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## Insights into the television in French sources from 1940 to 1960

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**Abstract:** The aim of the research is to look into texts about television (critical reviews on television, texts by first television theoreticians and practitioners, interviews, scientific articles, books, and dossier) published in France in the 1940s-60s, to reveal the reactions towards the new and rapidly spreading medium. An attempt will be made to show how the early insights of French authors reflect the purpose of the new medium, its distinctiveness, specific character, functions, content, audience, relationship with other media, and technological change. The analysis covers over 70 sources, categorizing the insights according to the following criteria: television in the context of other media, influence of theatre and cinematography, television as a home media, particularities of live broadcasting, and communicational characteristics of the small screen. The research was carried out with the support of the French Government and in co-operation with the Information and Communication Research Laboratory CARISM of the Pantheon-Assas University (Paris 2).

**Keywords:** television, early insights, specific character, functions, content, French sources, 1940s-60s

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*Les réflexions sur la télévision dans les sources Françaises des années 1940-1960*

**Résumé:** L'objectif de cette recherche est d'analyser les textes sur la télévision (critiques, textes des premiers théoriciens et praticiens de la télévision, interview, publications scientifiques, livres, dossiers), mettre en avant la réaction par rapport aux nouveaux médias, qui se propagea rapidement. On tentera de montrer comment les premiers auteurs français ont présenté le but des nouveaux médias, leur spécificité, fonction, contenu, audience, les rapports avec les autres médias ainsi que le changement technologique. Dans cette recherche, les 70 sources sont analysées, selon les critères suivants: la télévision dans le contexte des autres médias, l'influence du théâtre et de la cinématographie, la télévision en tant que média de maison, la spécificité du direct, les particularités communicatives du petit écran. La recherche a été menée avec le soutien du Gouvernement Français et avec la

collaboration du Centre d'analyse et de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les médias (CARISM) de l'université Paris 2 (Pantheon-Assas).

**Mots-clés:** télévision, premières pensées, spécificité, fonction, contenu, sources françaises, années 1940-1960

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### Introduction

The first television set was displayed in public in Great Britain in the 1920s and in the 1930s regular TV broadcasts were started. In France the experimental TV broadcasts were initiated in the 1930s, whereas the 1940s-60s witnessed the spread of TV media. The rise of the new technology ignited discussions about its mission and future prospects and pointed at the problem of the relationship between traditional and the upcoming technology. This text analyses more than 70 French sources dwelling on television that were published in the 1940s-60s. Our prime interest lies in the way the mission, functions, content, and audience of the new means of mass communication were pictured. These insights intuitively reveal the aspects of interaction which will be generalized on later with the development of media theories.

At the dawn of television the term *media* was not in use (such terms as *a means of communication*, *channels* were popular). In fact, in the 1930s W. Benjamin (1968) referred to photography as a *medium*, and in the 1960s M. McLuhan (2003) used the term *media* when coupling the modern communication technologies with the earlier ones. The today widespread term *media* will be employed in the analysis of the early TV insights, viewing them as a means of communication and technology-based information dissemination, processing, and storage (Munker, Roesler and Sandbothe, 2003). V. Flusser claiming that the history of media allows better understanding of the present, whereas the old media helps comprehend the new ones (Flusser, 1991), leaves us with the question with regard to the relativity of the term of the old and new *media*. The new *media* undergoes the stages of invention, innovation, and consolidation and the concept of novelty is only applicable to the invention and innovation phases while the technology is still being institutionalized. Our research covers the period of the new *media*, when the concepts are still under formation and their mission and impact are yet to be discovered (Peters, 2009).

The theory of *mediamorphosis* is relevant in the analysis of the new technologies (Fidler, 1997). According to it, communication technologies function in a unified system where the new forms shoot out of the old ones and supplement them. R. Fidler identifies various configurations of the concept: *coevolution* and *coexistence* (impact of the widespread technologies on the upcoming ones), *metamorphosis* (new technologies slowly evolve from the widespread ones), *succession* (new technologies modify the old ones). Analysis of the innovations of communication technologies from the point of view of the *mediology* theory focuses on their effect

on culture and social evolution of the society (Debray, 2001; Vandenberghe, 2007). Texts representing a certain period exhibit the relation between media and cultures, and the then prevailing media should be taken into consideration (Flusser, 1991). J. Baudrillard also believes that the rise of broadcast media, especially television, is inseparable from the period as, according to him, *media* reproduce images, signs, and codes (Baudrillard, 1983).

