increasing specialization and
> differentiation...left an aggregate rather than a
> closely-knit social group...early view of mass
> communication assumed that people could be persuaded by
> the media to adopt almost any point of view desired by
> the communicator(Halloran,1970: 18)

Television has grown so rapidly over the last thirty years,
that there has hardly been enough time to develop thorough
critical approaches to its study. The view presented here
considers television a true form of popular entertainment. Along
with introducing Stewart Hall's encoding/decoding concept, which
is particularly instructive in the context under investigation,
I treat television as a significant improvement in providing
distribution and accessibility to, a diversity of leisure
activities.

The prominent place television occupies in people's leisure
time can hardly be underestimated. Although most critics
acknowledge this fact, the debate between the popular and high
culture advocates, offers two vastly different accounts
regarding the consequences of this situation. The work of
Herbert Gans will be used to help appraise the debate and to
supply essential arguments in defense of popular culture
institutions.

Characteristics of Popular Art Forms

The television critic seldom perceives TV the way viewers do. While the former is a watchman for novelty, creativity, quality, relevant up-to-date materials, the latter is not so critical about television's offerings. The viewer will settle for relaxing diversion, familiar faces and a reassuring sameness . Critic Michael Arlen writes:

> A great many people obviously want the companionship of other voices as they pass through the day, with a sort of undemanding background picture thrown in to certify that the voices really exist as people...(quoted in Adler/Cater,1976:161)

Popular art can be defined through the popular culture of which it is a vehicle: "the social, psychological and material environment of the majority of people"(Schroeder,1977:1). Implicit in "the majority of people" is of course, the large size of the audience, but equally imperative is the concept of heterogenity of the constituting members. Furthermore, my treatment of television as a popular art form accounts for the interchangeable use of terms such as popular art and popular culture. It is my contention that not only is television an art form intended for large publics, but its content, portrayals, format, in short its global mode of operation cannot be dissociated from the specific culture it is meant to convey.

In contrast to "high art" which is limited to a few institutions for diffusion and distribution -opera halls, theatres, art galleries, museums, concert rooms- the popular arts require a much more elaborate technological structure in

order to reach their vast public. It then comes as no surprise that a major upsurge in the availability and accessibility of popular art forms be directly related to technological advances, especially in communication, accompanying the rise of commercial markets and industries and the expansion of purchasing power. [1] Also, the concentration of large populations into metropolitan areas made it economically possible to bring popular media forms like television quickly to vast audiences (Bogart,1958:4). The experience with radio had been most conclusive in this respect.

The question raised in this section is not to compare high art to popular art, and even less to find out whether one is more elevating than the other. The concern is with the components, the characteristics innate in popular art forms that make them so appealing to such large audiences. What type of forms persist in popular arts, and to what extent these forms embody symbols, ideas, philosophies and concepts that are prevailing at any one time ?

Probably the most common denominator in popular art forms, and this is especially relevant to television, is the fact that people turn to them for recreational purposes. This rather innocuous statement, in all its simplicity, may very well be a fundamental theorem in explaining the relatively high consumption of such art forms and their inherent value. Whether the individual is tired after a day's work, or needs diversion simply for the sake of changing thought, popular arts "are

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[1] A vivid example is the growth of the record industry.

typically absorbed at a rather low level of attention"
(Bogart,1958:25). This state of affairs partly results from the
low degree of sophistication used in the presentation, in the
hope of attracting the largest public possible. It is true that
the simplistic approach adopted by television, and by the
majority of popular arts, is governed by marked commercial
incentives. But what does that tell us ? That anything that
diffuses through popular channels is degrading because someone,
somewhere, has a financial interest ? Allegations of this type
leave the impression that all popular culture, and the
complexity of human affairs in this process, can be reduced and
simplified to a single motive: economic. It is precisely the
object of this thesis to expand on the underlying motives of
popular entertainment forms such as television.

Schroeder contends that in order to be successful a popular
art form must be clear and simple (1977). Also, by its very
nature, it is subject to many external influences and is bound
to be in a continuous state of movement, reproducing a multitude
of trends. In other words, the appeal and success of popular
arts "is always relative, relative to audience and relative to
market"(Schroeder,1977:3). So, it should not be surprising to
observe a regular turnover in a number of television programs
that did not "stick to" a large enough audience to warrant its
extension into another season. When it comes to evaluating
popular arts, success is related to what is widely consumed
(Schroeder,1977). What does not sell -regardless of the sums

invested or aesthetics deployed- is evidently not pleasing its audience and therefore must make room for a more marketable item.

Since this thesis is primarily concerned with North American commercial broadcasting, the question of economics seems most basic. However, for government or public-owned networks such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Public Broadcasting System in the United States, "success" is not necessarily measured along the same lines. In fact, if we look at C.B.C., which does not have to rely exclusively on the sale of time to advertisers to finance its productions, we can see that it will occasionally offer cultural and educational programs in order to fulfill this part of its mandate, even though this type of content may have limited community appeal. Similarly P.B.S., which gets financial support from subsidies and contributions from government, private foundations and the public, does not pursue mass audiences per se, if we judge from its programming. Its projected 5 % prime-time share of the viewing audience for the early 1980's[2], is based on its commitment to broadcast high-quality programs, i.e. those with definite educational elements which are not, as yet, the prime motive for people's televiewing.

The reasons for the poor showing of a television program or series aimed at a popular audience may be threefold: first, it

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[2] Figure released by the National Broadcasting Company's Social Research Department, 1976, Public Television, New-York.

may have to do with the forms of the broadcast show that have lost their clarity and simplicity and, as a result, their target audience as well; or second, that the "un-clarity" and complexity of these same forms are best suited for a more sophisticated, exclusive type of audience that the program will find itself reaching; or again, that same "un-clarity" may be perceived by the popular audience as being too simplistic, too hackneyed and even too predictable to sustain a viable level of interest. In all cases, the "raison d'etre" of popular arts is displaced and loses its prime engagement: that is, providing a functional mean of recreation[3]

Critics have deplored the fact that the most popular programs on television -in terms of ratings- did not have much to offer in intellectual stimulation and sometimes even less so

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[3] Many critics consider the popular arts as being a prime vehicle for advertising. Although it is not within the limits of this thesis to examine this issue in depth, I wish to comment on a quotation from Jerry Mander, which synthesizes feelings shared by a number of media observers:

Monolithic economic enterprise needs monolithic media to purvey its philosophy and to influence rapid change in consumption patterns. Without an instrument like TV, capable of reaching everyone in the country at the same time and narrowing human needs to match the redesigned environment, the corporations themselves could not exist"(1978:152).

Despite the important financial support that advertising does provide television with, the relationship is not of the type "one-creating-the-other". Popular arts existed long before advertising. What the latter did for television though, and for a number of other media such as radio, magazines and newspapers as well, was to give them more economic resources to elaborate their productions, expand their distribution network and keep the cost of acquiring entertainment at a marketable minimum.

in the expansion of knowledge. This suggestion might have to do with the fact that critics of popular programs are often adopting a faulty perspective on the matter, one based on high art standards. One should not expect a given set of rules to hold for all forms of art. If such were the case, it could lead to a form of cultural domination that would seriously impinge upon artistic variety.

Broadcasting: A Vehicle of Popular Art

Popular artists involved in television broadcasting, are faced with unique contingencies: they are not at total liberty in the expressive forms that they utilize. As demonstrated in the previous section, they must give the public what it wants. These constraining forces are amongst the most instrumental in shaping the "packaging" of television. The TV artist, be it a script-writer or a performer, must develop a high degree of expertise and skill in pleasing a large audience. This is certainly no less demanding than creating sophisticated happenings for a high art public.

Great art is sometimes cited as being deeply disturbing, besides being generally inaccessible to large audiences (Brown, 1970: 124). The profound questions it raises about man's place in the social order and about the existential value of life (as in theater and literature especially), do not do much to ease the tension that a great number of people must endure in their day-to-day living. Setting itself as a kind of antipode to

high art, television does offer a means of releasing tension. Some contend that this is performed through the "fantasy experience" where the audience projects its own expectations, desires, wishes and unconscious motives into the perception and interpretation of the television content (Linick, 1970).

Again, if one compares the physical environment where high art generally takes place*, to that of television, then the familiar intimate situation of reception of the home contrasts sharply with the formal atmosphere of the theatre, concert hall, and even that of the art gallery (even though in the latter case, we may occasionally encounter video exhibits, the receptive attitude of the gallery habitue differs greatly from that of the home-viewer). The casual, almost trite, consumption of television is engendered by the audience's conception of the medium as a pastime, where viewing and listening represent a merely superficial experience and is certainly not considered by all viewers to be an expression of deepseated psychological needs. However, it is worth mentioning here that the Uses and Gratifications school has done research that point at the fact that people do have some reasonable grasp of what functions might be served by exposure to one medium as compared to another (Katz et al, 1974b).

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* I purposely exclude here all domestic uses of great arts such as literature and the reproduction in books of sculpture and painting, and on records of music, to limit the argument to the intrinsic physical setting of both high arts (concert halls, theatres, galleries) and television (living-room) .

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The apparent triviality of the television catalogue to which critics incessantly point is not peculiar to the medium nor to our time. History provides an interesting similar example with the introduction of printing in the 15th century. While it was thought and expected that people would literally devour the treasures of learning, in the first decades of printing, the trend of reading proved to be along the lines of the light, the superficial and even, to a certain degree, of the vulgar, scandalous and seditious (Wiebe, 1969).

Equally revealing for the position that I am adopting in this thesis, is the introduction of a commercial network in England which came some twenty years after total program control by the British Broadcasting Corporation. The new network was featuring entertainment series from the United States. But since the British audience was used to a certain level of so-called 'educative content', the newcomer on the broadcasting scene was not considered to cause any serious threat to the firmly established B.B.C.. What actually happened is just the opposite. A long-held tradition of enlightening television was shaken up so badly, that the B.B.C. had to readjust its programming and offer what was undoudtedly popular with its audiences, namely entertainment material.

Not only in broadcast media but generally in most forms of art, there seems to be a tendency "toward an inverse relationship between audience size and the cultural merit of the program", cultural merit as determined by the predominent

intellectual forces of the society (Wiebe,1969:524). When given the choice between instructing and recreational art forms, a considerable majority of the population opts for the latter. While critics may call television "soporific", we should guard ourselves from associating enjoyment with waste of time.

The Entertainment Component

When television is examined through the high-brow culturalists' eyes, heavy criticism ensues. They would like to see television as a thought-provoking instrument, a type of modern discovery that would first and foremost edify the masses. However, what the actual facts of the matter tell us, do not really coincide with their wish.

As was suggested earlier, the widening and dissemination of the popular arts ought to be interpreted purely in practical terms: a demonstration of people being "brought together in a new relationship as audiences ...(where) new kinds of language and expression are developed and independent art forms and conventions arise"(Winston,1973:65). Consistent with this view of popular arts, a number of studies on the mass media over the past three decades point at various types of entertainment functions as being predominant in media use patterns of most persons.[5]

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[5] Among the most often referred to are two studies: G.A. Steiner, The People Look at Television, Knopf, New-York, 1963 and W. Stephenson, The Play Theory of Mass Communication, The University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Let us be reminded here that the conventions of entertainment serve a dual purpose. As was seen in the first chapter, a) they provide audiences with portrayals of their own lives as distinct from the lives of other social groups, and b) in this process, a number of conventional elements emerge and licence audiences to assert a continuity of relationship with members of their in-group. More explicitly, entertainment taken as a form of communication behavior has both social origins and social consequences. The two concepts are part of a unified, integrated phenomenon.

That the thematic contents of the televised medium are constantly changing[6] may be caused by influences generated at the interpersonal level. Television in that sense, is truly a popular form of entertainment in as much as its production structure picks up trends 'out there' on the social platform and encodes them for wider diffusion.

The notions of "encoding" and "decoding" in the television messages put forth by Stewart Hall are of utmost importance in support of the thesis being advocated. For Hall, the audience is at both ends of the communication process. First, people are the ones that initiate what is to be represented through the medium.

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[6] In absolute terms, that is. No single two programs are exact reproduction of one another. The variations, minimal as they may be, reflect as many movements in the social/communal evolution of given groups. For example, three or four soap operas will circumscribe globally similar themes but always with significant modifications; one situation is taking place in a downtown setting, the other out in the country, still another among rich or poor families, etc.. The projection of contemporary social priorities become decipherable under careful analysis.

They set movements, trends and fashions. At the other end of the continuum, it is the same audience that 'consumes' its own images, images that are the concrete materializations on the screen of prominent social concerns. Within its very own style and limits, popular music provides another excellent illustration of this process. Protest songs of the chaotic '60s and the effervescent revival of the rock'n roll era of the '50s that is currently happening, are two such manifestations of movements having concrete repercussions on styles of dressing, attitudes and overall communication behavior of their respective followers/initiators.

Hall affirms that

> though the production structures of TV originate the TV messages, they do not constitute a closed system. They draw topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audiences, 'definitions of the situation', from the wider socio-cultural and political system of which they are only a differentiated part (1973).

Granted that television presents the viewer with the opportunity of getting acquainted with the current issues of society, how are we to evaluate the "decoded" definitions that the audience attaches to those same events ? It is suggested that media messages are not imbedded with absolute and objective meanings. Despite the television writers' and producers' efforts to simplify the manner and form of presentation of certain material so that large publics correctly perceive the intended information, the interpersonal factor is most determinant in the decoding operation. Indeed, meanings of media contents are formed, developed and modified through man's interpretations of

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those contents, and also through exchange of interpretations with other audience members. Any study of media effects must begin with acknowledging the fact that the public is the user and interpreter of signs, symbols and values, and that it is through these use and interpretation processes that meaning is obtained and concerted action accomplished.[7]

Television as A Public Service

At a time where television's informative integrity is put under serious probing by certain citizen groups, it may seem awkward to qualify television as a public service. Yet, there are sufficient grounds to support such a view.

It is often cited and widely acknowledged that the recent history of the western world has been experienced to some extent through television. From political assassinations to ventures to the moon, from Royal weddings to wars, from international political conventions to hearings of smaller scale interests, all are examples of public participation in the making of decisive resolutions or events that have, or will mark the course or our lives.

The contribution of television to the enhancement of the democratic process -whether it is truly democratic or not is a semantic question and represents a different focus of interest altogether- is not negligible either. For the first time in

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[7] See Colin Cherry's semiotic treatment of communication in his On Human Communication, Cambridge, Mass., The M.I.T. Press, 1975, 223.

history, it is possible to extend our sense of sight so far as to make us feel as if we were actually there. That is a remarkable achievement in itself, a marvellous "angelization" as E. Carpenter so adequately termed it (1973:3). And today, since every home possesses a television set, minority groups get an opportunity to witness their exclusion from certain social domains, and assist via television to protests, marches and demonstrations requesting equality of civil rights. Furthermore, it could be contended that television was instrumental during the 1960's in raising anti-Vietnam war sentiments among the american population by its showing of massive crowds of demonstrators as well as 'on location' reports about the war.

As an entertainment medium, television is indisputably a prime vehicle of public service. Suffice it to think of the number of plays, films, operas, sports, to name but a few, that are brought home to any interested viewer. Such an important public service, despite the fact that it does not replace the real 'live happening', nevertheless permits a closeness and an intimacy with the object, unequalled by any other medium. However, critics would vehemently contend that this very accessibility to televised entertainment undermine considerably community participation in local amateur activities of the kinds presented on television.

We have all, at one point or another, I trust, found it most convenient to 'go out', thanks to television, from the confinement of our living-room. For those deprived of sufficient

financial resources to attend live spectacles, television may exert a considerable, and even disproportionate, attraction. So much so, that buying a color set and subscribing to cablevision may appear as essential and necessary even if it implies cutting-down on universal criteria of basic living standards such as nutrition, hygiene and clothing. The often-cited cliche that most people on welfare and unemployment own, if nothing else, a first quality color television may only be a gross exaggeration but it nevertheless warns us against the potential pitfalls of a morbid an irrational utilization of television. Damaging as it may be under extreme circumstances such as the ones referred to above, television, if it is taken for what it is, for what it signifies to those who take full advantage of it, must be given full credit for its contribution to the dissemination of entertainment art forms. Television certainly represents one of 20th century's most technologically advanced solutions to the problem of entertainment accessibility and distribution.

Television and Leisure Time

Before television could become the ubiquitous leisure activity we know today, some social transformations were needed. The most fundamental one has certainly been the growth of free, disposable time. Not that long ago, the average working-week was 70 hours. Today, the ratio work/free time is somewhere in the 1:2 order. Of course, we need to take into account the amount of

time people must spend to commute to and from work, and also the sleeping hours, but the fact remains that one has much more available time to dispose of than, for example 75 years ago.

Another important factor besides the reduction in the work-week, is the change in the overall quality of life. As a result of numerous labor-saving devices, the consumer is making a substantial saving of time on domestic chores, which further extends his opportunity to become consumer of entertainment. Also, the improvements made on more complex and speedier commuting networks may be seen as having two diametrically opposed consequences in terms of the extent of leisure activities. While one theory advocates that faster transportation systems between suburbia and office represents a valuable economy of time which can potentially be translated into more entertainment activities, another divergent theory is equally revealing. Granted that trains, buses, metros and highways are getting more efficient, they have also considerably extended the commuter range. In fact, a larger number of people now travel farther to their jobs, and in the process take more time doing so than ever before. Those commuting citizens are not likely to return into town after dinner to see a show. However, what may prove to be more convenient for them is either go to the neighborhood cinema or stay home and spend the evening watching television. Whether one adheres to one theory or the other, it remains that both have provision for television to be used as a functional means of filling one's leisure time.

One should be careful not to attribute the growth of television, or of any other mass-medium, to the simple rise of leisure time. The relationship should be perceived in reciprocal terms. True, more free time helps in the discovery and adoption of television as an acceptable way of spending one's time, but that same medium also helps popularize and make desirable what the great majority of viewers term a 'good life'. In that sense, television is a great showroom of the existing commodities and activities that people attempt to procure for themselves.

Evidently, pleading in favor of this consumerism aspect of television becomes a choice terrain of attack for critics. They argue that since commercial television depends largely on advertising revenues to operate, we can expect that large corporations will only invest money on publicity insofar as the success rate, i.e. the instigation of needs for new products, can be translated into increased profits. Critics are aware though, that television alone cannot create demand, which is dependent on a host of environmental factors, experiences and needs. However, it is suggested that television is able to focus the demands of people and perform a reduction in the tension between their needs and socially shaped and limited lives -all to the profits of big corporations (Gitlin,1972:335).