J.-D. Bolter and R. Grusin (1999) identify repetitive cycles in the history of communication technologies as the new technologies absorb the properties of the old ones, modify, re-form, and re-format them. Scientists also identify repetitive technology limitation cycles – in the beginning the cinema was monochrome, made in one shot; television was broadcasting live, in black and white, was watched on a small screens. *Diachronic* (inertia with regard to change, reflection of old technologies in the new ones) and *synchronic* (relationship between the television, theatre, cinematography, and literature) approaches of the *intermediality* theory (Rajewsky, 2005) will be applied in the analysis of television related texts. The texts will be searched for the signs of *remediation* (Bolter, Grusin, 1999) – representation of one medium through another (*transposition* – screen adaptation of literature; *multimediality* – employment of various media; *transmediality* – transitional forms, narrative structures).

The texts under investigation will be analysed on the following layers: the relationship between the new media and language, written text, book; TV and other audio-visual arts (theatre, cinematography); influence of technology on TV content and aesthetics; peculiarities of TV consumption.

### **1. A new media or continuation of previous ones?**

The texts that we subjected to analysis were searched for the links between television and preceding communication technologies. As television interconnects various expression methods, there were discussions in attempt to determine the dominant one. Early texts see television as the continuation of archaic forms of communication. The prevailing view was that by bringing the future and the past together, television continued the tradition of bards and ceremonial dances (Descaves, Martin, 1965), ephemeral forms of speech were seen as present in the modern audio-visual media, and television was predicted to widely spread the art of oratory. Prior to the appearance of writing, poetry used to be sung and recited, and while the press had rendered it silent, sound recording, radio, and television brought the true sound back to poetry. Listening to the radio was even compared to listening to the voices of the invisible gods in African pygmy or Indian tradition (Clancier, 1965, p. 313). More often, it is rhetorical and written tradition (literature) that is regarded as the origins of television, rather than the visual one. Watching television is compared to a conversation or to the act of reading, the visual rhetoric of television resembles speech, or whispering in one's ear (Vigneau, 1955, p. 160).

Television was considered to be a medium that would demolish the well-established order in the world. It was assumed that writing encouraged a deep and fundamental collaboration between the author and the reader, while visual culture shaped a passive society (Benoist, 1953, p. 128). However, there were opinions that television was one of the main successors of the tradition of conversation and reading, and it did not diminish possibilities of learning (Brincourt, 1960, p. 20). As J. Thevenot put it (1947), by offering an image to someone reading “The Three Musketeers” or “Madame Bovary” by the fireplace, the TV set itself becomes a book (Ollivier, 1962, p. 5). G. Desson (1965, p. 285) refers to television as a medium of a word, rather than that of an image, as he sees television as the continuation of the radio. Analysing the early Western European television feature programs, J. Le Duc (1965, p. 124) invites the viewers to listen more than to watch. As the experience of watching television accumulated, it became evident that the image is merely a supplement to the text and that television is closer to paintings or novels (Bory, Frank, 1964, p. 23-31). R. Blanckerman (1961, p. 217-218), on the contrary, believes that audio-visual media are a shift towards the era of image, and just as one learns to read and write, one also has to learn to watch and listen. According to him, an image is worth ten thousand words, and a mere 15-minute-long program can reveal more than hundreds of pages.

Meanwhile, danger is spotted in the attractiveness of the image on television. The progress of the scientific thought supposedly was achieved by means of words and text, while image brings one back to the more primitive, more basic expression, and thus to the simplification of civilization. Television seemingly opens a new era of image consumption, which resembles a faucet of images (Brincourt, 1965, p. 38). Since nobody, except for the humans, has any experience of watching moving images for several hours a day (Diligent, 1965, p. 108), consuming them becomes a habit equal to that of eating bread or drinking wine (Egly, 1963, p. 20) – a greedy viewer continues to drink the images even though he is not thirsty (Benoit, 1964, p. 57).

Search for links between television and other media leaves us with the question: what, in fact, television is? According to J. Thevenot, a layman would say it is seeing by means of a telephone; however, as J. Thevenot puts it, it is not a *tele-diffusion* of private conversations but rather a means of recreation and education of the wide audience (Thevenot, 1946). Discussions focus on whether television is a novel media or a mere continuation of the previous ones, whether it is a new technology in terms of quality or just an improvement of production conditions. The search for answers continued well into the 1960s. “Iron, concrete, and cement brought fundamental change to architecture, photography did the same to the portrait and landscape. And what is the mission of television?” ask R. Claude and J. Gritti (1969, p. 17). Television is referred to as the great imitator, a communicational human orchestra that took much over from the press, theatre, radio, cinema, and music-halls (Oulif, Cazeneuve, 1963). The expression arsenal of television includes words, the plastic, framing, musical rhythm, combination of still and moving

images, shadows and light, tension and relief, clash and harmony. Television is seen as an offspring of cinema and radio, taking after its both parents (Claude and Gritti, 1969, p. 53).