Television may occupy such a prominent part of people's disposable leisure-time that Comstock even speaks of a "fifth season" to describe seasonal associations to various series' beginnings and ends, sport finals and special events of wide

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appeal (1978:1). Although interesting in and of itself, this proposition calls attention to what I refer to as environmental factors present in the organization of one's leisure time. Schramm has already indicated that "there is good evidence that when the shorter days and inclement weather of the winter months reduce the number of potential alternative activities, viewing increases"(et al,1961.). Surely, television is not the sole route that a person would take to spend an evening, a week-end or any segment of time-off. However, what is instructive for this subject matter is the frequency and facility to which television will be used as a surrogate when one is deprived of other recreational channels. Even though critics would argue that TV is precisely the source of this deprivation, the medium can still be a viable compensation to the social occasion of going out to a film, play or concert.

A closer look at Comstock's fifth season analogy indicates another effect of television which pertains to its ability to structure the use of time by focusing attention to certain topics and conversely by avoiding others. It works as an agenda-setter, a term first introduced in 1972 by McCombs and Shaw, who were the first to empirically attempt to validate the notion. The concept not only endeavors to demonstrate that when the media emphasize a particular event they influence the public to see it as being important, but more importantly, it tries to demonstrate that exposure to the media is in part a function of individual factors making information useful or relevant. A

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certain rapprochement between the notions of agenda-setting and of encoding/decoding is made possible by the fact that what is being consumed at the receiving end of the continuum has to have meaning, a relevance, a rapport with the interests of the viewer. Any information about the source of those interests must be sought in the social environment of the viewer. It is there that he lives, forms and exchanges them. This fact therefore, implicitly negates all formulation about the overpowering and brainwashing authority that has been, and still is, many a time attributed to the mass media, and to television in particular.

Critical Voices on Popular Arts

A representative treatment of popular art forms must consider the negative views levied at the mass media. It is to this task that Herbert Gans devoted himself in his Critique of Mass Culture, in which he notes four major themes that have been recurring in the charges against popular culture (1973:49).

His summary of contemporary criticisms begins with the undesirability of popular culture based on its mass-production by profit-minded entrepreneurs. Since popular culture borrows heavily from high culture, two consequences arise: a) by charming away potential creators of high art, popular culture diminishes an already limited reservoir of talent and b) extensive echoing of high art into popular art can only debase the former category. A third point underlines spurious gratifications as being the best that popular content can

provide. By the same token, it indicates that popular content can achieve nothing but an emotionally harmful state of confusion. The final argument against the propagation of popular culture, as Gans cites, has to do with the reduction of cultural quality of life in a society with a wide distribution network of popular arts. Furthermore, it is assumed that the people are encouraged to become passive receptors of the totalitarian-persuasive techniques used by dictatorship-minded authorities.

Though the above summary does not represent all perspectives from which popular arts endure criticism, it nevertheless gives us a taste of the argumentative rigidity expressed by high art proponents. Most of their charges however are groundless, Gans contends, as there is just no empirical evidence to support them. For instance, how are we to accept the notion that popular culture is undesirable because it only mass produces objects and contents that will generate a profit ? What is implied here is that anything that is available on a large scale and quantity is automatically devoid of aesthetic elegance. Though it can certainly be demonstrated that the mass media make extensive use of stereotypical characters and formulas so that it can appeal to its large heterogeneous publics, this standardization of form in popular arts is not totally absent in the high culture spheres either. The mass production aspect of popular arts is a basic economic axiom: produce culture cheaply enough so that citizens of ordinary

incomes can come to it.

Let us not forget that the size and heterogeneity of popular arts audiences also have their impact on the performances. They call for contents that are meaningful to as many in the audience as possible and at the cheapest cost. To say that the shows we are offered through the mass media are not 'good quality' because someone, somewhere is making a profit is not really helping the debate. As in other industries, the monetary incentives found in the popular arts act as a crucial factor in propagating their continuity. Unfortunately, we cannot say the same for operas and symphonic orchestras for instance, which must repeatedly call upon the public for donations in order to survive. They will even go down to the streets to try to sensitize those least likely to appreciate their art. Will these musicians start to question the value of their 'product' the day they will be making a profit ?

On the hypothesis that popular art is depleting and debasing high art, a look at the reciprocal influence that the forms exert on one another will readily disprove the unidirectional flow advocated by the highbrow culturalists. While there is no doubt that popular culture borrows heavily from high culture -partly because the former's public is much larger and requires a lot more cultural production- the reverse is also true, albeit on a much smaller scale. Rock and folk music have been, and still are, occasionally borrowed by high culture composers. For example, it is not rare to see jazz

musicians make their own interpretations of popular hit songs.[8]
Also, one cannot really speak of depletion when the popular arts
take a product or style over from the high culture. The process
is not done unilaterally. A certain degree of transformation
occurs, adapting the object to its new public. In this sense,
one culture does not <u>deplete</u> the other of anything, nor does it
<u>debase</u> it, but rather it gets ideas, models, methods and styles
from which it constructs a product suitable to its public.

The attack stretches a step further when it argues that not
only objects of high art are being stolen away, but their
creators as well who are attracted by the bigger income
available in popular art. Again, the charge is accurate but
incomplete. The reverse phenomenon also happens as popular
artists will occasionally make the move to the more prestigious
high culture.[9] The horizontal shift of artists, in one direction
or the other, should not be taken as an indication of being more
or less creative and innovative. The skills required to work in
either group are equally demanding. The fact that it is possible
for creators to go from one class to another can be most
significant. As Gans observes:"If popular culture did not exist,

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[8] Though I am aware that, for many, jazz is a popular culture
form, I personally regard it as high culture. This opinion is
based on the rather limited appeal that jazz has on the
population in general, except of course for the initiated. In
this respect, jazz is very similar to classical music in that it
is performed for relatively small and specialized publics.
[9] Brian Eno, co-founder of the rock group Roxy Music, is a case
in point. His work now consists in making "city/sky"
video-productions of a very abstract nature over his own
"nostalgic" music, to use his own terms. His pieces are
exhibited in art galleries.

high culture creators would have to earn their living in other than cultural pursuits"(1974:29). If high culture wants to protect its creators, as it claims it does, it is not very likely that the solution rests in the elimination of popular culture, elimination founded on poor aesthetic principles. Gans suggests that raising high culture creators' income is a far better way of controlling the flight towards the richer markets of the popular arts.

The third and fourth points that Gans has identified in the critique of popular art also deserve a more detailed presentation. The emotional harmful affect and programmed alienation that people are allegedly subjected to, are interesting humanistic considerations, but they do not stand up to empirical evidence. To claim, in other words, that people cannot cope with reality because, among many factors, of the oppressive demands of the media is a dramatic overgeneralization. As will be seen later, the media

> do not have the simple Pavlovian impact attributed to them, and it is thus impossible to deduce effects from content. Instead, media content is just one of many cultural stimuli people choose, to which they respond and, more important,, that they help to create through the feedback they exert on the popular culture industries (Gans,1973:54).

People, in general, do not model nor adapt their lives after what the media prescribe. Rather, they will choose contents that will match their individual and peer group ?REALLY? requirements. People are not atomized as the critics claim. They are all members of families, social groups, work teams and can

be, within those groups, altruistic, kind and affectionate
(Chaffee,1972).

But of course, there exists a public that is poorly
discriminative when confronted with media content and which may
be affected more easily than others. This includes socially
marginal and/or psychopathic viewers -those with emotional and
cognitive disorders- that, because of their particular condition
may process the substitute gratifications provided by the media
in such a way as to later use them as a hindrance to their
participation in 'real' social experience. However, there is an
inclination to think that their pathological condition is the
cause, and certainly not the result, of the extensive use of
behavior modelling found in television.

As for the reduction in the cultural quality of life that
the popular arts are said to have introduced, Gans provides some
historical evidence against that accusation. If we compare the
majority of people of both today's and past societies, we can
appreciate a considerable improvement in the level of taste.
This tendency has been marked particularly by the increasing
proportion of people attending college over the last few
decades. Gans notes that

> although statistics about the rising number of classical
> record buyers and book club members may not prove that
> Americans are becoming cultured, they do suggest a
> significant change in taste from the pre-World War II
> days when even semi-classical music was considered
> highbrow (1974:45).

The treatment that people such as Gans, Hall and Schroeder
make of television, claiming it to be an important and necessary

form of popular entertainment, is far from gaining unanimous approval. There is a whole body of literature that examines the pernicious psychological, cognitive and physical effects that television may have on the viewers. The next chapter addresses those questions and indicates the difficulty of affixing direct correlations between behavior modification and television content.

III. Challenging Negative Critical Reactions

From the moment television made its entrance into the homes
of Western countries, it became the target of some of the most
severe criticism ever addressed to a medium of entertainment.
This chapter highlights the fundamental arguments against the
nature, functions and effects of television.

The following presentation of critical reactions also forms
the basis on which a positive evaluation of TV is constructed.
The criticizing of challengeable arguments serves to demonstrate
that very few consequences can be predicted from content
observations alone, and that in studying television's impact, we
must examine the viewer's social and psychological
characteristics. It is contended that, by virtue of their
inanimate nature, the media have no power of their own and that
any influence they may have, cannot be manifest without the
viewer's consent. Challenging the oppressive image that critics
offer of television, I will stress that the medium contains
valuable attributes which can be used in forming a more aware
citizen and in providing material for interpersonal
conversation.

Discordant Aspects of the Medium

A recurring theme in discussions about television is its presumptive capacity to inhibit intellectual development and activity in the viewers (Morgan, 1980, Kaplan, 1972). This view blames the medium for a variety of problems ranging from the impoverishment of originality in children's fantasies, to a flattening of consciousness that results in a socially limited view of the world. Other critics like to underline a comparative inquiry on the capacity for imagery induction between the acts of reading and television watching (Singer,1980:31). They concede an advantage to reading, as it provides certainly more extensive practice for the formation of mental images owing to the cognitive mechanisms at work in the reading process. One has to mentally create the story's characters, settings and villages when reading, while with television one is faced with

> a potential merely for stimulating specific image
> content, but not for providing the opportunity for
> independent practice of such skills, since it
> substitutes an external image that one can passively
> lean on rather than forming one's own (Singer,1980:43).

A possible[1] outcome of such a proposition is that present forms of television, and present forms of receiving its content, may only hinder one's ability to construct one's own world. The viewer is subjected to so much stimulation, the critics contend, that his judgment, selective capacity and participative interest

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[1] I say possible because there is, at the present time, no single empirical study that has been conclusive on the cognitive consequences of habitual TV watching. Most material in this section is acknowledged by a large number of critics but nevertheless remains inferential by nature of its object.

are greatly perturbed. Still others will go as far as claiming that by "increasing one's tolerance to noise, chopped variety, imagistic chaos, and the atomization of time, they (present forms of TV) may shrivel up patience and tolerance generally"[2] (Cater/Adler,1975:78).

Reverting to psychology, detractors of the medium find some evidence to support the passive and dependent states that are nurtured by television. Laboratory experiments in psychology have for a long time discovered the inhibitions of the motor activity that result from a fixation to moving visual stimuli. We are told that this psycho-motor property, which is such an eminent feature of television, is used in numerous hospitals and health institutions as "an extremely effective nonchemical sedative"(Glynn,1973:87). In his controversial book, Mander (1978) draws testimony from a researcher in hypnosis who, talking about the flicker effect of the medium, declared:

> Sitting quietly, with no sensory inputs aside from the
> screen, no orienting outside the TV set is itself
> capable of getting people to set aside ordinary reality,
> allowing the substitution of some other reality that the
> set may offer. You can get so imaginatively involved
> that alternatives temporarily fade away" (196).

Another contention that is popular among the disputants of television, is its potential addictive power embedded in its

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[2] This brings to mind the following suggestion offered by some critics: if one accepts the idea that television has indeed shriveled up patience and tolerance, could it not be hypothesized that many of the strikes, walk-outs and demonstrations with which the public has become accustomed to over the recent years, might have a possible, albeit remote, connection with extensive TV viewing where conflicts are always resolved in less than 60 minutes ?

form of presentation. They cite television's faculty to override the viewer's desire to go to sleep, do domestic chores and similar ordinary actions. Extremists will even use terms such as "psychopathology" to describe some television watching behavior and add that "neurotic TV watching begins, through withdrawal and neglect, to undermine the patient's adaptations to the environment" (Kaplan,1972:22). There is also fear that television may be a cause of hyperactivity. Because of the continuous movement that is shown on the screen, some critics claim that we literally store the physical energy sent at us and that when we turn off the set "it comes bursting outward in an aimless, random, speedy activity" (Mander,1978:167).

Thus, the problem with television is that while this form of viewing stimulates action through its incessant bombardment of moving images, it also suppresses it by keeping its audiences glued to the set and trains them to passive acceptance of information, authority and values. Regarding the habitual watcher, who approaches the medium with very little specific needs but simply as a means of relaxation, Gitlin comes up with a disturbing diagnosis: "If the viewer is already dazed by the conditions of his work and the sheer weight of the alienating environment, TV deepens the narcosis" (1972:351). A milder yet more readily acceptable hypothesis concerning the potential addictive magnetism of television, proposes that by substituting someone else's thoughts, motives and desires to the viewer's own, it reduces the negative affect level in the watcher and

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forms in him, an emotional addiction comparable to very few other forms of entertainment.

The attack on television spreads even further to include comments on its fostering a 'low-brow' culture. Much of the antagonism comes from 'people of taste', be they intellectual or academic, who abundantly criticize the medium for producing conformity, maintaining social status quo, diminishing habit and benefit of critical reasoning, concentrating on trivia, and last but certainly not least, for hastening a downfall in aesthetic taste and general culture.[3] For the purist of high art, it is inconceivable that such a wide range of material destined for television should be made available to large publics without a minimal sense of moral obligation. These critics agree that television has almost become a necessity of modern life. However, what they are not willing to accept as readily, is the fact that the medium should be limited to sheer simplified forms of entertainment with very little educational content. They find evidence everywhere that television content is intellectually intolerable and inadequate. The most vocal moralists may even sound like Lee Loevinger, an American Federal Communication Commission commissionner in 1966:

> The more I see of TV, the more I dislike and defend it. TV is not for me but for many others who do like it, but who have no time for many things that I like. It seems to me that TV is: the literature of the illiterate, the culture of the low-brow, the wealth of the poor, the

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[3] Among those critics, Schiller, Herbert, The Mind Managers, Beacon Press, Boston, 1973 and Marcuse, Herbert, One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964.

privilege of the underprivileged, and the exclusive club of the excluded masses (in Mayer,1972:381).

Marxist critics tend to argue against television in politico-economic terms. They contend that, historically, mass-broadcasting developed as a direct result of the electronic industry and that both are fundamental to a production-oriented capitalist society. Furthermore, the mass-media, being free entreprises privately owned, strive primarily for profit-making (Gitlin, 1972). It is to the medium's advantage to maintain an ideological hegemony in a social system where, on a purely economic basis, much emphasis is put on quantity as opposed to quality products. The aim of commercial television they say, is not to arouse concern about economic and social realities, but on the contrary to lessen any quest to understand critically the true functioning of the capitalist scheme. The Marxist critique also makes reference to the psychological addictive dependency with particular inference to conditioned reflexes to stimuli and the need for stimuli that are triggered by habitual viewing (Real,1977:24). Furthermore, not only does marxist theory advocate the alienation of the worker who is separated from any control over his own work, but it also qualifies

> the emphasis on nonrational consumption and then disposal of consumer goods...(which is) proposed by advertising as an end in itself and a means to everything...

as a "commodity fetishism" (Real,1977:265).

There are still numerous other aspects of television that have been brought up for criticism. The last one I want to mention, is the role of TV in altering certain primary social

relations. Much has been written concerning the degree to which television impedes social interaction. First, in the home itself where the viewers display a restricted vocal communication among themselves and, secondly, on the exterior social life of viewers who visit one another less frequently due to accessibility of entertainment in the home. This leads certain observers to think that television really does have an effect on social life since time spent in front of the screen is time not available for other potential social activities (Comstock, 1978).

Other dissident voices apprehend a homogenization of social experience resulting from an increasing penetration of television information and entertainment into all classes of society. It is thought that life-styles, habits and manners, tastes and preferences, even beliefs, opinions and attitudes have a tendency to become uniform to the detriment of social variety and development of the human personality. Analysts who give this matter great consideration assume that "heavy exposure to cultural imagery shapes conceptions of reality" (Hughes,1980:288). The cultivation of symbolic structure presented on television is thus believed to be used by the viewers in interpreting their everyday reality, depriving them of exploring their own personal resources and conceptions in facing the adversities of existence. Correspondingly, the same people see an equally redoubtable threat to the admission of new foreign impressions and experiences provided by the medium which could eventually alienate people from their own culture

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(McBride,1980).*

Some Positive Aspects

Many of the previous criticisms can stimulate further

research. They raise relevant question marks that must be

addressed with due care. The rest of this chapter presents a

perspective that dwells on elements often underestimated in the

study of media effects. In the process, it is suggested that TV

technology can be looked at as having positive impact on the

audience thus forcing a re-evaluation cf the traditional

uni-directional concentration on media contents alone.

More crucial than anything else mentioned about television,

one principle stands out: the impact of any given communication

very seldom will depend on one particular factor. An array of

mediating variables counteract the direct influence of any one

factor. These may range from interpersonal communication, to

individual beliefs, concepts, interests and levels of knowledge

of a subject matter, and most significantly, on the degree of

involvement of the viewer.

The traditional behaviorist model of "stimulus/response" is

far from being applicable to the television situation. Besides,

such a theory, at least from an attitude and opinion change

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* Over the last decade, this point has literally become a
political battle-ground for citizen groups interested in
promulgating Canadian bilingualism and resisting unilingual
national broadcasting services. As an example, the 'Federation
des Francophones Hors-Quebec' is continuously lobbying C.B.C.
authorties to obtain french-broadcasting for French-speaking
remote communities of the northern regions, in order to insure
the maintenance of their cultural life.

perspective, would make the viewer a totally indiscriminative and dependent entity. The media have no power in and of themselves. They are inanimate and the power that is erroneously attributed to them, resides in the people who use them. Television is no more than a contributory agent to reinforcing already existing conditions. Critics argue vehemently against the intellectual inhibitions implicit in television. They believe that the medium literally hypnotizes the viewer, creates an addiction and finally succeeds in selling him any value-system and/or ideology that the capitalist industry behind the scene finds economically functional. This is too simplistic an approach. The viewer is much more active in the process than critics lead one to believe.

I have already listed some of the mitigating variables that barricade any direct effect of television. This defensive posture takes on a more elaborate, more dynamic shape when merged with Stewart Hall's "encoding/decoding" paradigm. Hall argues that the very first step to consider when talking about the 'success' of any message is the validity, the meaningfulness of the decoding process for the receiver. Meanings decoded are the instrumental elements in the so-called influence, entertainment and even instructional aspects of communications and are embedded with "very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences" (Hall,1973:3). Hence, it is not so much what is intended to be communicated (encoding) that is relevant in communication

analysis, but rather what is decoded, understood and put to at the receiving end of the procedure. Such a research strategy challenges the image of the passive, narcotized and chronically addicted audience.

Even the most casual communication seeks to express an idea. Television programs must have a plot, information broadcasts have opinions to share, sport shows have stars to display. In order that the audience arrives at a decoding as compatible as possible to the intended message, 'encoders' might develop a 'preferred meaning' package in structuring the key feature of the communication in combination with other elements. This must be done in such a way that only a limited number of meanings are opened for interpretation within that specific context. However, one must not see in this delimitation of meanings the basis for hegemonic communication. The 'realization' is still in the hands of the receiver. In addition, Hall is very well aware that "there can be no law to ensure that the receiver will take the preferred or dominant meaning...in precisely the way in which it has been encoded by the producer" (1973:9).

The active psychological processes as well as the importance of the sociological context shed an interesting light on the question of television viewing. More and more attention is being paid to television as a mere entertainment activity. It is acknowledged by an increasing number of communication students as a form of play, i.e. the viewing is no more than an

end in itself and rarely a means to an end (Silvey,1968, Stephenson,1967). Stephenson goes a step further and contends that regular attendance to TV programs may be "a step in the existential direction"(1967:45). People are thus presented as active users and definers of media materials. They consume a product to which they must give meaning, through which they get exposed to the dynamics of their social milieu and with which they can engage in interpersonal exchanges. It is in this sense, that media contents can enrich one's existence. Thus the attacks aimed at the triviality of most TV content, too hastily fail to take into account this aspect of reality (play) so important for the well-balanced personality. True, a good share of television content is not 'enlightening' but, why should it be ? The experience of the medium, as it now exists, is found by a great majority of viewers to be singularly satisfying (Comstock et al, 1978).

Television is also accused of bringing a very limited view of the world into the living-room, and also of affecting substentially the judgment of its viewers. Yet, there are just so many varied interpretations offered, and just as many levels of social organization considered that I personally tend to find the questions dealing with the effects of television rather inconclusive. As Singer suggests, "TV as practised today is just one of the many windows through which we observe, transmit and reflect our valuation of society to each other" (1968:154). In that sense, one could praise the medium for creating a more

aware citizen with a wider knowledge of the world, culture and history at large and even for expanding a secure parochialism. People are better provided today with all sorts of information on just about everything, than ever before. They are given the possibility to form their own image of the world based on the source of information in which they have the most faith.

Marxist critics are eager to claim that television forces consumerism in its viewers. It is hard to adhere to this view when, as seen in last analysis, it is the viewer that originates the exposure to the exterior influence. A fundamental prerequisite to such a behavior is, besides time and opportunity, a manifest interest in the viewing situation. In addition, as was mentioned previously, the production structures of television are by no means, a closed system. The 'encoding' is the end result of borrowing current topics of interest from the large social pool of activities. The messages are not imposed but merely reflected upon the viewers. Who would watch regularly and assiduously, programs that he just cannot relate to ? Interest in a subject matter comes from the wider world of socialization and despite its reliance on television for additional information, it must first and foremost be sustained through human interaction and must have relevance for one's identity in a group.

Much blame is launched on television on the basis that it tends to impede both motor and intellectual activity (Mander, 1978). Although fundamentally correct, such a view is only

partially true. It is contended that this very aspect of television, whereby it does the thinking for the viewer, is in itself of tremendous importance for the homeostasis of weary persons. Returning home from a troublesome day at work, it seems emotionally functional that a person wishes to be exposed to a distracting source of stimulation that will demand minimal cerebral efforts and provide immediate rewards. The benefits that viewers obtain from the experience are mainly of an emotional nature. The vicarious emotional states they indulge in provide them with a safety of consequences that differs greatly with real life practice. Also, there is reason to believe that some striking portions or elements of a program, be it fantasy, sport, education or information oriented, can be later utilized by the viewer either mentally rehearsing them or adding them to his own repertoire of actions and behaviors. To illustrate the former case, we can think of the viewer who, after a program is finished, re-plays the plot in his mind, incorporating his own feelings, verbal responses, attitudes and values to the denouement suggested in the televised episode. In both spheres of action, mental and/or physical, the potential for media material to enter one's thoughts and suggest certain types of conduct in certain situations, can certainly not be omitted.

Television as A Facilitator of Social Interaction

What was the extent of social interaction before television arrived in the home ? Studies done on the degree to which radio altered traditional patterns of entertainment, were already hinting at a lesser need for people to assemble and partake in community celebrations. In this regard, we might contemplate the fact that indeed, broadcasting media, and especially television, have played a significant role in the re-definition of the function of the neighborhood pub, community hall, local park and similar gathering quarters. But by no means, should it be implied that before television and radio came into being, people were much more prone to getting together to either exchange the latest gossip, or sing and dance around the violin of the neighbor's friend. Working longer hours, playing cards among family members, knitting or reading are all activities that were not directly socially committing.

Today, it is well documented that television can provide material for interpersonal conversation (Chaffee/McLeod, 1973). Individuals appropriate media content and use it as a basis for small group communication. Television material in this view, is perceived as operative in helping to organize both individual and group knowledge as well as bearing a significant influence on the behavior of everyday life. Because of its nature, i.e. it requires a private mode of reception, television is better suited to unify the viewers in spirit than physically. For those members of the public who share common affinities for say, sport

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finals, political announcements, live music concerts and nature documentaries to offer a few, the capacity for television to integrate them around a program of interest, contains all the impetus necessary to trigger an exchange of opinion at the first opportunity they have to get together. From a societal standpoint, this use of the medium is of utmost relevance. As Kline et al mention: "Talking about a topic raises its salience to the conversants and may also give information about the topic the character of 'social currency'" (1974: 117).

Occasionally, television may be the catalyst for a physical gathering of people. Granted that this occurence is rather exceptional if compared to the general individualistic character of consumption, we cannot however dismiss outright the friendly reunions and parties that originated on the pretext of watching 'Hockey Night in Canada', 'The Academy Awards' and similar highly talked-about spectacles and sporting events. In this context, both usages of television, whether by oneself or in small groups, point to the same social involvement initiated by television. Because of their respective participation and experience in various levels of social action, people form and develop a taste and an aesthetic sense that is congruent with their group affiliations. Thus, from a popular culture standpoint, television offers innumerable objects and situations to be actively interpreted, defined and utilized by the viewing public, in a manner that best suits its specific needs.

Neither a medium such as television nor interpersonal communication in the TV era, can conclusively be understood without reference to one another. They have to be seen as interconnected and complementary. The relevance of television in someone's life must be analyzed with a proper treatment and evaluation of the maze of social relationships and interactions within which a person has functioned before, during and after his confrontation with television. It is through this social dimension of mass communication that meanings are defined, interests in specific topics cultivated and subsequent participation in media material sustained and validated.

Context of the Communication Situation

A great deal of criticism about television exaggerates the dominance of media content. We are led to believe that programs can perform a slow but effective brainwash over the years, and achieve control over the viewer's life. I want to pursue my disagreement with this point.

Chaney has expressed his preference for the term media 'performance' over media content (1972). The latter terminology, he contends, is too restrictive since it suggests that symbols, objects and situations portrayed in the media have an intrinsic value which is to be correctly processed if any effect is to occur. The word 'performance' on the other hand, is much more inclusive and refers to the whole media experience. People are treated as being part of it; very much like the public attending

a show. Both the 'performer' and the 'performee' (spectator)
fully participate in, and are equally responsible for the
success or failure of the performance. In terms of television
materials, the use of the word media 'performance' offers more
latitude for a positive treatment of the mass media, and of
television in particular.

Indeed, the notion of television 'performance' is radically
opposed to the much heralded state of defenseless reception in
which people are said to be exposed to media messages. This
poorly founded theory which, as many suspect, has been
propagated by marketing laboratories hoping to entice big
corporations into buying their services for advertising
purposes, has been almost completely abandonned in recent years.
In fact, this re-evaluation of the media/person interaction
became a necessity in light of the revelations obtained through
empirical content analyses. What is now suggested, is that
meanings derived from media messages are impossible to predict
from manifest content. The comprehension, accomodation and
utilization of those meanings are of a very subjective nature
and in this sense, the dynamics concealed in the word
'performance' are a much better reflexion of the veritable
transaction.[5]
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[5] The repeated occurence of media 'content' throughout the
course of the text is justified by two factors: a) practicality
-the term media content is generally far more closely associated
with television than 'performance' which tends to refer to live
artistic exhibitions, and b) theory -the use of media 'content'
serves the purpose of this thesis in helping to demonstrate that
people do not passively execute commands embedded in contents
but rather that contents are treated as means by which people

Essential in the understanding of audience behavior with
regards to television, is the web of social conditions prevalent
in an individual's environment. Nobody approaches television
'tabula rasa'. A host of social situations may be present within
an individual: tensions, anxieties, needs, values, expectations,
desires that can be best responded to through the consumption of
television materials. Contrary to what many critics affirm, the
individual does not react to television but rather adapts to its
offerings by extracting what he finds appropriate at that given
moment. As will be seen in chapter 5, the functionalist approach
defends this model.

It is somewhat startling to read people like Gitlin, who
advocates that "the habitual viewer seems literally entranced,
hypnotized and made passive" in the presence of television
(1972:351). Yet there are communication researchers who face
problems of a totally different nature: how to define 'viewing'
as an independent activity since it is so often reported to be
accompanied by reading, eating, writing, talking and even
playing? (Robertson,1979). Many are inclined to think that
television viewing is more often than not a discontinuous
activity, undertaken amidst many potentially disturbing noise
sources and is very often thought to be given no more than
peripheral attention. Comstock reports on studies indicating TV
viewing is frequently secondary to some other activity (1978).

5(cont'd) actively define, interpret and participate in the
mediated performance.

Moreover, there is often a secondary activity being attended to, even when viewing is the primary focus of interest.

Considering the Viewer

Any study of television, if it does not want to be considered one-dimensional, must expose the contribution of the viewer to the communication situation. Criticism that favors the uni-directional impact of television on its viewers, fails to account for a rich reservoir of progressive thoughts on the medium/public relationship. I wish to express some of the most relevant ideas on the topic.

Many psychological experiments have proven to be enlightening in the study of communication messages. Their treatment of messages as symbolic entities and dependent on the subjective decoding of the receiver, stood as a serious threat to the long-established behaviorist tradition of stimulus/response theory. The investigation of the communication processes then adopted a more individualistic frame of reference, so that a new terminology emerged and was being applied to the majority of relevant research. Terms such as 'selective exposure', 'utility theory', 'resonance principle' and others of that nature, all regard the media consumer as playing a very active and selective role in the way he approaches a new situation. Moreover, there is increasing credence in

the fact that individuals bring to each environment, preestablished schema or what might be called

> 'preparatory plans', based of course, on a previous
> experience about what may be expected in a situation
> (Singer,1980:34).

The emphasis that is now being put on the social and

psychological characteristics of a person is of significant

assistance in defining enjoyment and sensitivity to various

types of television programming.

It is interesting to note that a good part of the

literature on media effects comes from laboratory experiments.

These have an intrinsic limitation: in a laboratory test, the

individuals receive a message, whereas in real-life situation

only those who voluntarily wish to, expose themselves to the

message whose effects are then measured. In addition, messages

studied 'in the field' are living organisms, in that they are

objects of discussions among friends, workmates, relatives,

etc., whose meanings are added to the original information. On

the contrary, in laboratory studies this vital social component

of the communication is, if not totally absent, considerably

inhibited. Yet, despite the rigid boundaries of the laboratory

setting, some golden rules in communication analysis emerge.

Thus, from cognitive dissonance theory, it becomes widely

acknowledged and accepted that selective exposure is operative

basically as a mechanism of dissonance reduction (Festinger,

1957). In other words, a simply accidental and completely

non-selective exposure to media is believed to be virtually

impossible, as people are naturally inclined to process,

consciously or not, messages in line with their own

predispositions.

However comprehensive the concept of selective exposure promises to be, it still has some weaknesses. There are just too many dependent variables involved in this theory to guarantee any secure prediction of behavior. In fact, to this day, we still lack evidence that clearly indicates the presence of a general preference for supportive messages, and equally important, of avoidance of non-supportive material (Sears, D./ Freedman, J.L., 1971).

It seems crucial to include in this section the 'utility factor' of the messages gathered. With such an important annex to the theory, it becomes apparent that media material which promises, or has proven, to fulfill a specific goal or need, will be preferred over any other. Various motives may be involved in the preference of a certain program, or program type, besides the personal utility that a viewer makes of it. For example, the availability of the material sought is certainly a most important variable in defining the value attached to it. When viewers know that every week they can rely on "W-5" for in-depth reports on currents events or "XYZ's Game of the Week" for sports, they are more likely to turn to these shows to satisfy their taste for news or sports than if these programs were only sporadically available to them. In this case, they would most likely transfer their needs on to other programs. Also, we might expect that the effort required and the education level of the receiver can be significant determinants in evaluating the utility of a television program.

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The growing emphasis on the receiver as the focal point of study, has produced another fertile theory. One that contends that the audience will attend, perceive and remember material that is primarily pleasurable and that in some ways, satisfies some needs and desires. Known as the Uses and Gratifications approach, the model once again highlights the meaning that the viewer arrives at in the viewing situation, and by the same token rebuffs the assumption about the uniform impact of television. An inherent problem with this promising model, is that it must specify what are the kinds of needs that are gratified through television. When applied to large and complex levels of social organization, the model admittedly faces severe difficulties. How are we to define the gratifications that say, a lower middle-class sample obtains from a specific type of program ? Or again, for what functional gratification do women at home watch soap operas ? Those are the types of questions that are too broad to be adequately dealt with within the analytical framework of a Utility theory.

To give a need or a preoccupation of a psychological nature systemic proportions, is a challenge that very few models can support consistently through empirical demonstrations. More manifest needs like companionship, entertainment and need for information can be better extrapolated to the whole social system. Gratifications of a personal, at times pathological order however, must be explained in relation to a much smaller immediate group context. So the model is best suited for

studying the individual's network of small group ties, but more precisely

> the uses which are studied nearly always concern the individual use of mass communications either to facilitate integration or to compensate for frustrations with these ties (Chaney,1972:33).

Subsequent implications of this approach suggest that each and every use of media performance carries with it a positively functional consequence, assuming human beings strive for pleasure-inducing activities. Therefore, contrary to what some opponents of TV think, the rewards obtained from television -and from most media- are not predetermined but rather develop through experience of various situations and social conditions. In this way, the individual is once again the key element, the dominant figure in any behavior modification scheme.

Schwartz's writing is very perceptive of the active role played by the viewers. He summarizes this operational principle:

> The meaning of (the producer's) communication is what a listener or viewer gets out of his experience with the communicator's stimuli. The listener's or viewer's brain is an indispensable component of the total communication system. His life experiences, as well as his expectations of the stimuli he is receiving, interact with the communicator's output in determining the meaning of the communication (1973:25).

In closing, I have one further remark. The cultural repertoire which most of today's technologically advanced societies offer to their members is so large, so complex and so diversified, it is hard to imagine, let alone advocate, that audiences would be experiencing their social environment in any patterned fashion through only one of the many sources

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available. The latter line of reasoning is far-fetched, unrealistic and can only be applied to an infinitisimally small segment of the population. For the population at large, television is a celebrated form of relaxation. It favors home-based entertainment with the effortless convenience of a portable multi-theatre, where television channels can analogically be represented as stages offering distinct performances from one another.

One aspect that does not always get the attention it deserves, is the restorative impact of television on a perturbed psycho-social equilibrium. This is the topic of discussion in the following chapter.

IV. Psycho-Social Implications

> Television...is just one of the many windows through
> which we observe, transmit and reflect our valuation of
> society to each other (Singer,A.,1968:154).

Initially thought of as a mere source of entertainment,

television has become over the years a matter of great concern

for both sociologists and psychologists. Evidence has been

gathered to show that when it is not used for entertainment,

people revert to television with a hope, conscious or not, to

restore, to re-establish a deficient psycho-social equilibrium

that is plaguing them.

Whether television is used as an escapist outlet or offers

gratifications that are absent from social, labor, or even

interpersonal circles of action, the emotional states obtained

through it are believed to be determinant in the development of

the personality. Among the critical implications that television

has for certain viewers, is the enlargement of social experience

that is made possible through the variegated presentations

filling the screen. It is suggested that this feature of the

medium operates as a purveyor of the standards, values and norms

dominant in the population.

Many communication analysts are worried about the way an

increasing portion of the public is experiencing 'reality'. The

mediated form of contact with the environment that is prevalent

in the television situation, is thought to be inimical to a

healthy human social development. Those who criticize the medium's potential in areas other than entertainment, often leave the impression that a non-mediated reality -if such a situation is actually possible- can engender a fully creative and developed personality.

The following chapter demonstrates that not only is it impossible to live in an objective "natural world", but that it is perfectly normal for man to develop, fabricate and distribute symbolic and even technological means through which people experience their culture.

Television as A Behavior Model

The contention that television can serve as a behavior model, seems to be accepted by a large section of the population. The problems with this situation however, are manyfold. In one of the most well-known instances, for example, critics almost incessantly revert to the modeling potentials of television -be it in adventure series, films, sports and even news- to explain a high degree of violence in our society. They often strive to establish direct links between opinions presented on television and attitudinal changes in the viewers. Also, if the data obtained by the critics is well-founded, it would appear that the importance put on the value of the 'social status' throughout the popular arts, engages people into

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idealist pursuits of success away from their true selves.[1]

These criticisms are only some of the many raised against
the actual programming of television. However, my goal is to
expose evidence of a different nature. Starting from the very
same content as the critics, a more leniant position is
suggested. One that prescribes an emphasis on the receiver/user
aspect of the communication situation.