Certain analysts consider television to be not an independent media but rather a means of transportation for other arts, resembling a vehicle or an aircraft. Television was understood simply as a means of communication and an exploitation service (Henri, 1966; Robbe-Grillet, Frank, 1964, p. 23-31). Similarly to photography in its own time, television was associated with devices for long distance viewing (binoculars and telescope). J. Mourgeon (1961, p. 122) poses the question whether broadcasting a solemn ceremony or an ice-hockey game is an art. Others are concerned with television becoming merely a means for rebroadcasting instead of developing its own unique language (Benoist, 1953, p. 83-86).

Nevertheless, the function of relay and the ability to spread works of art is considered one of the essential characteristics of television. It is maintained that the broadcast of one theatre performance, is watched by as many people as there have been spectators coming to the theatre throughout the entire history of Comedie - Francaise. However, the issue of the elitist nature of the work of art gains relevance. Art has always been the prerogative of the minority; therefore, reservations arise on whether a performance aimed at many can still be referred to as art (Hood, 1964, p. 157-159). "People wish to consume, while art has never been an object of consumption... Seemingly, television itself is yet unsure of what it should or would like to show. Its greatest fear is to fail to appeal; yet, in the field of art, commercial success is not what matters most" (Robbe-Grillet, Frank, 1964, p. 23-31). By finding its place in the homes of the better well off, television risks becoming bourgeois and sweet as a piece of pastry. Therefore, the TV set should not buzz calmly like a washing machine or a carefree friend; television should disrupt the viewer's comfort and push him out of his physical and mental languor (Brincourt, 1965, p. 9).

The first reactions suggest of a certain fluster. Theretofore unseen communicational possibilities of television injected hope that the new *medium* would promote the revival of spoken language by then suppressed by written communication. Others believed that at last the era of image had dawned bringing along visual simplification. Television provokes new discussions on the topics of art dissemination (transportation) and the relation between the original and replication.

## **2. Theatre, cinema, or something else?**

Featured programmes and rebroadcast theatre performances become an important part of TV program; TV theatre performances are staged. J. - G. Moreau (1967) identifies three stages in the initial period of French television. In the first one an attempt is made to unveil the peculiarities of live television with a hint of opposition to cinematography and promotion of national culture. During the second

stage, which began in the late 1950s, the focus shifts to the global culture with an increasing number of cultural programmes and drama performances broadcast. And the third stage (beginning in the mid-1960s) is associated with video recordings. In order to prevent risks, programmes are ever more often recorded on cinefilms or videotapes. On the one hand, there is a desire to preserve the magic of live television, yet on the other hand, people realize that resisting progress is preposterous, and the transition takes place towards recording and editing technology (the last live theatre performance was shown on French television in 1963). Unwilling to spoil their reputation, theatre actors were reluctant to perform on television, since live television meant fewer rehearsals and no possibilities of correcting mistakes (Prat, 1963, p. 46). Such contradictions related to the transition from live broadcast to recorded programmes were also reflected in the discourse of the time, where the aspects of *synchronic intermediality* and *transmediality* (screen adaptations of the works of literature, visual arts, cinematography, and theatre) become obvious.

Television was assumed to differ from theatre because of the omnipresence of the former, and from cinema because of its small screen and sensations experienced – while eating, chatting, or going through a newspaper a viewer is incapable of experiencing such illusions as the big screen provides (Faye, 1964, p. 99-101). It was proven that it is impossible to combine the incompatible, namely, the feeling that a large cinema screen and a tiny TV set can provide, the balance, rhythm, and stability of cinema and the shadows of the TV screen. Footlights that disappear in the home environment are also brought into light. The differences between cinema and television become obvious when one watches a motion picture on television. It was soon understood that the image balance as well as rhythm, and subtleness of lighting are lost. G. Desson (1965, p. 285) sees cinema and television as different, even opposite. J. Arnaud (1952) believes that while showing a film on television, the psychological poetry of the spectacle changes.

At the beginning of television, discussions take place on how a theatre performance should be shown. J. Thevenot (1947; 1957) opposes those suggesting that a theatre performance should be shown from one angle, from a single position, similarly to the way a viewer in the theatre hall sees it. J. Luc (1950) also believes that showing a theatre performance from a single fixed position would be unacceptable to TV viewers. According to him, television must leave aside the theatrical *mise-en-scènes* and employ cinematographic expression.