As many researchers have noted, there is no question that
the audience does "gain a sense of what counts as acceptable
adult behavior from the public media (Cater, D., Adler, R.,
1975;12). The problem with such an assumption however, is to
apply it uniformly and indiscriminatively to all viewers at all
times under all circumstances. Thus a certain elaboration on the
concept of modeling, becomes necessary in order to prevent
erroneous perceptions about the medium's potential. One chief
consideration in studying television is to regard the medium's
primary function -entertainment- as potentially capable of being
used as a complementary source cf socialization. It can be
complementary to family, school, social groups and clubs,
church, work and other similar organizations to which one is
bound to be associated with during the course of one's life. It
is through these interpersonal relationships and interactions
that one forms perceptions and responses to a social reality.

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[1] See Ellul, Jacques, _Propaganda: The Formation of Man's
Attitudes_, Vintage Books, New-York, 1973. Of particular interest
is chapter 4 -Psychological Effects of Propaganda. Also, Mander,
Jerry, _Four Arguments For The Elimination of Television_, Morrow
Quill Paperbacks, New-York, 1978.

This 'direct experience' with the physical world is certainly the prime way to construct a set of values, but conversely this channel of experience is coercive. It limits acquisition of knowledge, facts and events that are not available in the immediate surrounding physical environment of a person.

It can be intellectually rewarding to reflect on the existence of a 'natural world' and thus question whether any culture, be it modern or primitive, has ever experienced a non-mediated reality. The observations we make of the real world, are filtered by our senses, values, beliefs, customs and instrumentation, so that knowledge and reality cannot be expressed in absolute terms. Moreover, man's innate materialism, whether it is manifested in the form of building shelters or fabricating weapons and clothes, negates any such notion of natural reality. Both 'natural world' and 'reality' are narrowly related to the social milieu from which they are derived. It is the sharing of a given social construct, or frame of reference vis-a-vis reality throughout the various levels of a society, that gives it the appearance of 'natural reality' (Berger,P./ Luckmann,T., 1967). Can we condemn this most fundamental human survival operation simply on the grounds that today it is performed through technologically advanced forms ? The gathering, consuming and integrating of information inevitably evolves away from primary sensory-physical means. Acceptance of this is acknowledging a considerable improvement in the quality and longevity of life resulting from technical progress.

This is where television enters the scene. The information traditionally conducted through interpersonal relations is increasingly harvested through mass mediated channels of communication, with television being the most accessible. Before one can speak of television's influence on people's behavior, it is essential to determine the extent to which what they acquire from the medium is actually being exhibited, with significant results, in their everyday relationships. Once this is established, it then becomes possible to think of television as a reinforcement stimulus to normal imitative behavior.

Ethicizing Function

Certainly among the most prone to television behavior modelling are those people who have very little community or family ties around which to fully develop their personalities. What is depicted as currently accepted modes of behavior on television, may be integrated and stored until an appropriate situation arises and triggers the dormant model. One should be careful not to limit the above point solely to psychopathic individuals. This tendency would be extremely misleading. What is implied here are situations, environments, conditions where regular and close social contact is hampered. For socialization purposes, these people have a great deal to gain from television. As Halloran notes, television can be looked at

> as providing information which extends far beyond one's immediate experience; as giving definitions and as supplying knowledge including stereotypes in uncertain and unclear situations; as offering a wider range of

role-taking models than would otherwise be available; as suggesting appropriate values and ideals for particular positions; as portraying many aspects of popular culture which other agencies do not transmit; as playing a part in the socialization process previously carried out by some other agency...(1970:30).

As an agent of social integration, television tends to support a common frame of reference and provide a terrain for experiencing the values of the culture, thus contributing to social stability and maintenance of social norms (Wright, 1975:131). Occasionally, television may also present vivid accounts of alternate lifestyles and aspirations that exist 'out there' in the normal social world. These portraits, which can diverge from the dominant cultural establishment, may be interpreted as a legitimation of counter-cultural values. This apparent contradiction of intent, must be seen as an indication and acknowledgement of the diversity of social forces present in the environment. Wright confers to television an 'ethicizing' function when, for the sake of social control and solidarity, it brings deviant behavior into the public realm. Thus we might be introduced on C.B.C.'s "The Journal" to surrogate parenthood where infertile couples pay $ 20,000 to borrow the services of a surrogate mother. Or again, we might be offered a ride through the subway of New-York city and experience vandalism at its worst. In this sense, television can complement, and even supplement if need be, social institutions in diffusing various ethical codes such as those found in politics, religion, education, entertainment and leisure, by establishing 'direct' contact with its audience (McQuail, 1969:12).

Television as An Agent of Socialization

Television has an extremely important social responsability. It is the prime source of cultural experience and expression for millions of viewers. Not only is it a carrier of culture, but also a chief selector of what is to be disseminated, to be made accessible to the members of a community. Although it is certainly correct to say that it is still possible to expose oneself to one's culture through traditional and interpersonal forms, the observer is now forced to consider the mass media as an increasingly influential channel of social participation.

The controversy surrounding television as a mass medium does not arise solely from its capacity to reach large groups of people. The actual number of people affected simultaneously by a message is of little significance in itself, as it was possible to address large audiences long before the emergence of modern electronic forms of communication. What is accentuated rather is television's

> ability to mass-produce messages that create mass publics; heterogeneous social aggregates that never meet face to face and may have nothing in common except the messages they share (Gerbner, 1972:155).

Television penetrates into all levels of society, into disparate groups of individuals whose viewing is evidently limited by what is available. But what does this indicate ? Has man not always been limited in his perceptions by the restrictions imposed by his environment ?

Writing about the interdependence between mass media and advanced industrial society, D. McQuail suggests that, based on the high average level of exposure to mass communication (radio, press and television) and the strong subjective attachment to this form of leisure pastime, membership in a modern society almost requires a moderate level of exposure to the various mass media of information and entertainment (1969:3).[2] Television therefore, is only one among the many modes of communication through which people are initiated, exposed to and confronted with the priorities of the existing dominant social codes. What is being put on the screen is, in a way, an encapsulation of the shared ways of viewing events and aspects of life. The learning and behavior inputs that people encounter with television, must first be experimented on and substantiated by interpersonal relationships before one can speak of television's influential efficacy. It is only through actual exhibition of behavior that the observer will be able to assess the true extent of television's impact on an individual's social behavior. It is in this sense, that television is believed to be an effective agent of social orientation. It can be just as influential as direct personal interaction in shaping one's response to media material and can also increase public participation by calling attention to topics, shows, events and situations that might have been

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[2] McQuail pushes his argumentation even further with this passage: "Indeed, as a way of spending time, TV viewing is actually more 'normal', in the sense of occuring more widely and frequently, than paid employment, since its incidence is equally high amongst the non-working population"(1969:3).

otherwise overlooked.

While it cannot be denied that television possesses all the basic requirements to be considered an instrument of indoctrination, it is also capable of catering to a number of needs and wishes that do not always easily find expression in large urban centers. If the need to be united to other persons is still prevalent in this world, then television may be seen as playing a part in the process. The commonality that is now found among people has expanded. In pre-electronic times, the sharing of experience could almost exclusively be done through physical presence. Today, this is often impossible. Even isolated individuals, be it because of spatial or temporal constraints, share a commonality with one another grounded on similar mediated experiences. The relevance of this phenomenon to the social system, is that television can be perceived as a dynamic force of social integration. The 'common ground' now opened to everyone for social interactions has reached proportions of a gigantic order. One should not be surprised that, on the level of interpersonal rapport, shared media experiences may even over-power non-media experiences in terms of the type of information exchanged.[3] What really becomes a matter of critical attention in this affair, is not so much that television provides some information or entertainment. It is rather its extremely wide dissemination to all levels of the social fabric

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[3] See Laba, Martin, "Folklore, Popular Culture, and The Active Audience" in Laba, M. and Narvaez, P., In Media Sense: Popular Culture and Folklore in Canada., Bowling Green, Ohio; Bowling Green University Popular Press, forthcoming 1983.

that raises questions.

Some social scientists have speculated that regular
television viewers, belong to a linguistic sub-community.[4] Some
words, names, expressions and advertized products are found to
have a higher frequency of occurence among TV watchers. A
situation somewhat akin to a free-association test. Certain
ready-made colloquialisms are appropriated from televised series
and used in daily interactions as a means of identification.
Those 'fashions of speaking', exemplifications of vernacular
tradition, are thoroughly interesting phenomena to investigate.
"Howie Meeker-isms", "Archie Bunker-isms" and Steve Martin's
"Excu-u-u-se me-isms" for example, may supply further evidence
on the socially integrative function of television by looking
into the linguistic patterns of communication that are seemingly
regulated by one, or many interrelated media. Thus, the
resulting television heavy-user group[5], can be perceived as a
creation of the communication process per se, a relationship
that takes shape between the audience and the media materials,
as a way of rendering the experience graspable. Besides, it is

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[4] See The Hofstra Study: A Measure of the Sales Effectiveness of
TV Advertising, by Coffin, T.E., N.B.C. Research Division,
New-York, 1950. A summary of the study is also available in
Brown, Roger, Words and Things, The Free Press, Glencoe,
Illinois, 1958, p.332. Also Paolo Giglioli's Language and Social
Context, Penguin Modern Sociology Readings, Baltimore, 1962,
presents a collection of interesting articles on the matter. See
in particular B.Bernstein, "Social Class, Language and
Socialization",chap.8, p.157.

[5] By no means, the only one to use linguistic codes but
certainly the only one to have those codes used by such a vast
and varied community.

Chaney who advocates that

> leisure and communicative activities result in shared
> affinities for common means for the expression and
> integration of social character and identity (in
> Carey/Kreiling, 1974:246).

The need for a common frame of reference finds expression in
television by providing elements from which and with which to
elaborate the togetherness.

The significance of the high average level of television
viewing -some figures report 30 hours/week (Gutman,1973)can be
seen as indicative of a general and diversified interest in
leisure activities. Correspondingly, there is supportive
evidence in favor of a mutually reinforcive effect among mass
media (Meyersohn, 1968:103). It is thought that individuals who
watch a lot of television are also bigger consumers of
newspapers, magazines, radio shows and the like. Television
thus, did not take time away from the other media in the sense
that people who were previously listening to three hours of
radio per day, were now spending an equal amount of time
watching television. Television re-allocated the periods devoted
to other sources of entertainment and reorganized leisure time
altogether. In a way, television can be described as a time
regulator due to the tightly programmed schedules to which
viewers are encouraged to conform. Parker is dispensing a
metaphor which, despite its accurateness today, may not be as
faithful to the reality of a very near future, when he says that
broadcast television is like a passenger train: it takes people
to scheduled places at scheduled times (1973:621).

Social benefits available through television for those members of the public who live a life with limited opportunities to experience 'stimulating situations', are positive notes in favor of the medium. In fact, if most people tend to surround themselves with friends of the same age, socio-economic level and with same global interest, television then has a capital role in enlarging their experience "putting them in touch with a much wider range of people than do their daily lives" (McGuire, 1974:180).

Despite the difficulties encountered in attempting to define what the social role of television really is, I would like to suggest two proprieties of television that appear singularly essential. First, as a technology, it can be described as a mere extension of the visual sense whereby routine information, entertainment and education are all made accessible to individuals, regardless of their social affiliation. In other words, television acts as a mirror and relayer of premises required in any given social membership. It provides common ground material to be applied and interpreted through participation in the activities of one's reference group. This integrative ability of television is manifested through various styles of programming. From Sunday morning gospel shows, to weekly consumer report broadcasts, to daily coverage of current worldnews, to Saturday-long parades of sportscasts, all attract a public that has indeed a high degree of interest in the material presented on the screen. That

interest is further reinforced by the social commitment that individuals tacitly make with their peer-group to update themselves and keep up with the developments affecting their mutual preference for a specific topic. Second, as a socialization agent, it has the cogency to heighten perception, thus revealing new relationships, new rapports that can only increase one's awareness of the environment into which one is operating. The latter point is particularly critical, mainly because of the concept of 'new relationships' that is initiated by television. Initiated in the sense that the medium presents material that is discussed, evaluated and, in the final stage, interpreted through interpersonal context.

Since its inception, one of the great appeals of television has been its inherent concentration on light -and let us admit it- even trivial, contents. This characteristic of programming, far from shocking the viewers, is so popular, so much in demand, that one has to pay close attention to the matter. What is there in the comedy programs or police stories that is so fascinating? The answer to that may be found in the numerous studies and research that claim that the natural escapist drive of most viewers is fully contented by such 'imaginary-inducing' programs (Tannenbaum, P.,1980).

Television as An Escapist Outlet

As the works of psychologist Carl-Gustav Jung have
indicated[6], numerous artifacts, art forms, legends, costumes and
celebrations throughout history have testified to mankind's
innate desire to break loose from his immediate environment to
enter one of a more magical order with a minimal degree of
restrictions. The play element in culture performs a similar
function while also stressing social constraints as represented
by rules and objectives. In that imaginary world, man's dearest
desires and wishes would be allowed to materialize. This
identification process with the spirits, characters and animals
of the fantasy world, has always been considered an essential
activity by its participants. Regardless of the path one embarks
on to escape from reality, a common feature seems to be always
present; the escapist route adopted appears as a manifestation
away from boredom and even at times, from one's troubled self.
In addition, the momentary psychological relief that the
individual obtains through escapist fare and activities, may
further allow him to function more adequately within the
structures of his social system.

Of course when the term 'escape' is brought up, a series of
pejorative connotations can be cited, as if it meant a total
rejection of reality, an abdication towards one's inefficiency,
or worse still, a sort of intoxication with the fantastic images
of an imaginary world. My understanding of the word escape

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[6] See in particular <u>Man</u> <u>and</u> <u>His</u> <u>Symbols</u>, Dell Publishing Co.,
New-York, 1964.

within the context of this thesis, is of an existential nature. I use the term in the sense of forgetting about one's difficulties, and in so doing, attempting to alleviate a disturbed emotional state. Moreover, it is my belief that not only is man entitled to get away from problematic concerns, but it is equally imperative that he be given the opportunity to visit, in fantasy, an ideal universe where his repressed wishes are let free, and in which a definite psychological utility is obtained.

No one, with a minimum of human compassion, would be willing to blame someone who is trying to forget his miseries by watching a television show. For this troubled viewer, TV is performing the seemingly impossible task of filling the head with something other than a continuous dilemma. In this regard, television is an unequivocal alternative to a strenuous situation since it

> reduces negative affects and can for long periods
> substitute another's brain for one's own, thus
> minimizing painful private rehearsals of one's own
> problems (Singer,J.L., 1980:50).

This is not to say that <u>only</u> television can alleviate the harmful tension in the viewer. In fact, just about anything that is not related to the frustrations and limitations engendered by one's troubles would do. The reason why television is so massively and so frequently reverted to for escape purposes, has to be seen in terms of its ubiquity, its relative facility of access and most importantly, for the low degree of intellectual demands that it exerts on the viewer.

The specificity of the rewards brought forth through escapist activities via television, needs to be presented in greater detail. Chaney for one, thinks that the rewards obtained through TV, can hardly be predetermined but rather "will develop through experience of situations" (1972:51). We have already seen how television can be used in interpersonal relationships. But the psychologist Wiebe, brings to the situation a whole different perception. For him, television may be used in a completely opposite manner by viewers who see in the medium, an opportunity to escape real conversation through imaginatively being in contact with the outside world. First, he notes that television does indeed present images, sounds, printed symbols and the like, but never actual persons. The illusory sensation of interacting with persons on the screen is most deceptive. The viewer does not have to follow the conversation, interject occasionally, react to remarks, make compromises and all those essential feed-backs expected in a real exchange. For someone who, for one reason or another, does not feel capable of going through the relatively demanding operations involved in a conversation, television can be efficient in providing "the sense of experience without the accomodation required in true participation" (Wiebe,1969,527).

The retreat to the company provided by television characters, offers the viewer gratifications for which he is only remotely responsible. The only initiative the viewer really takes is to turn on the set. Afterwards, he reverts to a taking

pattern, obtaining personal satisfaction through what he interprets psychologically as a reciprocal relationship with the persons involved in his television fantasy. Of course, it is all too easy to disqualify this use of television on the grounds that it is anti-social, that it encourages solitude and deepens the vicious circle in which a person has engaged himself. If these observations are sufficient to censure the escapist properties of television, one should be reminded that McLuhan (1962) made similar comments on the use of the printed book. Yet, who would dare think negatively about a heavy-reader ? We seldom question the intellectual value of the printed word, but are much more eager to ban any pronounced use of television. The novelty of television obliges severe moral and aesthetic criticism. What fails to be perceived though, is the fact that it is not so much what is being consumed for escape that matters but rather the functionality of the way in which it is done. Everyone agrees, in principle, that nothing equals direct contact with one's environment for a full practical experience with society's norms, values and tenets. But sometimes, the adversities that an individual encounters, may get so confusing as to elicit a deep need for escape, or retreat, during which time the person will work on finding a solution to his disequilibrium. Television, in this respect, functions as a significant agent. The social contact it maintains with the troubled person, ought to be seen as a most crucial tie, one on which the individual relies heavily to justify his sense of

participating in the issues of his social group.

In defense of this point, Katz and Foulkes (1962) suggest that if a person is to cope adequately with his environment, he must be given the possibility to retreat to gather the necessary strength. Reading, whether it is books, magazines or newspapers, also performs the task of distracting from the complexities of one's life. However, television appears to offer a major advantage over other media. It is an alternative that has immediacy. It is always present, always available and its effects on the viewer are instantaneous. It provides the fantasies sought to make one forget, with a minimal degree of intellectual effort, the pressures of daily routines. If we accept then that escapist material on television does bring some definite rewards to the viewer, would it not be possible to identify those gratifications which are met ?

Psychological Comfort and Escapist Fare

Most communication analysts agree with Halloran in thinking that "the functions served by the escapist material and its effects depend on the needs brought to it by individuals" (1965,21). Thus, what has to be taken into consideration when attempting to shed light on the gratifications derived from TV content, are the types of social and psychological circumstances that may lead one to certain orientations toward television. In advocating this application to the study of television, the subjectivity of the viewing act becomes a prime consideration.

No two viewers approach the medium with the same attitude, frame of mind and expectations. The list of possible motives for choosing television as a way of passing time, could be endless. Yet, too often, escapist material is seen as being itself an obstacle to the real solution of the problems which led a person to seek such material in the first place. It can be contended that from a sheer psychological perpective, retreat into escapist fare has useful benefits for both viewer and society.