J. Luc sees cinematography as the only prospect for the evolution of televisual expression. J. - L. Barrault (1964, p. 3-9) identifies the following advantages of a theatre performance shown on TV: a possibility to enjoy details and hear the text well. Yet the losses include leaving the viewer on his or her own, not seeing everything but only what is shown, watching the performance as if through crooked glass, when emphasis might be put on a trivial detail, leaving what is important behind the scenes. In order to preserve the pleasure of collective viewing, television was proposed to be watched in big rooms. Speaking about forms of expression that

are close to television, J. Thevenot (1946; 1947) believes that television prolongs and improves the radio; however, it is the mentality of a cinema viewer that is more characteristic of the TV audience. In G. Freedland's (1949, p. 122) opinion, television should adapt and renovate the cinematographic form of communication. He distinguishes two TV directions: tele-vision (programs broadcast live) and TV cinema (filmed programs). According to G. Freedland, programs broadcast live are characterised by improvisation, while the TV cinema implies different watching conditions that alternate the content. In the cinema, the dictatorship of the shown piece is more palpable, as well as the author's strive to win the mind of the audience over (cinema viewers are compared to a patient lying on a surgical table deprived of any other choice). Whereas TV viewers suffer no restrictions – they can choose the conditions, environment, lighting, and angle for watching independently.

Despite the competition between cinema and television (with cinema attracting fewer viewers) (Charensol, 1964, p. 174-178), there was still hope that television would save cinematography from bad films, similarly to the way cinema saved theatre from poor plays (Brincourt, 1965, p. 75). Comparing television and cinematography, E. Lalou (1964; 1957) sees nothing that cinema would not be able to do and “what one would not be able to hear via a loudspeaker”. It is assumed that it was via cinema that television acquired the manner of combining painting and photography (Clancier, 1965, p. 305), and television is predicted to become a home-adjusted cinema (Thevenot, 1946). Television took the unity of the performance (action being born on the spot) as well as scenery, movement, mise-en-scènes, and actors' voices from conventional theatre, while it took dialogue, rhythm, narration, lighting, and image from cinematography. Here we find hints suggesting that television might be a new form of art. Doubts remain whether television could destroy cinematography, as television is assumed to be neither theatre, nor cinema, nor music-hall, nor circus; however, it is a new form of art that will not destroy anything (Benoist, 1953, p. 81). A. Bazin (1954) considers television to be neither theatre, nor cinema, but something else, whereas A. Frank (1962, p. 46) predicts that television will cause the transformation of theatre into cinema. Frequently emphasis is put on the opposition of what is pre-arranged and fixed (cinema) and what is freedom and improvisation (television) (Quiquere 1966, p. 96-103).

According to A. Brincourt (1965, p. 49), a theatre performance broadcast live is not a distinctive feature of television as it is also characteristic to the art of drama, which is an absolute opposite of cinematography (Desson, 1965, p. 290). Combination of the two opposites in television was encouraged. It was assumed that the aesthetics of cinema, brought together with the improvisation of television, as well as life captured on a cinefilm and events broadcast live could stir new aesthetic sensations (Blanckeman, 1961, p. 204). Suggestions were made to employ cinema technologies to imitate live broadcast, and to shoot an uninterrupted theatrical action (Quiquere, 1966, p. 96-103). Television of live broadcasting also imitates cinematography. Misgivings with regard to the possible disruption of the stylistic

unity of the piece shown are voiced. P. Benoist (1953, p. 129) sees a difference between an action played out in front of a TV camera, and the one filmed on a videotape. As he puts it, the atmosphere and scenery differ; therefore, the viewer can easily tell the *mise-en-scènes* of television and cinema apart (with one's attention focused on the dramatic action and the characters in the theatre, and on scheming and adventures in the cinema).

During the period of live broadcasting, the creative process on television had more resemblance to that of the theatre, with cinematic principles employed only as an additional means. Distinctive features of the television of pre-editing times included improvisation, spontaneity in image selection, unpredictability, and an active creative mode (Freedland, 1949, p. 122). Upon acquiring image recording technology, the improvisation of live broadcast diminishes, and so does the impression of a contemporaneous action (Brincourt, 1965, p. 49); however, certain elements remain unchanged, including the conditions for watching television, and its particular relationship with the audience (Diligent, 1965, p. 68). Some authors believe the changes in content perception have been exaggerated since part of the audience could not see the difference between live broadcast and recorded image (Charensol, 1964, p. 174-178).