Consider for a moment, the kinds of opportunities that television can provide for people in need of emotional release and relaxation, of stimulation of their creativity and imagination, or in need of escape from the burdens of work or family-related problems. For these persons, as well as others, television achieves a major role: it carries them _away_ from painful personal ambiguity. The assumption that escapist contents or drives are dysfunctional can thus be objected. If we consider other channels of escape like drug addiction, alcoholism, consumption of expensive material goods and even mentally-based behavioral disorders that people sometimes revert to, television then appears as a rather tame route.

Television as Cathartic

High art proponents touch a most important area of discussion when they refuse to establish outright, a direct relationship between television and the tension-reduction aspect obtained through the viewing process. For these critics, the

'fake' rapport that emerges between the viewer and the medium

further inhibits active participation in creating the illusion

that an informed citizen is an active citizen. This

dysfunctional 'narcotization'[7] described by those analysts has

its merits, but fails to look objectively at a most complex

human phenomenon: emotional restoration.

There is reason to believe that television can contribute

positively to someone's catharsis. Although not confined to the

Aristotelian sense, my definition of the word 'catharsis' in the

actual context of this thesis conceptually borrows from the

classical usage and further expands into the more recent

interpretation arrived at by psychology. In other words, the

cathartic attributes of television are seen as primarily

effective in fostering an abreaction, i.e. a process by which

the individual externalizes a suppressed desire by projecting it

into the fantasy/escapist situation provided by the television

program. If, as the high art judges say, no direct

correspondence can be established between reducing tension and

TV-viewing, how are we to explain then that

> felt deprivations emanating from the social environment
> do lead people to turn to television to seek out
> emotional restoration? (Johnstone, 1974:42)

It is not that the televised medium is the only one capable of

fulfilling this level of personal satisfaction. Other media

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[7] This term was first introduced by Lazarsfeld and Merton. They
believe that access to mass-communicated news may result in
apathy. The false sense of mastery over one's world resulting
from passive reception of news constitutes a prime source of
worry for some social scientists.

forms like cinema, radio, books and music are all capable, to a certain extent and within reasonable limits, of offering considerable comfort to persons in need of it. But owing to its accessibility and low level of demand that it exerts on the viewer, television seems to be the favorite mode of relaxation and/or retreat for a vast majority of people.

The reason for this marked preference over other media and activities, is still unclear though many theories attempt to solve the enigma. The difficulty of this case resides in the subjective function that television plays for different viewers. As mentioned earlier, it is an almost impossible task to determine clearly what a population expects from a television program, and an even more excessive enterprise to attempt to investigate the kinds of personal needs and anticipations that will be met by television. So, unless they are provided with specific, well-documented examples, mass communication theorists can only generalize principles and suggest patterns in trying to unravel television's overwhelming attraction. One interesting observation in this respect, comes from Manning who indicates that the restorative potential of television might be associated with a larger freedom of choice of the type "doing what you want" versus "doing what you must" (and Averson,1968). Manning further argues, that the simple fact that one is allowed to do (view) what one likes and for as long as one wants, constitutes in itself an influential opportunity with regards to re-establishing a threatened equilibrium. Sitting relaxed, not

having to concentrate, looking at images whenever one wishes to, having the feeling that someone 'out there' is talking to us, even at times doing his very best to entertain us, are but a few satisfactions that may have a most positive effect on a person's psychological balance.

Life in today's urban environment has been, and certainly continues to be, a recurring subject of investigation for social scientists. While many acknowledge the tremendous progress on the material aspect of life, there is great concern as to the psycho-social repercussions involved in today's style of living. There are talks of growing loneliness, poverty, alienation, boredom and passivity that all seem to culminate into a depersonalization of the individual. The point is not to be for or against technology, and its related aftermaths, but rather to look at how people function with it, integrate and adapt to it when need be. There are critics who, like Van den Haag, level some rather virulent attacks on the present system, with a specific reference to the mass media. His argument deserves to be given attention:

> All mass media in the end alienate people from personal experience and though appearing to offset it, intensify their moral isolation from each other, from reality and from themselves. One may turn to the mass media when lonely or bored. But mass media, once they become a habit, impair the capacity for meaningful experience...The habit feeds on itself, establishing a vicious circle as addictions do... (1957,529).

The validity of this argument cannot be dismissed altogether, since it is in fact possible to find examples to support such extreme cases. Reality however, if taken more globally, presents

a different picture. It is not at all certain that the mass media engender the alienation and social deprivation that are felt by a considerable segment of the population. Rather, I tend to believe that their frustrations in the arenas of social, labour, political and even interpersonal action, are the basis for their withdrawal into the media world which offers substitute gratifications. In Carey's opinion, this withdrawal may also work toward the formation of a ritual/integrative process among the participants. According to this ritual view of communication, the "drawing of persons together in fellowship and commonality" is aimed more at maintaining a society than at propagating messages in space (1975:177). Thus, it becomes possible to establish an operational relationship between the communal catharsis that is achieved and the ritual-like mode through which the viewers are brought together. Television in this perspective, can play a crucial role in creating, modifying and transforming a shared culture, a common set of beliefs, values and aspirations among its viewing audiences.

In addition, in restricting the analysis of alienation to the harmful effects of mass media alone, supporters of this view omit that the impairment of meaningful experience is not only caused by the mass media alone. On the contrary, literature in sociology and psychology has indicated time and time again, the need for people, from all levels of the social structure, for evasion, change of atmosphere and retrieval into a dream-like world where fantasies and deep-felt desires are allowed to flow

free.

In this sense, media content has a crucial role to play in today's world. Without denying the importance of face-to-face relationships, media messages can be perceived as valuable tools in supplementing, enriching, reinforcing and compensating for personal social experience. McGuire offers a supportive reflection on this issue.

> Perhaps the satisfactions that mass communication can offer to the person, pitiful though they may be, are better than the alternatives offered in the real life of quiet desperation which many members of the public endure. The large proportion of their time that people choose to devote to media consumption is evidence that however illusory the gratification offered it may exceed the more tangible but inaccessible or unsatisfying satisfactions available in their actual world (1974:169).

Given then that television provides a certain level of compensation and that it also facilitates temporary escape from the pressures of the social world, television viewing, with these usages in mind, may reveal an unconscious motive in the individual. Although this speculation goes beyond the information collected from the viewers, mass media behavior of the alienated, and of the deprived in general, may involve a certain element of instinctual striving to reestablish effective and satisfying social rapports with their peers. The viewers would store media messages until appropriate situations render their 'acting out' useful. In this sense, mass media analysis seen from a psychologically restorative point of view, can be apparent to a theory of personality. The use made of television is aimed basically at maintaining a minimal state of well-being.

And for those in conflictual periods, the cathartic relief or escape might be singularly beneficial.

Television as A Provider of Fantasy Material

In support of the psycho-social benefits that audience obtains from the mass-media, there is a body of opinion that holds that sheer fantasy experience, because of its emotional character, can be rewarding for a viewing or listening audience. Tannenbaum contends that although perceived at a vicarious level, the emotional states involved in fictional and fantasy shows may prove to be instrumental in the development of the personality. He further argues that

> emotional behavior plays a significant part in our lives and provides a major source of motivation for much of our communication behavior. This suggests that the attempt to satisfy such desires on a widespread (and, hence, possibly a diluted, shallow) basis is why so much of our popular media content is geared to entertainment, and why such emotionally arousing TV-entertainment programs are consistently and repeatedly among the most popular in different countries (1980:110).

Various advantages have been attributed to fantasy material on television with the most prominent being certainly its relative safety over real experience. Viewers are transported from place to place, get involved at times in most complex situations, and experience others' joys, sorrows, dilemmas and the like. They may create close emotional bonds with the characters and the plots as they may just as well 'step out' of precarious developments. The commonness among the various quiz shows, comedy programs and soap operas also offers a degree of

safe predictability that cannot be discounted. It is as if the programs were a kind of ritualistic representation of human emotions whereby the good always succeeds against the evil. It is anthropologist Levi-Strauss who writes about the conjunctive effect of the rituals by which initially separated groups of profane and sacred, living and dead and similar oppositions are brought about in a sort of union and even, communion (1966:32).

For tribal societies, the celebrations of those rituals are of prime significance in providing the imaginary evidence that the society of the community was under good care. This suggests that both rituals and TV programs could have some rather interesting similarities in terms of their function, and also with regards to the use people make of them. The affinity of these modes for stimulating fantasy images and for asserting basic communal principles is an area of investigation that could be enriching in our own quest to understand the psychological operations at play in the television experience.

Again, watching television does not have to be solely motivated by a need for escape . In fact, a simple need for entertainment, for a break in the daily routine or still for changing one's thoughts may be sufficient impetus to warrant tuning in on any program. Moreover, it is also hypothesized that a form of para-social relationship of fictitious friendship may emerge between a popular entertainer or program and the viewer (Rosengren,1974:269). The imaginary intimacy may be present quite vividly in the viewer's mind between the program intervals

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and may provide him with considerable mental enjoyment. Similarly, children can think of themselves as "The Fonz", Gretsky, Brooke Shields and act out in their imaginative play, behavioral experiences that are most constructive in the development of their cognitive, emotional and interpersonal skills.[8]

No one will argue that the high-profile celebrities of our times are endowed with a mysticism that fascinates almost everyone. For the common individual, getting to know how a famous person made it to such a visible position is most intriguing. In this respect, television can offer the closest intimate look at these peoples' lives by introducing them, and their achievements, to the layman. Seeing them quietly talking about themselves, casually answering mundane questions, has all the ingredients to make one dream how much more exciting a life it would be if one were a celebrity. It is similar to the merging of the profane and the sacred with which the work of Levi-Strauss has familiarized us.

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[8] For further elaboration on this point, see a most interesting article by Jerome L. Singer, "The Power and Limitations of Televison: A Cognitive -Affective Analysis", chap 3 in Percy H. Tannenbaum, The Entertainment Functions of Television, Laurence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, New-Jersey, 1980.

Further Contributions

We have already been introduced to the concept of natural versus mediated reality at the beginning of this chapter. However, in light of the ground covered, it would be useful to add a few more notes to this essential feature of human life. More specifically, it becomes essential to provide solid counterevidence to Mander's contention that

> TV is capable of dominating personally derived imagery -from books or imagination- and it is also capable, at least some of the time, of causing confusion as to what is real experience and what is TV experience (1976:246).

First, Mander seems to be advocating only one single way of building up one's reality. If such is the case, then Mander's assumptions are opened to severe attacks. Psychologists and sociologists have both spent considerable time and effort to demonstrate that perception and reality are highly subjective domains. They have never thought of considering this subjectivity 'confusing' or even 'unsafe' for the well-being of a person. Carey provides a most valid point to the debate in saying that

> what men create is not just one reality, but multiple realities. Reality cannot be exhausted by any one symbolic form be it scientific, religious, or aesthetic. Consequently, the true human genius and necessity is to build up models of reality by the agency of differing symbol forms -verbal, written, mathematical, gestural, kinesthetic -and by differing symbol forms- art, science, journalism, ideology, ordinary speech, religion, mythology...(1973:190).

This statement thus gives full credit to mediated forms of experience such as television, as it too, offers images of one's personality and role in society. Obviously, it is not at all

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clear whether these functions of television are manifest, latent or simply accidental. This type of analytical uncertainty is what led Chaney to suggest the notion of "subjective reality" in the mass media. For him, the reality that is portrayed on television cannot help but be subjective since

> the comprehension and accommodation of any aspect of a performance is not necessarily predictable from manifest content (1972:11).

But as in the study of any other activity, the psychological processes at play in the viewing of television have to be approached with openmindedness. One must realize that situational and individual differences are determinant factors in the interpretation arrived at by a person. In this sense, it is utopian to envisage television as having a definite impact on its viewers, let alone the uniform, standardizing effect it allegedly leaves on them. The psychodynamics involved in the act of watching television, are initiated and sustained by the viewers. They are the ones who select the inputs they want to be exposed to, and who construct the interpretations they make of the material they watch. They also, in the last analysis, fulfill the need or wish they originally brought to the situation.

That television falsifies the image of reality, as Mander writes, is arguable. What is certain however, is that for the vast majority of citizens, their daily contact with the reality of their social activities, is certainly not something imaginary. The natural limitations of their work and obligations

do not leave much room for surprise or better still, for multiple identity. Television, though at times dull, redundant and even trite in its treatment of things, nevertheless provides the audience with a large amount of new possibilities, combinations and images of an unusual even magical order. It is A. Linick who says about TV's capacity to violate traditional reality and identity that it also "brings to psychic life the instantaneous possibilities of identity transformation" (1970:653). Even though this process is thought to be of prime relevance in the development of children's mental health, it is not at all evident that residual manifestations could not be present in adulthood as well.

I am aware of the poor degree of solid empirical evidence available to support the psycho-social potentials attained via television. Furthermore, it is Carey who warns us that

in trying to understand the meanings persons place on experience, then, it is necessary to work through a theory of fictions: a theory explaining how these forms operate, the semantic devices they employ, the meanings they sustain, the particular glow they cast over experience (1975:190).

However fictitious the analysis may seem to some, research has provided evidence that various permanent or transient personal attributes of a psychological nature, are related to both the amount and type of programs viewed. In a very comprehensive book that Comstock wrote about the influence of television on human behavior (1978), he presents the possibility of an existing rapport between anxiety, stress and social coping and television viewing. Not refuting totally the idea that mere diversion and

entertainment are largely responsible for the consumption of television, Comstock provides examples of experiments that advocate relief from psychological discomfort as the basis for using television.

Another critique that is often leveled against television, is the passive state into which it draws the viewer. Mander even speaks of TV encouraging mass passivity. It has been shown that not only is television not that passive an activity, because of the other things the person is doing while watching, but also that it can be an active, involving undertaking if looked at from an intellectual or even interpersonal standpoint. Moreover, Tannenbaum goes as far as to perceive television as a potential form of participation in the affairs of society. The idea is worth some reflection as other writers have corroborated this use of the medium. For instance, H. Newcomb exemplifies this concept by referring to topics of N. Lear's comedy series such as "All in the Family", "Good Times" and "The Jeffersons"(1976). In these programs, the public is confronted with serious contemporary social issues, albeit in a humorist fashion, the likes of racism, alcoholism, black middle-class strife and various traditionally unacceptable social and sexual situations. According to Newcomb, all Lear did was put on the screen topics and issues that people privately discussed, things that were in their immediate social environment. In so doing, he gave the public a chance to look at itself. That television is capable of achieving this role should not be all that surprising. This

medium, in a manner similar to how radio operates, is commonly thought to be capable of establishing the connection between persons and society.[9]

A final comment in closing. In response to critics who do not willingly acknowledge the potentials of television for enlarging one's social consciousness[10] , the concept of social reality should be looked at more closely.

It is essential that we draw a distinction between what one learns through direct communication with others and what one learns from observing the behavior of others. But the two aspects intertwine and are at the very basis of one's global perspective. They constitute the mental set with which people approach new situations and learn to deal with their world. To say that only direct contact with one's environment is truly serviceable to the human species and by doing so, negate most mediated forms of interaction, appears as a most limiting statement at this time. The contact with the world 'out there' that television offers, seems to be met with considerable

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[9] The argument states that structurally related needs find satisfaction in certain media more than in others. For example, it is believed that needs that have to do with 'self-fulfillment' may direct the individual towards books, magazines and cinema. Radio, television and newspapers are said to be related to social needs. The following article provides a thorough description of the concept: "Utilizations of Mass Communication by the Individual", by Katz, E., Blumler, J., and Gurevitch, M., in The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives On Gratifications Research, by Blumler, Jay G. and Katz, Elihu, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, California, 1974.

[10] Mander will even advocate that "TV cuts the child/adult off from real sensory stimulation" (1976:168).

satisfaction by the viewing public.[11] Whether this form of experience is successful because it is presented in an entertaining format or because it permits psychological identification and/or escape, does not impede its role in the formation of one's cognitive map. Television, undoubtedly, has become a major force into the dynamics of society. We can no longer adopt an indifferent attitude vis-a-vis the ways TV affects the allocation of leisure time, how it influences other personal and social activities in general, and more specifically how it can satisfy various psychological needs for some viewers. Television, by borrowing topics from the crowd's concerns, priorities and activities, does not provide the people with totally irrelevant content. Granted the treatment made of these social events by the medium may distort an objective appraisal, the fact remains that the viewers are given the occasion to observe and experience from a distance, circumstances that can, and at times do, have a bearing on the way they conceive and see their society and world at large.

Correspondingly, it is not at all clear that television does indeed foster physical and intellectual passivity in the viewers. If such is the case, we should expand our investigation and look for other probable causes. Television alone cannot possibly assume all the social difficulties that some citizens

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[11] In Comstock's book (1978), it is reported that "the public as a whole has expressed high esteem for television"(128). Of course, there are certain major outcries against undesired violent and sex-related programming but in general, and the ratings are always there to express it, there is a clear-cut majority of people that do favor television's offerings.

are going through. No single element can be that determinant in someone's life. And if it were that detrimental to the well-being of the people, why would it be watched for a weekly average of some thirty hours ? A valid route of inquiry into the study of media performances, if we take account of the content and form of the media, would provide an interpretation based upon the views of the majority of the audience. Chaney had suggested this method before and it is still most appealing principally because of its empirical nature (1972).[12] If people feel that they are gaining something by watching television -relaxation and diversion are notable gains- then the elitist, highbrow culturalist and extremist's view of banishing television from people's homes would cause a severe imbalance in the present social organization. Now that television is just on the verge of further revolutionizing home-entertainment and information, its positive psycho-social qualifications are in need of closer study.

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[12] Two other choices are available to the analyst of media performances according to Chaney: either provide a formal interpretation of meaning or a personal interpretation justified by personal skills. For further information on the analysis of performances see Chaney, D., Processes of Mass Communication, McMillan Press, 1972.

V. Models of Analysis Used To Assess Television

> Television may provide models for identification, confer
> status on people and behavior, spell out norms, define
> new situations, provide stereotypes, set frameworks of
> anticipation and indicate levels of acceptability,
> tolerance and approval. Influence must not be equated
> with attitude change (Halloran, 1970:19).