As the amount of live broadcast decreases and electronic editing gains grounds, it brings along the sense of nostalgia towards a spectacle of theatrical nature. Now, as takes are shot and selected similarly to the cinema, the piece is born prior to its presentation on air, rather than during the live broadcast. According to P. Benoist (1953, p. 122), life itself disappears after editing. Despite the increase in similarity between the technologies and forms of expression in cinema and television, the latter preserves its distinctiveness in its ability to shape the viewers' reasoning and critical thinking. "When television presented to us certain images that we would never accept in a big hall, when it spoke to us in a tone we could only imagine spoken in a half-lit home environment, when it established intimate relationship with millions of viewers, we felt this could only be done by television. By offering to us scenes of life and drama on a daily basis, television allowed us to better perceive the human truth, and killed the cinema-made monster of artificiality, called 'the big screen stars'" (Diligent, 1965, p. 64). Even though it is impossible to create the ceremonial sacred atmosphere of the theatre hall at home, more freedom and autonomy, individuality and sense of community can be experienced in front of a television screen (Le Duc, 1965, p. 125-132). According to F. Benoit, theatre and cinema viewers are more active, more engaged in the sequence of scenes, and less distracted by external interference. TV audience is less focused, more passive and indifferent. Although submerged into his world of imagination, the TV viewer nevertheless remains in his casual home environment. "He watches without seeing and sees without watching" (Benoit, 1964, p. 57). Casual environment brings together the ritual-like and the daily, it allows participation in a performance and preserving the comfort of one's home (Bory, Frank, 1964, p. 32-43).

Generally two trends of TV aesthetics are forecast – loyalty to the traditional theatre and attempts to imitate cinematography, however, voices searching for the third option can be heard – neither theatre, nor cinema, may be something else.

### **3. The magic of live television**

Features of the invention and innovation stages are characteristic of the television in the period in question as the concepts have not yet been firmly established and the mission and impact have not been fully perceived. Ephemerality is considered a peculiar trait of television. A reoccurring motive of the initial TV evaluation is simultaneity, omnipresence, and ability to show events in real-time. The TV camera was compared to a microscope, scalpel, or x-ray machine. It goes down beneath or broadcasts from a submarine or space. Seeing the sun already down in Paris while it is still up in Edinburgh, A. Bazin (1956) states that television has confirmed that the earth is indeed round. A. Bazin (1957) calls CBS broadcast from the East and West Coast of the USA a new conquest of space, and F. Billedtoux (1964, p. 102-111) refers to the technology of direct delivery of images to one's home as a new form of speed. The uniqueness and controversy of television is seen in the universal content of programs and in the mixture of documentary style and imagination. "Television proves the same dramatic level of the plays by Aeschylus, pieces by Beethoven, frescoes by Picasso, bomb on Hiroshima, Cuban revolution, biography of Edith Piaf, and a juggler on the rope. No genres or forms stay in our memories but separate scenes: Shakespeare's characters, Lenin, St. Francis of Assisi..." (Brincourt, 1965, p. 38).

Since television was considered a medium for transmitting events directly, drama was seen more as an exception than a natural component of the program. The possibility of fitting drama between announcements of the Caribbean cyclone or victims of Saigon made people wonder (Faye, 1964, p. 99-101), the drawbacks of a drama piece broadcast on television were also brought into light. "Molière is theatre, Matisse is painting with its colours and half-tones, and Stendhal is literature, style, and phrase. What remains of it once it is transferred to a monochrome screen?" (Gauthier, 1966, p. 49-61). Even when speaking of acted out creative genres, emphasis falls on the documentary style of the image, and imitating live broadcast is advised when shooting on a cinefilm (Bazin, 1954). In order to achieve natural effect, it is suggested that plays where actors could act without exaggerating or raising voices are selected (Neveaux, 1964, p. 162-169). Stage genres are expected not to fall out of the context of real life (Faye, 1964, p. 99-101); moreover, television should reject fixed images and show live ones only (Brincourt, 1965, p. 12-44).

The so-called participation effect, the viewer's emerging into the event taking place at the time was praised (Diligent, 1965, p. 66), and it was recommended to show images familiar and recognizable to the audience (Viallet, 1951, p. 33). Live

broadcast and the sense of participation in the evolvment of history are considered romantic and thus believed to be most important (Diligent, 1965, p. 66). Television constitutes real life, broadcast from where it happens, conveyed at the same time when it is happening. It is the medium that dissolves the distance in time and space (Blanckeman, 1961, p. 204). When a theatre performance is broadcast on TV, R. Clair (1951) is overwhelmed by the feeling that the action is taking place 20 kilometres away. When watching a film on TV, he feels it all happened 20 days ago. In R. Clair's opinion, TV films are incapable of creating the same feeling and inspiration as it can be achieved during a live broadcast, where the viewer's relationship with life and with the fragility of the event is of particular importance. Television should eliminate all finished images and only keep living ones (Brincourt, 1965: 12-44). Some doubt the authenticity of the image on television, wondering if one can consider looking at something through cellophane a reality (Egly, 1963, p. 12-13).