A common theme of early research into television seems to

have granted communicators far more power than they actually

had. Media were looked upon as all-powerful, capable of

orienting people's ideas and points of view in the direction

sought by the communicator. In addition, the public was thought

of as an atomized audience intimately connected to mass media

sources and with very little direct social rapport with fellow

citizens.[1] A number of research models eventually sprung out of

such a conception. Mass media were studied as agents of

persuasion rather than agents of entertainment.

Those initials assumptions were to be disproved. It became

apparent that what was conditioning people's ways of actions was

not one but a number of influential elements among which

television was only an instance. Furthermore, investigations

began to take a completely different stance vis-a-vis the media,

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[1] A valid work on the matter is J. Halloran's book The Effects
of Television, Panther Modern Society, 1970. The first section
deals specifically with an early view of mass communication. See
also E.M. Rogers, "Mass Media and Interpersonal Communication",
p. 290 in I. de Sola Pool, W. Schramm and N. Maccoby's Handbook
of Communication, Rand McNally College Publishing Co., Chicago,
1973.

by putting the emphasis on the way people used them and on the kinds of intentions they brought to the viewing situation.

Only recently has a model been devoted to assessing the positive forms of cognitive and behavioral learning made possible through television. Comstock lists a host of determining factors that mediate the effect television can have on viewers. In so doing, his analysis offers a fresh new perspective on the psychology of communication and seriously challenges the often-cited damaging consequences of television.

Early Models

How the media came to be suspiciously looked upon as behavior modification sources, as opposed to simple purveyors of diversion and information, can be explained through historical events. The numerous changes that a fast-developing technology was provoking upon North American society in the early years of this century, did not go unnoticed. There were observers that indicated a trend toward homogeneity in the fashion of dressing, along with certain speech patterns and values, that were thought to result from mass media exposure. Gathering a series of similar observations, researchers pointed at an emerging mass culture, feared by many to be the result of a de-personalizing process that had already been engaged in the factories where machines were gradually replacing men (Rogers,1973). Since mass production was the new concept of the day, there would be no reason to avoid talking about 'mass culture' fed by the 'mass

media' of the 'mass society'.

Among the first models of mass media analysis to be articulated, is one called 'hypodermic needle' (Katz,1963). A direct outgrowth of the emerging concern with mass society, this model essentially advocates that mass media's messages reach each member of the viewing public and induce in them sufficient *reduction* convincing material to warrant a change in behavior, attitude, opinion or value system. Such a mode of analysis is narrow in scope and does not really reflect the true nature of the media-person interaction.[2] This view is much too simplistic and mechanistic to explain accurately mass media effects. For one thing, it omits totally the notion that both mass media and interpersonal channels have complementary, albeit different, roles in creating the communication effect. Furthermore, this rather drastic approach fails to account for selective tendencies that are manifested by the viewers watching media performances. Exposure to communication messages is believed to result from a selective quest for materials consistent with one's existing attitudes and beliefs.

Similarly, the perception and retention that the individual makes of these messages, will be highly motivated by the person's already existing attitudes and beliefs. In this sense, the selectivity that a person exhibits in his consumption of mass media messages acts as a protective shield against
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[2] The notion of "Medium-person interaction" has its origins in McQuail,D., J.G. Blumler and J.R. Brown's "The Television Audience:A Revised Perspective" in D. McQuail (ed.) Sociology of Mass Communications, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972.

potentially oppressive effects postulated by the 'hypodermic needle'. Thus, by recognizing the vital role of the receiver in determining mass media effects, researchers were able to suggest a one-step-flow model where personal, social and cultural biases of the viewer would counter the alleged overpowering dominance of the media. This refined version of the 'hypodermic needle' model stated that, along with the screening aspects of selective exposure, perception and retention, we had to accept the fact that media materials did not have a unified meaning or effect on all members of the listening/viewing audience.

A fair degree of interest was shown toward this model and, as is often the case, eventually a more complex, more encompassing form took shape. This time the study of media effects was not only concerned with the receiver himself, as in the one-step-flow model, but rather with his surrounding social network. Known as the 'multi-step' process, it assumes that

> the message first reaches opinion leaders, or
> influentials, who in turn either pass the message on by
> word of mouth to persons who consult them or utilize the
> message in the advice or information that they pass on
> within their circle of influence (Wright,1975:81).

This was a significant improvement over other research designs, but there were still a lot of uncertainties that needed a more elaborate approach in order to be dealt with adequately. Now that we were gaining insight into how the individual received the messages, there were still plenty of question marks remaining as to how these same messages were processed and perceived. Substantial advancement on those investigations was

provided by psychology.[3] Indeed, the relevance of a behavioral science to the study of mass media effects, can be best appreciated through a five-step model for the adoption of new schemes of conduct. According to this theory, the most fundamental element about the probability of a message modifying one's attitude, value or behavior is first to become aware of its existence. Then, the individual must have a minimum of interest towards that message in order to motivate him to seek more information about it. Thirdly, the individual must be able to evaluate the relevance of that message for his particular needs. Fourthly, once all these considerations are processed, the individual goes on and gives the message a trial in whatever form found suitable. Finally, once the message has been experimented with, the individual now faces the task of either accepting or rejecting the promises imbedded in the message. For people of the 'early-adopter' type, i.e. those subject to quick acceptance of novel objects and ideas, studies have suggested that the mass media could be a more salient source of influence than interpersonal channels which are found to be more appealing for 'late-adopters' (Wright,1975:101).

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[3] Of significant relevance here, is the work done by the Gestalt school of psychology. For those interested in the problematics of awareness and perception, a book by Fritz Perls, The Gestalt Approach and Eyewitness to Therapy, Bantam Books, 1976, is a most valid text. See in particular chapter 5.

Television as A Playful Activity

Most students of communication studies will unhesitantly recognize television's competence in focusing a whole nation's attention on the same persons, topics and messages. Recent events in the Falkland Islands and Lebanon are striking examples. This absorption into media fare, thought by some to foster a loss of the self, lies at the basis of W. Stephenson's "Play Theory of Mass Communication". In fact, Stephenson suggests that communication-pleasure is a direct by-product of personal experience with the non-serious, non-work communication situation. He argues that the mass media norm is precisely built around those non-involving environments. He says:

> Playing is pretending, a stepping outside the world of duty and responsability. Play is an interlude in the day. It is not ordinary or real. It is voluntary and not a task or moral duty. It is in some sense disinterest, providing a temporary satisfaction. It is the thesis of (my) book that at its best, mass communication allows people to become absorbed in subjective play (1967: 46).

This theoretical model might indeed hold a key to some long unanswered questions in communication research. In particular, it provides popular culture with a valuable foundation on which to resist the charges leveled by the critics about the inherent triviality aspect of television programming. Stephenson's theory offers a positive treatment of triviality, one in which man's participation in trivial activities and objects is based on a voluntary decision, and even at times, on a vital need for such non-committing engagements. Following Stephenson's contention that people basically look for pleasure-inducing materials in

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the media, what we may have here is a possible explanation for the mitigated success of educative programs. When confronted with intellectually demanding messages, viewers are likely to tune out and literally ignore these messages. Perhaps this is why few attitudes are found to be changed by the media alone.

Today's more optimistic train of thought about mass communication research, contrasts sharply with the pessimism of earlier works. Carey and Kreiling suggest that recurring terms such as alienation and mass society were

> the legacy of 19th century and early 20th century social theorists who were marginal men who felt considerable personal alienation from the burgeoning industrial society (1974:231).

The remainder of this chapter presents two research models that are, or just beginning to be, utilized today and expands further the importance of concentrating on the way people _live_ _with_ the mass media , when investigating media effects.

The Functionalist Model

The fundamental* experience that television provides today to millions of viewers, makes its study so much more complicated. From the very beginning of mass communication research, Bogart had expressed "the difficulty of teasing out specific effects from the tissue of surrounding social influences"(1972:518). Actually, researchers rapidly came to realize that the mass media of communication cannot, practically

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* Fundamental in the sense that it has become as regular, as habitual as some very basic daily activities like eating, working or going to school.

speaking, be studied in isolation. They are social institutions, amidst a host of other social institutions, equally capable of providing the necessary ingredients to activate some cognitive or behavioral learning. But regardless of how elaborate a theory one comes up with, there will always be adherents to the traditional behaviorist theory who will argue that man is first and foremost, a responder to stimuli. This latter school of thought claims that

> when stimuli are channeled to appropriate
> response-dispositions within planned reward contexts,
> the behavior of individuals can be manipulated,
> modified, induced, eliminated or changed directly and
> immediately almost at the will of those projecting the
> messages (Strouse,1975:201).

This rather mechanistic view of communication, had to be expanded in order to reflect more accurately the essence and complexity of the media/person interaction. The functional school proposed a model that incorporated in its study of media effects, the crucial role played by the surrounding social instances exterior to the communication messages per se. The major contribution of this model of analysis, is that it expresses clearly the fact that inferences to human behavior and cognition cannot be made solely from content analyses of the mass media. In addition, this analytical approach does not try to determine a simple one-to-one relationship between media messages and social effects. Rather, it attempts to gauge how influential a particular message is in modifying people's opinions and/or behavior by always keeping in mind the broad social mosaic that is also exerting considerable pressure.

This model has several appellations: 'Uses and Gratifications theory', 'Utility theory' and 'Functional theory' will all be used interchangeably in the following pages. Foulkes has presented the study of uses and gratifications as a possible bridge between two major traditional sources of ideas that had remained relatively separated from empirical media research. On the one hand, he contends that, thanks to the work of Klapper (1960) and Wright (1960), Robert Merton's functional paradigm has been made applicable to mass media behavior. This demonstration was an important step away from the behaviorally oriented stimulus-response theory that had prevailed up to then. On the other hand, Foulkes links the utility model with the group of humanists, psychoanalysts, reformers, better known as the popular culture theorists, who have been active in analyzing the relationship between mass media and mass society (Foulkes,1962).

If one were to state in a few words what is the main difference between the uses and gratifications model and other approaches to mass media analysis, the answer would read:

> Uses and gratifications' researchers shifted the impact
> of mass media from the effects of producers' intentions
> to the effects of audiences' intentions, which are
> understood to depend upon sociological context and
> active psychological processes
> (Carey/Kreiling,1974:227).

Evidently, the functionalist school was swift in recognizing the infinite and unspecific demands people make upon the media. The program that people select, it is assumed, is more a function of a personal need to be fulfilled than what the

content is about. In fact, the 'want' of a viewer will very rarely be met by one single program alone, since the theory advocates that totally different contents may be found to serve the same function. The program, film, book, paper, in short any media that an individual attends to, has to be taken as having positive psychological and social utility. Therein lies the heart and soul of the functionalist theory.

The functional analysis of mass media behavior can easily be perceived as a self-contradictory research model by critics looking for infallible analytical techniques. Much emphasis is put upon determining the importance or consequences of a given media behavior for the maintenance and/or restoration of a person's cognition, social activity and overall equilibrium. The uses and gratifications model is very careful in stressing that mass media consumption is not the only way or even the optimum way of satisfying these needs. A host of factors have to be considered when one attempts to justify the motives behind media consumption. If the satisfaction of personal needs is generally seen as a basic criterion for turning to television, one should not discard the crucial role that external factors may bear on media exposure. For example, access to and availability of certain media may provide unexpected gratifications. This may in turn stimulate and lead to a more elaborate use of one or several other media, perceived by the individual as capable of providing similar elements of psychological and/or social well-being. The functional relatedness among media that is

suggested by the uses and gratifications approach, becomes in this perspective, a matter of utmost significance.

A common mistake that is often repeated by the critics of the uses and gratifications theory, consists in interpreting media exposure solely in terms of restorative purposes. The premises of functional theory are however less extreme. This theoritical model strives at explaining behavior in terms of a quest for equilibrium on the various levels at which a socially integrated individual must perform. Also called homeostasis, this state of equilibrium acknowledges a person's desires, wishes, needs and various drives such as for entertainment, escapism and social relationship. For most people, many of these needs can be fulfilled through more traditional, more socially involving and accepted channels. But when, for one reason or another, these needs cannot be satisfied, the individual will tend to adopt a behavior that will aim at re-establishing his equilibrium. This is where the mass media can assist. Hence, it is the contention of the uses and gratifications researchers, that for certain types of people, having certain types of needs, certain media may offer functionally equivalent gratifications to direct social experience. Functional theory makes it explicit that mass media use cannot be related to all, not even a majority, of human needs. Nevertheless, they may prove to be significantly efficient in

> certain well-defined, albeit varied, areas of need for which mass communication might be especially suited. It either meets a need (eg. for information) for which it is the 'natural' solution, or it stands in as a

substitute, or 'functional alternative', for some
missing 'natural' solution to a need (eg. personal
contact) (McQuail/Gurevitch,1974:288).

It is in this sense that media use is seen as beneficial
and salutary in the eyes of the functionalist. The individual
makes adjustments to his homeostasis with the devices available
in the social system. Today, of course, with the extent and
frequency at which people revert to the mass media, and to
television in particular, to fulfill an infinity of needs, there
is legitimate reason to question the causes and consequences of
such a widespread phenomenon. The uses and gratifications model
assumes that the psychological and social attributes of
individuals play a most instrumental role in people's use of the
mass media rather than the reverse correlate put forth by
previous interpretations. This more positive line of reasoning
stems from the fact that people have the freedom to use or not
to, the media at their disposal.

Gratification Aspects of the Functional Model

When the gratification studies were first launched in the
1940's, they were focusing on topics like: why women listen to
soap operas, the function of newpaper reading, gratifications
obtained from quiz programs and motives for getting interested
in serious music on radio, to name but some of the most famous.[5]

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[5] An article by Katz, E. and Foulkes, D. "On the Use of the Mass
Media for Escape: Clarification of A Concept", in Public Opinion
Quaterly , no.26, 1962:377, makes reference to early domains of
investigation and continues on to raise pertinent arguments on
the question of so-called 'escapist motives' which could be, the
authors contend, a manifestation of a need for entertainment
content.

A common weakness of most early functional research on mass media use, is the fact that they had the tendency to report series of functions without relating to them, specific psychological or social characteristics of the person for whom the media performed their function(s).

Among the functions that were served by some specific contents, or even by particular media, were the likes of getting advice or information about daily routine, comparing one's knowledge against others', providing a framework for one's day, preparing oneself socially and culturally for the requirements of upward mobility and being comforted about the social usefulness of one's role.[6]

As this research method matured, it became increasingly essential to emphasize not only the functions played by the media but more specifically, the uses sought and made of them by the viewers. Furthermore, since users came to the media with a variety of needs and predispositions, any study that attempts to show specific effects of a medium, must first and foremost, identify those needs and expectations that various types of viewers brought to the media.

In a joint article, Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch summarize the orientations that recent uses and gratifications studies have taken:

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[6] For further elaboration on the development of the Uses and Gratifications approach see: "Utilization of Mass Communication by the Individual", by Katz, E.,Blumler, J.G. and Gurevitch, M. in The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives On Gratifications Research, by Blumler, J.G. and Katz. E., Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, Calif., 1974.

They (studies) are concerned with 1) the social and psychological origins of 2) needs, which generate 3) expectations of 4) the mass media or sources, which lead to 5) differential patterns of media/exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in 6) need gratifications and 7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones (1974:20).

This gratifying notion that the utility model is advocating evidently led functionalists to be more explicit about the satisfactions obtained through the mass media. Put under pressure by the critics, they presented several lists of categories of needs. Some of the better known classifications include Murray's (1968) in which he lists 28 basic psychogenic needs; Maslow's (1970) seven-step hierarchy of needs, ranging from primary physiological needs to self-actualizing needs; McQuail et al. (1972) which is substantially broken down into four groups, i.e. those needs related to diversion, to personal relationships, to individual/personal psychology and to surveillance of the environment.

A word of caution must be added. Too often the uses and gratifications model is taken in absolute terms and conveys a false portrayal of the viewer, equating exposure to mass media with voluntary need satisfaction, in a sort of 'on order' fashion. We can all think of situations where exposure to a mass medium was not motivated by a deep-felt desire. It is important to realize that a certain portion of televiewing, for example, happens without any intent for need satisfaction. Such is the case for the person who watches television during mealtime, or watches a certain program because it is the family's favorite, or maybe simply, because he has nothing better to do at that

particular moment.

The functionalist model, with all its merits, must nevertheless be handled with a good understanding of its inherent limitations. The simple fact that the model requires researchers to lay out specific needs that are served by the media, is in itself a hindrance to a fully objective analysis of media attendance. Also, the utility model originated on some very speculative grounds, saying essentially that individuals, consciously or not, come to the media to have their equilibrium restored in some way or another.[7] The model can certainly account for a number of expectations that people have with regards to the mass media in general, and to TV in particular, but there are certain areas in which it would do poorly. For instance, the uses and gratifications approach makes little room for factors such as taste, style and aesthetics in its analysis of media consumption. The exposure to a medium is taken holistically as either a physical, psychological or social behavioral manifestation. What appears in front of the individual, is not as important as how the viewer interprets it, what meaning he fixes to it, and to what use he puts it. The creative, artistic and stylistic attributes of the content are treated as unimportant. Actually, they are seldom referred to. The focus is directly on the person. The material consumed is

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[7] Clifford Geertz, The Interpretations of Culture, Basic Books, New-York, 1973, calls the Uses and Gratifications model a 'strain theory' due to the basic assumption it makes that personality and society are chronically malintegrated.

categorically treated in the analysis, i.e. it is either entertaining, escapist, newsworthy and the like.

The functionalist approach alone cannot explain all the motivations behind a person's exposure to television. This is made more explicit when we consider other analytical strategies. One such approach, still very much in the experimental stage but which nevertheless holds a considerable promise, is Comstock's "Arousal" model, to which we now turn.

Comstock's Arousal Model

George Comstock is a prominent figure in media analysis. His contributions are numerous and represent an indispensable source of reference to anyone considering the study of human behavior in a technologically mediated environment. Along with four other researchers[8] , he put together a summary of more than 2,500 books, articles and reports dealing with the influence of television on the way Americans live. To this he added his own thoughts and recommendations regarding how a study of television's bearing on people's conduct should be carried out. His perspective on the role of this medium, and its potentials for pro-social behavior learning, are at the core of his proposed methodology.