Although many are overwhelmed by the ephemerality of live broadcasting, and the magic of the medium without memory, G. Neveux (1964, p. 90-94) proposes remedying this flaw and providing television with a memory. The phenomenon of simultaneity and the possibility to spontaneously select scenes that should be shown while broadcasting live creates the aura of exceptionality for the television, and the director's panel is compared to the human brain (Oudin, Frank, 1964, p. 64-85); the core difference between the two audio-visual media lies in the live broadcast: cinema is a mediator, while television is the medium of the moment and of direct touch with the event. Television shows the world that is not pre-arranged, the world without perfection (Guitry, 1964, p. 155-160). The work of the live broadcast director reminds of an inspired improvisation by an organist playing with images and reflections. According to M. Egly (1963, p. 21-22), TV viewers experience a similar feeling to the one that the first cinema-goers went through, naïvely rejoicing over seeing a moving tree leaf.

New ways of modelling the reality and imagination are linked to television. It brought the perceiver of a spectacle to the object itself and reduced the level of subjectivity. "We see an actor, as any other person, on the TV screen from the same angle and in the same format. The consequence is the link between art and life, when fiction and reality exert mutual control" (Brincourt, 1965, p. 58). Real life scenes and characters were considered more natural and more familiar than acted scenes; therefore, the ambiguity of the truth and imagination is suggested on television. "In the theatre the spectator accepts the rules of the genre without any major resistance; at home . . . real images are immediately replaced by fictitious ones. The TV viewer looks at it all with real eyes" (Benoit, 1964, p. 142). Although the texts suggest that the ephemeral television should be provided with memory, most of the authors can hardly imagine a fixed image on TV. Ironically, today we can still consider TV *a new medium* unable to once-and-for-all institutionalize itself. Initially the medium of live broadcast, television employed the principles of cinematography with the emergence of video recording. Modern digital technologies

disrupt the flow of the TV program by turning it into an archives of images (smart TV, image portals).

#### **4. The world in your home**

Another important topic for discussion is the TV audience. The TV set enters one's home on equal rights with the telephone, record-player, and the radio. Special attention is given to the conditions of watching television. There is no need to leave home or dress up and the TV viewer is not surrounded by strangers. Instinctively the new technology is considered the continuation or upgrade of the old one. Television is referred to as home cinema, home theatre, a medium that brings the world to one's home (Mauriac, 1964; Gerin, 1961). A. Bazin (1953) believes that by turning on the TV, the viewer is inviting the people appearing on the screen to come over for a meal or coffee. Remembering the live broadcast of the coronation of Elisabeth II, A. Bazin (1954) writes that television split the event into millions of individual scenes and provided to everyone the possibility to experience intimate moments of the Queen's life. However, the loss of fully-fledged contact is also observed and referred to as the dialogue between a deaf and a mute person. Although the viewer occasionally tries to talk to the characters, he nevertheless is mute (Bazin, 1954). Television does not address thousands of viewers but one viewer a thousand times (Guitry, 1964, p. 155-160), not millions of personalities but millions of someones (Brincourt, 1965: 8), while the television critic, the observer of the behaviour of the faceless audience, becomes the only publicly known viewer (Guitry, 1964, p. 155-160).

Although a phonograph, telephone, and radio had appeared in people's homes prior to television, the television set, however, was assigned a special status. It is surrounded by objects such as doors, "Normandy" or Renaissance sideboards, vases. Such surroundings provide the viewer with a feeling that is absolutely different from the one experienced in the darkness of a cinema or theatre hall (Guitry, 1964, p. 155-160). On the one hand, a TV set is a piece of furniture akin to a table, a chair, a bed, or a mirror; however, it is exceptional since it offers the possibility to see familiar faces every day (Blanckeman, 1961, p. 121). A TV set is a banally common miracle causing no surprise anymore (Moreau, 1967, p. 7), M. Egly (1963, p. 8-13) sees it as a magical daily object. While a washing machine or a refrigerator do not disturb the person, a TV set, like a tyrant parked in the best spot at home, asks for constant attention and sacrifice of every second of life. Lighting and the arrangement of chairs depend on it, it regulates the family life and arranges schedules.

The appearance of a TV set in a home is compared to fire that once was brought to people's homes. The television set blends into the daily life and causes a revolution of habits and relationships. The viewer becomes the witness of a magical action in which time and space are brought together, human spirit is imprisoned, logical articulation is replaced by random associations and distorted hierarchy of

values. It is a completely new type of a spectacle, a daily ritual, identical to a schoolchild's backpack dropped in the corner, a burned pie, or an accidentally broken tea cup (Egly, 1963, p. 12-13).

The new media were noticed to alter the behaviour of their audience. Previously, people looked for news on the streets, whereas now they haste home to hear them. There were attempts to predict the ways television would change the order of the world – either saving it or destroying (Barrault, 1964, p. 3-9). In any case, television has certainly already changed the rhythm of life and the face of humankind. Approach to privacy has changed – in the past one could hide and shut off from the external world in their home; and since the appearance of the radio and television, one has to save themselves from the noise and the omnipresence, so they stay silent more (Brincourt, 1965, p. 7). The spread of television is coupled with new forms of leisure time activities, the provision of routinely entertainment which becomes a part of the daily life. The first thing upon coming home is switching on electricity and the television set (Benoit 1964, p. 9); therefore, misgivings emerge about television becoming a medium of loners which isolates rather than brings together and atomizes rather than socializes (Egly, 1963, p. 12-13).

The first sociological research confirms that television becomes an important social phenomenon that changes human behaviour. Theatres and cinemas lose their audience, resorts go through the worst of times, people skip meetings and parties, and use public transport less often. J. - M. Agostini (1969, p. 14) refers to these changes as television terror. Audience surveys reveal different expectations in the audience, as well as different perception of the functions of television. Some wish to see cultural and scientific programs on television, while others expect television to help bring their families together, and make their homes nicer and more fascinating. Fear is voiced about disagreements on what to watch, becoming prisoners of television, about the lack of socializing (communicating less, not letting guests in, and not answering the phone). Some believe that the influence of television renders people more inert and lazier, while others think that television prompts discussion and proposes topics for conversation. There are opinions that television pesters and hinders learning, whereas others believe it offers new approaches, ideas, and encourages critical thinking. Moreover, the impact of television on people's health came into the spotlight. It was assumed that excessive watching is harmful to eyesight, spine, and causes nightmares (Sandt, 1969; Benoist, 1953, p. 123).

The appearance of television coincides with certain technological restrictions (live broadcast, small low definition screen). Since technology is considered a determining factor of television (Oudin, Frank, 1964, p. 64-85), live broadcast shapes the perception of TV aesthetics. Moreover, consideration is given to the ephemeral nature of the broadcast as well as watching conditions, reflecting on the effects of the viewer's ability to concentrate. It is advisable not to tire the viewers with long dialogues or parenthetic secondary story lines and not to abuse the time since the viewers' eyes get tired soon. It is advisable to avoid short takes as the viewer might fail to notice them. The spectacle should be simple and clear, adapted

to an ordinary viewer (Freedland, 1949, p. 122). The quoted director of the British BBC Drama Service, S. Newman, calls for avoiding any subtleties that might hinder perception. The viewer should take five minutes to understand what is happening, since the baby sleeping next door might start crying any moment (Barrault, 1964, p. 3-9). In the opinion of a German theoretician P. Horn, general views, numerous *mise-en-scènes*, and details are to be avoided in TV spectacles. The scenery should be in easy positions for lighting, hiding microphones, and not form obstacles for TV camera movements (Oudin, Frank, 1964, p. 64-85). According to A. Brincourt (1965, p. 67), it is light and shadows that constitute the actual television scenery.

Since television program brings together the real and invented worlds, TV actors are advised not to act but rather to attempt to remain their own selves, in order to achieve maximum intimacy, which is what distinguishes television from the atmosphere of the cinema or theatre (Luc, 1950). Television is said to be particularly sensitive to naturalness, instinct, sentimentality, humanity, spontaneity, and exceptional atmosphere of the spectacle (Vermorel, 1952, p. 26). Warnings are voiced that the TV screen is more dangerous than that of the cinema since the viewer can watch everything at a close distance (Gambut, Evein, & Frank, 1964, p. 86-89). The face takes a privileged position on the TV screen; therefore, the TV director should exploit what cinema has already forgotten – close-up on television gains new force of expression and becomes the main formula as well as the most captivating component of TV spectacles (Kaltofen, 1958, p. 111). Television is referred to as a gallery of faces, and a human zoo (Vedres, 1964, p. 216-228). Close-ups of TV characters and calm voices are most appealing to viewers enveloped in the silence of their homes. The TV character penetrates into the house, settles in, takes care and becomes part of the viewer's life (Viallet, 1951, p. 33).