What differentiates Comstock's approach from most other current procedures is nothing drastically innovative. Rather, it

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[8] Comstock,G., Chaffee, S., Katzman, N., McCombs, M., and Roberts,D.,Television and Human Behavior, Columbia Univ.Press, New York, 1978.

is a matter of emphasis and conviction. Comstock certainly aligns himself with those who regard television as an agent that contributes to, rather than causes general patterns of behavior. For him, the medium has to be looked at as a significant source of influence among the other socialization factors that surround and mold people's sense of belonging to a given community. Acknowledging the capacity for television to contribute -to a certain extent- to behavior modeling, Comstock launches the hypothesis that television can assuredly influence more socially desirable, or what he terms, 'pro-social' behavior. What is developed is almost opposite to the evidence that has been obtained throughout the tradition of TV studies, such as those emphasizing its role in aggressive behavior. Not many researchers have investigated in the direction suggested by Comstock.[9] In fact, this type of research is in its infancy, but the results gathered appear promising.

An important premise in Comstock's scheme is his evaluation of television's role in learning. Whether it is the learning of actual physical behavior or of a cognitive, affective order, the extent of the learned or acquired course of conduct can hardly

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[9] Here is a partial list of some of the experiments: Bryan,J.H. and Walbek,N.,"Preaching and Practising Generosity:Children's Actions and Reactions", in Child Development, no.41, 1970a, p.329-353.
Bryan,J.H. and Walbek,N.,"The Impact of Words and Deeds Concerning Altruism Upon Children", in Child Development, no.41, 1970b, p.747-757.
Liebert,R.M., Neale, J.M. and Davidson, E.S.,The Early Window:Effects of Television on Children and Youth, Elmsford, New-York, Pergamon Press, 1973.

be assessed unless it is performed. It seems all too simple to adopt the traditional behaviorist attitude and connect the viewing of a TV program to a subsequent action. Too many intermediary factors -which we will refer to as third variables- outside the stimulus/response format, may complicate a thorough understanding of the transaction. Comstock distinguishes three main groups of intermediary elements, according to the moment they take place in the communication situation. They can either be referred to as an antecedent condition, an intervening condition or a contingent condition. All three are said to be determinant in modifying a person's line of action.[10] A brief elaboration on these third variable types will be useful at this point.

The first condition, the antecedent, can be best represented as an event that must have happened prior to the person's exposure to television for any effect to occur. In a sense, this condition points at the reinforcive potential of TV, insofar as it can only reinforce what has previously been learned. The second condition, the intervening, can be represented by a psychological event that takes place between the moment of exposure to television and the ensuing behavior.

> It can be thought of as a necessary linking mechanism
> that consists of an immediate response to the TV
> stimulus, and which in turn becomes a stimulus whose
> consequent response is the behavioral effect in which we
> are interested (Comstock et al. 1978:394).

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[10] The original and elaborate presentation of Comstock's model comprises chapter 8 "The Psychology of Behavioral Effects" in Comstock et al, 1978,op.cit..

The generalized arousal initiated by television material,
can lead a person into a number of avenues. Which direction the
individual will choose to manifest the stimulation he has just
been subjected to, is however, dependent on some other factors,
which are not necessarily linked to the television program. To
illustrate this, we can think of the inclination of a viewer to
do something of a physical nature following exposure to violent
material on television. Whether he starts yelling at somebody,
goes jogging, fixes the car or cooks a dish, will depend on the
most prominent intervening factor(s) at that specific moment. We
therefore cannot posit that specific contents automatically
engender specific actions. I return to this matter a little
later.

The third and final condition, the contingent, embraces all
those conditions that encourage, stimulate and highlight
pertinent aspects of the social and physical setting in which
the individual finds himself and which allow the stimulus to
have a behavioral effect. A contingent condition is not part of
the communication process per se, but is nevertheless necessary
for it to operate. We may think of it as a catalyst, i.e. a
factor in whose presence a specific reaction between two
elements (in our example, television and the viewer) will take
place, and in whose absence it may not. An illustration of a
situational contingency is provided by the way laboratory
experiments on violence and aggressive behavior are conducted.
Very often, the subject of such experiments will be provided

with a target (dolls, toys, even persons) on which to direct the behavioral effect to be studied. As Comstock writes,"the contingent condition is external to the process, but influences it" (1978: 396).

The reason why Comstock gives so much importance to the antecedent, intervening and contingent conditions may not be readily obvious. But if one sets out to examine the behavioral effects that television might have upon viewers, it then becomes crucial to pay due attention to these conditions that are most influential in determining the scope of these effects. In addition, a person's behavioral response to TV stimulation is not exactly random. At least three factors can be cited as being operative in the process. First, we must consider the salience for the individual of the behavior displayed on television, i.e.the extent to which that act exists psychologically for him. Second, the 'repertoire' is the terminology used to designate the summed salience of all possible behaviors which a person may choose from when confronted with a given situation. In this sense, Comstock conceptualizes an act as being a fraction of the overall repertoire from which people select their response to stimulation. The third factor that can be determinant in the manifestation of an act, is that of arousal. It accounts for the degree to which a person is activated and stimulated into behaving in accordance with the portrayed act.

Where does TV fit into all this theorizing ? Comstock tells us that it is simply one of the many available sources of

socialization that surround an individual and that it should be analyzed with this reference in mind. Furthermore, he strongly supports the notion that television can, because of its capacity to display and qualify a behavior, affect the salience of any act a person may consider engaging into. This is due to the fact that television may explicitly demonstrate a behavior, and attach to it either positive or negative tones, thus rendering the act more familiar, more habitual to the viewer. And, as the individual elects to exhibit that behavior, we can expect that the real consequences that ensue, will further reinforce or discourage him to add this particular conduct to his favored repertoire.

One point that is often overlooked in media research, is brought into full light in Comstock's analytical plan. It is often assumed that people adhere, almost without reserve, to whatever is displayed on the video screen. Of course, those who like to blame television for promoting and instigating violence in society find in such assumptions, ample support for their views. However, there is a body of theoritical foundations that readily disclaims such beliefs and which proposes a more global, more encompassing outlook on the study of television. It would be illusory, regardless of the stance adopted, not to recognize that television can be, in certain instances and for certain viewers, a prime source of belligerent behavior. Conscious of this probability, Comstock submits the inclusion of a capital variable into his proposed analytical platform, so as to take

the focus away from an exclusive treatment of the content element alone: "the degree to which the person perceives the televised portrayal as representing reality"(1978:404). This addition, despite its apparent evidence, is absent in a great deal of studies that aim at demonstrating how influential television can be on various aspects of the development of the person. Yet, the mere presence of it in Comstock's model, may provide sufficient evidence to make it a fundamental point in any further investigations into mass media influence.

One cultural studies analyst that is very much compatible with the way Comstock approaches the study of media effects on behavior, is Stuart Hall. Earlier introduced as the father of the "encoding/decoding" concepts in the television discourse, Hall now becomes of significant assistance to Comstock in identifying with him the paramount necessity of looking into the receiver's treatment of the television message. For Hall, a message cannot have an effect, satisfy a need or be put to a use, without first, being perceived as a meaningful piece of information and subsequently meaningfully interpreted or "decoded" by the receiver. It is those meanings, obtained through an active participation by the individual, that may "have an effect, influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioral consequences" (1973:3). Again, media contents have no value of their own. They suggest meanings and interpretations of situations but need the viewer's approval before they can be

confirmed as 'effects'.

Getting acquainted with Comstock's analytical procedure, also involves concentrating heavily on one particular aspect of the television situation: the level of arousal generated within the viewer. Indeed, this factor is, for Comstock, an unquestionable prerequisite if television is to have any behavioral impact. Whether the person watching is aroused by the content or the form of the televised portrayal, is of no major significance. What is singularly crucial, in strict behavioral terms, is that an individual who is aroused by a television program is likely to make cognitive and/or affective associations which may later exercise sufficient incentive to produce a given behavior. Manifestly, other factors will contribute to the ultimate expressive action. We have already mentioned the part played by the real consequences of an action. We may also consider the degree of opportunity that an individual has to perform an act, as being of significant relevance in the learning and integrating of a specific conduct. As Comstock writes,

> this provision in the model would account for the
> relative ease with which arousal has been demonstrated
> empirically with regard to aggressive effects (for which
> opportunity is often present), but the comparative
> failure to show the comparable result for erotic
> behavioral effects. Opportunity for the latter is rare:
> sexual behavior is appropriate -or even possible- only
> in rather limited social circumstances (1978:419).

It is a generally and widely accepted fact, that learning through direct real-life observation is a very natural way of acquiring knowledge. Although the validity of that statement

cannot be disputed, Comstock's treatment of television can nevertheless be examined in cognitive terms. Shockingly enough as it may appear to the purists, Comstock contends that television, under certain circumstances, may in fact be a stronger model for imitative learning than real-life observation.

> ...although TV eliminates from view some elements of real-life observation, at the same time it provides a concentrated focus; the boundaries of the screen set off the behavior from its surrounding context, which in some cases could be diverting (1978:430).

Far from implying that when a behavior is not displayed it has not been learned, Comstock brings us back to evaluating the opportunities available, the consequences anticipated, and the incentives at work, before the indivual actually performs the stimulated behavior.

Various works in psychology have indicated that among the leading influential factors on behavior are those related to reinforcement, reward, and punishment. The findings take on a particular significance when they are included into Comstock's model. If we accept the notion that television can, within the subjective limits expressed above, influence a viewer's behavior, then why should it not be capable of providing strong positive behavioral models to the public ? Comstock does provide the experimental evidence to demonstrate that indeed, television has a tremendous potential to elicit pro-social behavior. But at the same time, he warns against the practical limitations of the kinds of material that could produce the anticipated effect:

We (research team) are envisioning, in writing our
model..., a process in which TV and environmental events
tend to be mutually reinforcing if behaviors that often
appear on the screen are similar to those for which
opportunity frequently presents itself (1978:447).

In essence, what Comstock is calling for, is television

programs offering patterns of social behavior that would somehow

coincide with similar "real life" situations in which the

viewers have sufficient opportunity to display the positive

behavior learned on television. The mass media will be able to

provide influential models of pro-social behavior only as long

as there will be opportunity for these models to be acted out in

people's daily environment. Thus, we should not expect

television portrayals to stimulate or discourage behaviors for

which opportunity is almost nonexistent, and not contiguous, to

the viewing situation.

Prospects of Comstock's Model

Unquestionably, the last thirty years have been singularly

productive in elaborating and perfecting analytical models that

have proven to be most subservient to the study and

understanding of the media/person rapport. From the

unidirectional rigidity of the first models of analysis,

progressively evolved the concrete acknowledgement that, however

powerful and influential a source of behavior modification it

might be, television did not act in a social vacuum. Television

just could not be examined in isolation from the rest of the

social institutions that too, are exerting their share of

influence and constraints. It thus came as a radical shift in

focus when the uses and gratifications approach advocated putting the emphasis on the receiving end of the communication process. Studies were now concentrating on the viewer's intentions and sociological context as well as on the various active psychological processes that he displayed in interpreting media messages.

Comstock continues in that tradition. His insistence on the role played by the surrounding conditions of a person's life in mitigating the behavioral influence of a television portrayal, is conceptually analogous to the functional school's model. Furthermore, Comstock eloquently stresses the basic mechanics involved in the communication situation. His treatment of the notions of arousal, opportunity, subjective salience, and perceived consequences of an act, is a significant advancement as far as a psycho-social theory of communication is concerned. Comstock's wish to see television used as a teaching tool for pro-social behavior however, has only collected a limited degree of success so far.

We have known for some time of the use of television by psychotherapists.[11] The initial reports made available to this day, seem to point at a fascinating prospect. Some therapists

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[11] Here is a partial list of some of the most prominent works on this matter: Danet, B.N., _Self-Confrontation by Videotape in Group Psychotherapy_, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1967. Also by the same author "Videotape Playback as A Therapeutic Device in Group Psychotherapy", _International Journal of Group Psychotherapy_, No.19, 1969, p.433-440. Melnick,J., "A Comparison of Replication Techniques in the Modification of Minimal Dating Behavior", _Journal of Abnormal Psychology_, No.81, 1973, p.51-59.

use television as a means of bringing their patients to look at themselves, to observe their own physical stance, demeanor, and similar projections that they find unpleasant about their image. The "reality" of their own observations about themselves, i.e. they are no longer dealing with someone else's interpretations, may subsequently act as a strong motivator to modify certain undesired behavior patterns.

But on a commercial television basis however, the situation is rather grim. The only programs that are explicitly oriented towards pro-social behavior teaching are found among those addressed to children (Sesame Street and Passe-Partout are examples). The reasons for the absence of such programming for adult audiences are the subject of abundant speculations. Whether it is due to an innate desire in man to trespass in fantasy, the established structures of society, or to the financial interests of the networks to supply the viewers with the kinds of programs that now fill the airwaves, is opened to discussion. Nevertheless, Comstock's contention remains: television's potential to affect, in positive social terms, a person's conduct exists and has already been demonstrated.

The crucial question that must be answered before we engage further into this line of television offering is the following: where will the people transfer the needs that they now satisfy via television ? Until such an answer is provided, we should be most careful about requesting the urgency of the type of programs suggested by Comstock. It is within this question that

lies the practical limitation of his proposal.

VI. Conclusion: Prospects and Possibilities

A friend once suggested that my thesis was better suited for classification under social psychology than communication studies. Although the dividing line between the two disciplines has always somehow eluded me, I made an effort in this work to justify my conceptual difficulty by showing that actually both schools were interested in the same fundamental phenomenon : how man behaves in, adopts to, and makes use of his information environment.

I might also be accused of treachery for not having brought to the analysis findings about advertising and violence, let alone, my complete avoidance of the economics of the television industry. The reason for this is rather simple: there are so many conclusive studies on those issues that any attempt to assess their general recommendations would be unproductive. Furthermore, my goal was to produce a perspective that was based on the viewer's treatment of television rather than on the opposite. For me, it is more important to discover how people find diversion and relaxation with television than the kinds of financial interests behind broadcasting. It is around this conception that I developped the thesis. I tried to demonstrate and provide sufficient evidence to support my contention that, indeed, television has the potential for much benefit, be it social and/or psychological. In doing so, I could not help but to take a defensive stance at times since I was resisting an

increasingly strong movement against the television industry as a whole. I am aware that an accidental position of that sort could easily lead to my thesis being treated as an unconditional supporter of television. I feel I had to take that risk to show that the television phenomenon is first and foremost a product of what importance the viewer attaches to it.

Almost all the studies done on the best-liked programs- and in all the countries surveyed- came out with the same result : programs that were telling a story (be it a police drama, film, situation comedy and the like) caught the favor of the respondents. Cazeneuve (1974) has tried to shed light on this finding by suggesting that the key to a successful content analysis of TV programs may lie in a metaphysical projection that the viewer engages in. The projection would permit an identification with one or some of the characters involved in the plot. The viewer unconsciously immerses himself in the situation of his hero and lives with him through various perils, joys, and dramas. By doing so, the viewer would forget about his own burdens and obtain the respite he initially sought.

It is my belief that such a symbolic activity, as displayed in the television context, performs functions that are similar to those of ritualistic celebrations. In the latter, a sense of togetherness and commonality among the participants is generated through involvement in symbolic action that attempts to explain and restructure an assymmetry or an unfamiliar and disconnected event. Whether the ritual is manifested through religious and

cultural contexts or at seemingly trivial routine group practices such as the 'Seventh Inning Stretch' during baseball matches, the feeling of belonging to and of being part of a meaningful whole cannot be neglected. Television serial programming in this respect, operates on the same mechanisms. It too, exposes the constraints, limits and regulations of the social order while at the same time, allowing the viewer sufficient freedom to choose which side he wishes to be on. He can either be the always-winning Quincy or challenge him by surreptitiously endorsing the villain's deed.

Under this scheme, the "triviality" aspect of TV viewing may be analyzed as psychologically useful for an individual who has had an arduous day at work and who simply wants to rest, forget about his job, and be entertained gently. This appears to me as a very legitimate right and I cannot consider that "enlightening" content would be more beneficial. On the contrary, I believe that a continual supply of programs making rigorous demands on the judgment, attention, and imagination of people who approach the medium in a mental state of fatigue, would deny the viewers of the important leisure use of television. Rigidly structured didactic elements would far from help them surmount their personal adaptation crises. After all, a large majority of viewers get considerable relief and gratification out of the "non-decision making" aspect of television. If you are out to enjoy yourself why go about it the hard way ? More than that, how are we to define "enjoyment" if

trivial material is to be condemned ? Enjoyment takes many forms and is achieved through several activities. I feel it is paramount that society acknowledges that different audiences are fully entitled to attend, buy, listen to, and watch whatever is for them, an expression of pleasure-seeking behavior.

One of the strongest intentions I had in mind while preparing this work, was to provide sufficient evidence to support my rejection of the thought, expressed by many, that television technology is essentially harmful. I just could not come to terms with the notion that television led to the desertification of the mind, the social isolation of the people, the colonization of experience, a physical lethargy, and a number of similar somber themes thrown at the medium by extremist critics such as Mander. I trust, I have realized that part of my objective. Nevertheless, I wish to expand even further my stance on this question by considering, later in this conclusion, the educational potentials of television.

Also, the fact that television is believed by certain people to be a means of escaping the difficult reality they find themselves in, should not tarnish the prime function of television as a medium of entertainment. What people do with television, how they interpret its content, and whatever ends they utilize the programs for, cannot be blamed solely on the medium. As the discussion of Comstock's model in chapter 5 showed, we must consider a number of actively influential factors when evaluating the true extent of television's reach.

Television itself, as a material object, has no power of its own. The viewer does. His current state of mind is most determinant in allowing the televised content to bear any influence. This functional, even existential, approach to the problematic of television viewing makes Comstock's theory a testimonial of prime significance. For if we accept the notion that television is a valid source of relaxation, diversion, and pastime, we might be constrained to equally acknowledge the various sets of surrounding conditions that predispose an individual to seek media forms such as television for recreational and/or gratificational purposes. Certainly, the monetary cost of televised entertainment allows a frequent utilization. Other factors such as convenience, flexibility, and range of choice are all favorably linked to television usage. With such attractive incentives, it is no wonder millions of viewers, every night, willingly turn to their TV set.

Another of my objectives in this thesis, has been to invalidate the notion that television's long-term effect resulted in the individualization, even anti-socialization as some proposed, of its users. Although I have already discussed this facet, I feel it is important to bring it up again and confront it this time, to the newly emerging abilities of the medium. The combination of cable and pay-television could have a significant impact on the way people utilize and consume entertainment and services made available to them. Let me provide a few specific examples to better illustrate my

conception.