Emphasis is put on extraordinary characteristics of the TV camera. It can penetrate down to the essence of objects and characters and provide the viewer with the possibility of independent explorations. Since its attention is unavoidable, the glance of the TV camera is compared to a never-lying mirror (Blanckeman, 1961, p. 216), reducing or magnifying glass (Frank, 1964, p. 113-132), or a ray of an X-ray machine that shows what is intemperate or unreal. The eye of the TV camera notices the least lack of naturalness, it uncovers artificiality, and sees people as they are. It is a psychological scalpel, exposing the person's soul and heart, providing everyone with the possibility to analyse, to plunge into the pleasure of learning, to individually read every piece shown on television. Every face occurring on the TV screen is compared to a new standard, a new measurement unit (Cotte, 1962, p. 30-31). Close-up is a psychological reality establishing a special bond between the viewer and the spectacle (Bazin, 1954, p. 243-244), while the viewer is a new type of face reader. On the TV screen the face can turn into a separate spectacle, whereas in the theatre the actor is hidden behind a mask; on the TV screen direct connection between the actor and the viewer is realized when the mask falls and the actor no longer plays but lives the role (Blincourt, 1965, p. 59-62). Continuing

improvisations on the topic of the face describe theatre as a small head in a big hall and television as a head in a head (Brisville, Frank, 1964, p. 51-56). Close-ups in cinema are considered unnatural and monstrous, while on television they are completely normal; therefore, close-ups turn theatre into television (Desson, 1965, p. 190).

In television new rules are observed when the psychological line between the viewer and the character vanishes and the TV camera becomes the eye of the viewer investigating the character's behaviour (Benoit, 1964, p. 143). "The realization of being watched by millions of eyes bring emotional uplifting to the actor and causes excitement. Knowing that he will never see what he is watching at the moment again allows the viewer to understand they are participating in a unique ephemeral process" (Diligent, 1965, p. 68). Drawing a parallel between various forms of expression, it is claimed that television holds no space for a choir, only a soloist, a voice of one person; moreover, the more alone the person on the screen is, the more we trust him (Pugliese, 1954). Speech on television is also different, reminiscent of a confession. Exaggerated facial expressions on television can turn into grimacing, raised voice into screaming, and histrionic manner of acting might seem like too thick of a layer of greasepaint (Vosse, 1962). The feelings, passions, symbolic characters, declarative style, solemn manner of speech, and long monologues of the classical tragedies seem disproportionate on the small screen (Bazin, 1954). While inner monologue, which sounds ridiculous on stage and is completely unimaginable in the cinema, suits television perfectly (Thevenot, 1957, p. 90).

Although a certain overrating of certain properties of the new *medium* can be observed, it should, however, be admitted that the circumstances of TV watching and listening are well perceived and adequately assessed. Content creators and those responsible for the TV program start taking them into consideration.

### **Conclusion**

It is with hope and suspicion that technological novelties are welcomed. Writing brought controversial views, optical telegraph equipment was subject to devastation, photography received resistance, and the first images of cinematography seemed scary. The great technological revolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the rise of mass audio-visual communication (radio and television). It crowns the old dream of humankind to see and hear at a distance as reflected in fairy tales, stories, fantastic utopias, and scientific insights.

What interested us most was how television was welcomed and what expectations and hopes were vested into it. We were gripped by the early (dating back to the 1940s-60s) insights on the television medium that appeared in various sources in France (critical reviews on television, works by the first television theoreticians and practitioners, interviews, scientific articles, books, and essays). The period chosen for investigation coincides with the stage typical of new *media*

where the concepts are still being framed and the purpose and impact are still vague. When analysing various viewpoints we took note of the intuitive groping after the relations between the old and the new media which later were elaborated on in the theories of *mediamorphoses*, *mediology*, *intermediality*, and *remediation*. The texts under investigation were analysed on the following layers: the relationship between the new media and language, written text, book; TV and other audio-visual arts (theatre, cinematography); influence of technology on TV content and aesthetics; TV audience – the phenomenon of the home medium.

The analysis of the media context revealed that television was seen as a continuation of the tradition of former human activities (speech, oratory, writing, and reading), capable of joining all these traditional forms of expression into one. There were discussions whether television should become an independent medium or serve as a relay for other forms of expression. The analysis of the creative potential of television brought forward noticeable influence of the theatre (the creative process born on the spot) and cinematography (framing, angles, and editing). Some believed the specificity of television lied in the symbiosis of theatre and cinema, while others thought that with technological advancement television would inevitably take a turn towards cinematography. In early texts it was live broadcast that was considered to be the distinctive feature of television and the possibility to transmit an ongoing action was seen as an advantage of both documentary and act-out content.

Technological shortcomings (live broadcast, small screen, and monochrome image) were turned into advantages of the new medium. The specific character of television was coupled with particular watching conditions (a cosy home environment), short distance from the TV screen (the closeness and intimacy of the spectacle), and the extraordinary feature of the camera to explore human face (persuasive ability of close-ups, television camera as an X-ray, a magnifying glass, and a psychological scalpel).<sup>1</sup>

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