The recent development of cable-television has certainly triggered an explosion of programming diversity that gives the TV set a unique flexibility in terms of materials entering the home. The viewer is now given a wider selection of entertainment and information programs and, most importantly, is presented with the possibility of becoming familiar with a far larger number of issues, topics, and interests than was previously offered over regular transmission. Today, cable-TV is technically capable of two-way communication between the TV station and the viewer's home. This interactive ability[1] is at the center of the controversial debates that question the rapport between the information-gathering potentials of that system and the invasion of people's privacy. Certain media analysts plead for government controls over cable operators, forcing them to explain to the public what information will be collected, how it will be used, and to whom it will be turned over. But Mark Fowler, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission in the United States, is of a totally different opinion. He argues that

> if too many strictures are imposed in the name of privacy, the strictures could be so onerous as to thwart or discourage the development of these new technologies that can serve people. That's the balance, and it's a very difficult problem. The answer is: there are no clear answers. But are we concerned ? Absolutely. And we would act, if the appropriate day and time came that it

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[1] The Warner Cable Co. has been experimenting its two-way cable system in Colombus, Ohio, since 1977. It offers its subscribers thirty channels to choose from, along with the "talking-back" feature of the system.

became a real issue. It's not yet. (in NOVA, 1982)

"Not yet" is also the answer to the ultimate prognostic assembling all the currently existing pieces of technology for television into one single unit. Known as the "Home Communications Center", it integrates at a single station (home), entertainment, educational, informational, and message services. Adults would watch television for entertainment, would record favorite shows, pay bills, scan merchandise catalogs and travel guides, update their social calendar and even, in some instances, do some work at home. Children would use it for computer-assisted instruction as well as for entertainment and games. But, however fascinating such a center may seem, I do not believe it will materialize during this decade. Two main reasons make me skeptical about this prospect. First, the Center would be far too expensive for the majority of the population to purchase (estimated figures are well over $ 1,000.). Second, and that is a recurring theme about television technology, "most families still appear unwilling to have their primary set diverted for extended periods to other, nonentertainment activities" (Baer,1978).

Therefore, if entertainment continues to be the prime consideration- and, to a certain extent, expectation- of people's use of television, we should pay special attention to the propagation of videotape systems now flooding the market. Videorecorders open up a whole different conception about televiewing besides meeting the critics' requisition for a radical transformation of the medium. It is now conceivable that

within a very near future, audiences will be 'partially' in control of the television experience. I say partially because the control referred to is only in terms of the receiving authority that the viewer will be conferred. The types of programs aired will still be in the hands of the TV industries, or program production agencies, but the public will no longer be forced to take only what is being broadcasted at any particular time. Videocassette recorders (VCR) will only make television viewing easier and more convenient for the public. Not only will they provide a means of building personal 'librairies' of favorite programs, but they will literally "time-shift" the audience by allowing them to watch their selected show whenever they want or are able to (Levy, 1980).

Thus versatility seems to open the way to a more personalized selectivity. Personalized in the sense that, from all the materials coming through the 25 or 30 channels available on the cable, viewers will be asked to make a choice that will be reflective of their sharpest interests. I do not think habitual viewing will be abandonned altogether, but at least it will now be feasible for the public to watch programs about which they have a minimum of concern, granted obviously that the selection to choose from is attractive enough to sustain attention. I see this development as being somehow similar to the history of radio. With both AM and FM station sharing the total listening audience, individual listeners become loyal to a specific station, one that comes the closest to their interest

and taste priorities. The marked advantage of videorecorders is that they allow the receiver to decide the proper time and place to obtain the material he has made a decision about. The satisfaction that one gets from having a certain degree of control over the technology of television coupled with the pleasure of viewing materials that one has chosen, combine for what, I feel, is a most positive and rewarding way of enjoying one's free time. I certainly cannot imagine such activity as being detrimental to the viewer.

From a cultural standpoint, an expanded version of television (cable with or without VCR) has incredible prospects. If we look back at how television was instrumental in the transformation of radio from a national to a local medium, we might very well be in the presence of a similar sequence with the cable this time playing the main role. Television has traditionally been carrying news, variety, sports, and drama through the local stations of the two major canadian networks. Initially, this was radio's task but the audio-visual medium forced radio stations to cater smaller homogeneous audiences. Cable-television now permits such a wide variety of programs as to appeal to an even larger portion of the population on strict entertainment features, let alone the interspersed educative programs. The breakdown of huge national mass audiences into regional publics has gained much credibility and even applicability over the past years. This movement does not signify the end of national networks per se, since there will

always be room for information and matters concerning the whole population of a country. But, the concern about, and need for local programming, is definitely forcing changes on the actual broadcasting format. As Maistre commented some years ago

> partout les memes arguments sont avances en faveur de la participation de la radiotelediffusion, a ce vaste mouvement de regionalisation qui a aussi des composantes administratives, economiques et culturelles. Elle peut jouer un role important dans la revelation d'une conscience regionale et represente un atout decisif pour la politique de decentralisation culturelle. Dans le domaine de l'information economique et sociale, le cadre regional permet une approche plus concrete, plus realiste et finalement plus efficace des problemes (1976:73).

As we see, cable-television can not only provide a wider latitude of choice for the population at large but also motivate the production of programs that relate more closely and more directly to the activities of a community.

The critique has, at times, been harsh in its treatment of television as a mass medium. Terms such anomie, alienation and indoctrination have all surfaced to demonstrate its subversive implications. This is based on the conviction that privatized reception of TV programs is contrary to the human species' so-called 'innnate' social orientation. Television thus, is presented as fundamentally and intrinsically noxious and is further thought to be replacing all other forms of social rapport. However, is it necessary to be reminded that staying home after a hard day's work certainly did not start with television. Nor does television keep people in their living-rooms on saturday nights, inducing them to reject dining

invitations at their friends'. Society still has numerous avenues to establish and develop close relationships among its individuals. That television incites people into social activities, gives them topics and issues to talk about, and widens their practical knowledge of their immediate environment are all, to my estimation, substential contributions in facilitating one's integration to the wheels of one's community. One ought to be careful not to take television as a scapegoat for evils that often originate elsewhere.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to accurately forecast where the technology of television will stop. Everytime an innovation sets in, another one is pressing to make even further advancements. A case in point is the licensing of pay-TV in Canada, scheduled to begin operation in April 1983. While hard core detractors will tell you how much more dependent on television people will get, proponents of subscription-television enter the battle with a bagful of counter-arguments.

First on their list, is the contention that pay-TV will provide viewers with the option of watching superior or special programming. They also argue in favor of the flexibility of viewing those shows, thus doing away with the current fixed scheduling of contents. By having various drama and movie specials repeated on several occasions during the course of a month in a number of different time slots, viewers will be able to plan their viewing in a manner that best suits their personal timetables. Not negligeable either is the commercial-free

viewing featured on pay-TV channels which can do nothing but enhance the pleasure of tuning in on a film or show.

The economics of entertainment are also brought up when the magnates of pay-TV present you with their monthly charge of about $ 14. for a channel offering a 24-hour-a-day selection of nearly new movies, drama and variety programming. It will be interesting to observe how the canadian public will react to pay-TV next spring. When the time will come to make a decision on how to spend their entertainment dollar, we can logistically expect a fair number of people will find it cheaper, more comfortable and convenient to stay home and watch a movie. What pay-TV will do essentially, is give the public the occasion to organize its priorities, values and needs. Pay-TV will not replace the cinema, theater, concert hall and sport stadium. It will supplement them, give the viewer the option to go out to a performance or stay home and watch something just as good, if not the same show. Moreover, it might be particularly beneficial and profitable for those who do not have the financial ressources to go out regularly to prime performances. The relatively small monthly fee charged to get pay-TV could be largely compensated by the quality[2] of the material presented on that channel. But this remains to be seen.

Among the most probable possibilities for a not so distant future in television technology, is the suggestion that direct

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[2] The notion of popular aesthetics is problematic. Quality is used here to mean forms that are generally appealing to the majority of the population's standards of taste and novelty.

satellite-to-home telecasting could make cable-TV literally obsolete. Scientists forecast that this could very well materialize even before the nation is completely wired. This type of direct TV transmission from the satellite to a roof antenna would bypass terrestrial TV transmitters and cable-TV networks, by providing distribution of multiple TV channels directly to the home. It is a technology already in operation on an industrial basis and only minor changes would be necessary to apply it to home usage. However, it is still too costly at this stage to consider launching it on a widescale basis.

Naturally, discussing the options offered by the new television industry can only further activate the already acute controversy on the effects of technology on the social system. As I have endeavored to demonstrate throughout this thesis, it is ludicrous to suggest that television's primary consequence is a diminution of social contact, a general apathy towards events of the world and a rather damageable impact on people's cognitive functions. I cannot help but quote Mander who encompasses perfectly his unequivocal perception of television in the following passage:

> Sitting in darkened rooms, with the natural environment
> obscured, other humans dimmed out, only two senses
> operating, both within a very narrow range, the eyes and
> other body functions stilled, staring at light for hours
> and hours, the experience adds up to something nearer to
> sense deprivation than anything that has come before it
> (1978:168).

I believe stringent comments of this sort can be disclaimed if one carefully examines how some socially vital institutions

are gradually adapting to the prominent position television has reached. It is my contention that the education system will be asked to sensibly modify its actual structures in order to ensure a smooth continuity and a progressive cooperation among the various agencies of socialization. School can no longer claim to be the sole educator. But what kind of interaction between television and the school should there be ? The next section addresses this question.

Education Revisited

One can barely discuss the television phenomenon without being confronted with such questions as: "Don't you think TV is teaching our kids that violent conduct is rather common in our society?", or that "TV helps reinforcing the belief that material possessions equate social success?". In fact what is really creating all this questionning, is the realization that television can, and does, exercise a fair degree of influence over the most vulnerable members of our society: children. So, how do we immune ourselves from that uncontrollable intruder ? How can it best contribute to the socialization of the children? I feel that much can be gained from a closer rapprochement between television and the school, which, no one will contest, is certainly among the most socially constructive experiences in someone's life.

Television is often indignantly referred to as a third parent. As if children had always received all of their

education solely from their parents and that priests, teachers, workmasters, even grandparents had not provided the children of their community with valuable instruction. And even if this allegation were true, as I think it is, what would it indicate ? That parents can no longer assume their primary responsabilities or rather that society has discovered yet another form, a new channel for transmitting a level of tutorship that is both pleasant to receive and pragmatic in its utility ? It is essential, if we wish to grasp the inquiry adequately, to realize that television did not actually bring a whole different pattern in the socialization of children. It already existed elsewhere.

> The trend away from direct parental involvement in the socialization of children is not a new one. Both the increasing separation of home and work place and the increasing formalization of schooling have served to limit parental supervision of the social and emotional development of the young. TV,however, has reinforced this tendency (Cater/Adler,1975:145).

The fact that television now poses itself as a source of instruction of such magnitude is not without having effects on the education spheres. More and more educators, communicators and concerned elements from various origins, are pondering over the delicate question of the integration of television within the academic curriculum.

Of course, one may legitimately ask, why bring to school an activity that basically always takes place in the home ? Moreover, if television is fundamentally entertaining, should not the school retain its didactic function ? If these questions

were once easily answerable, they are not so anymore. The learning that a person makes in the viewing process, cannot be overlooked any longer. Thus, what emerges from this situation is the following : we must find a way, within the existing structures, to scrutinize, analyze and interpret the messages presented on television so that TV viewing becomes a profitable experience. It is not that only school can provide the necessary critical framework with which to approach television. However, I think that right now, it could be our best instrument to counter TV's prejudicial influence.

The very first protection for the children ought to come from the parents themselves. Even though intervention by a 'significant' adult can remarkably influence what a child learns from a program, resarch indicates that unfortunately, "TV viewing is generally not accompanied by any significant family interaction directed toward the medium or its content" (Robertson, 1979:17). While working-parents may give the best excuses for their lack of monitoring their children's TV viewing, the amount of time a child spends with television cannot go unnoticed. Therefore, as is the case for a number of other issues, society tends to lean against the school to handle the whole problem of children and television. There is increasing belief in, and talk about, television becoming a subject for the regular educational curriculum. Although it is not at all clear at this moment, in what shape or form the school should incorporate TV to its program, all parties agree

that the most urgent task of the school, is to order the vast quantity of information and experiences that the student has stored within him via his involvement with television.

We are now witnessing the loosing of a monopoly. The education system is confronted with a technical environment which itself, is capable of providing a great deal of information. Despite their basic disparities, mass media and the education system must be perceived as two vastly different, yet complementary channels for shaping our children's view of the world. But the complementarity is far less obvious than the dichotomy. McBride (1980) expresses the polarity in the following terms: whereas the educational system valorizes order and technique, personal effort, concentration and even competition, the mass media of communication, on the other hand, transmit issues that are topical and novel, hedonistic values and easy understanding. Yet, the child enters school with so much media experience of the world, shares so many media images and information with his fellow-students, that I feel the time might have come to use the classroom context to process and structure the effect of nonclassroom experiences.

This latter point is of capital significance, particularly in view of the conclusions arrived at during a Vancouver Conference on Children and Television held in April 1982. One of the main observations at the conference, was that television has created a generation of children who do have knowledge but no experience or wisdom. Children are collecting an enormous amount

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of information and a feeling of power that they don't know how to use. The most tangible solution to this predicament is believed to be education in the mass media. If the child understands how the power came to him, he will have greatly increased his chances of using that information in an advantageous manner. Also, it appears crucial to decrease the degree to which children perceive the programs they watch as real. Equally formative for the children, is the expansion of their tendencies and abilities to compare TV content with information from other sources.

If we accept the notion that the school has traditionally been concentrating on teaching how to integrate, structure and analyze knowledge and the data derived from experience, we can envisage an enriching contribution on behalf of television, if the operation is wisely orchestrated. I believe that audio-visual presentations in the classroom can have pedagogical value only insofar as the student spends some time reflecting on what he just saw on the screen or better still, if he tries to reproduce the action depicted. Far from being innovative in itself, this 'operative process' of cognition has long been advocated by Piaget. For him, the knowledge of something cannot simply be a figurative copy of reality. Piaget's operative process involves an attempt to transform the observed into action or thought. Consequently, television can provide innumerable occasions for students to understand and assimilate useful information. The multi-disciplinary cooperation available

at the school only reinforces the contention that a systemic approach to education, one that most certainly has to recognize the impact that television is having on 20th century living, can be particularly fruitful. I use 'systemic' in the sense that education, in order to be truly functional, must join to its core program other currently prominent sources of learning if it wishes to give more depth to its original teaching task.

French sociologist Rosney, who is a firm believer in this specific approach, explains that the method applied in education, consists of cross-examining a question, from various levels and through successive touches. As he writes,

l'approche systemique, en reliant les faits dans un ensemble coherent, cree un cadre conceptuel de reference, susceptible de faciliter l'acquisition des connaissances par les methodes classiques (1975:263).

Utilizing the medium in an active and discriminatory fashion within a pedagogical framework is to me, a most practical way of resisting the overpowering destructive effects that many critics attribute to television. The discriminative habit that children are taught and encouraged to develop in the school, along with their critical involvement in the media, is ultimately the strongest protection any society has against information control. In my view, it is becoming imperative that the education system take the initiative in teaching children to react critically to information and just as pressing, to choose their leisure activities, particularly television, according to qualitative and cultural criteria. The concern about a closer association between the school and television has nothing of a

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theoritical quandary. As UNESCO president Sean McBride commented in his 1980 report, certain countries have already begun introducing the knowledge and use of means of mass communication into their primary and secondary schools. For McBride, as for an increasing number of concerned educators, communication professionals and general public, what appears as the most crucial aspect of the interdependence of education and communication, is that the learning process must become an experience of communication in itself, of human relations, of give-and-take and association, rather than a magistral one-way transmission of knowledge (1980:29).

Without minimizing the gigantic contribution that the school can make to a more rational, more critical and more balanced use of television, we cannot expect however the education system to completely transform the medium's long-established, and still prevailing, entertainment tradition. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, viewers do not approach the medium with the manifest expectation of acquiring knowledge -though occasional learning does evidently take place- but rather they seek basic pleasure out of the 'light entertainment' materials that constitute the bulk of TV's offerings.

The fact that I took position in favor of television's predominently entertaining orientation, should not be interpreted as a rejection of any attempts to present programs with an informative or even educative flavor. On the contrary, I

think it would be ideal if people could increase their social awareness and practical know-how <u>at the same time as</u> they would be entertained. The prospect I am putting forth here, is that of an integration of entertainment and educational functions of television. It is based on my contention that although documentaries, educational programs and other productions whose main objective is to impart information are dealing with interesting topics and issues, they are frequently reported as being dry and inexcitable in format and presentation. P.McGhee who investigated this domain, assumes that maybe "we simply have not yet discovered the right 'formula' to make informative programming interesting and popular to the mass of television viewers"(1980:184). To this day, the area that has proven to be the most successful in integrating entertainment and educational elements has been children's programming. There are indications that educational networks such as the Public Broadcasting System in the United States, are already giving serious consideration to the feasability of such programs for adults.[3]

After some thirty years of existence, television has managed to become such a dominating presence in our way of living, that continued investigation on its effects is of prime necessity. I have offered a perspective that considers television as fundamentally providing diversion, entertainment and various pleasure-inducing experiences. To me, society needs this. Television ratings, weekly viewing averages, viewers

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[3] McGhee (1980) refers to personal discussions with officers of the Public Broadcasting System to sustain this prospect.

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satisfaction scores, can all be taken as signs to support that contention. The intellectual's demands that TV programs be more enlightening, more enriching is confronted with facts and data that quickly discourage such production. A mass medium is by definition oriented towards the greatest number of people possible. Only when refined, technically elaborated, can it then satisfy specific needs, particular requisitions. The emergence of new forms of broadcasting are allowing a wider choice, yet more responsability on the viewer's capacity to select and screen the materials entering the home.

In view of the recent developments in television technology, it is my firm opinion that 'media literacy' has become a particularly effective skill to possess in today's society. By instructing children, and when feasable adults as well, to be discriminative and selective with TV entertainment programs and by also stimulating in them the integration of valuable information presented on the screen, we may secure them from the risk of falling victims to the abundance of messages coming their way. The multi-faceted theater that is unveiled before us via television may offer so much for the individual person, and for that matter for society as a whole, that a rational utilization can only increase its value. It is in this direction that we must concentrate our efforts.

→ yes but whos going to do that?
↳ cable companies
+ Advertisers?
would they do this?

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