

again. In the entire Eastern zone such a critique serves simply to make the conformity total by stifling the last unruly stirrings that have taken refuge in art. This surely means nothing less than that the foundation of art itself has been shaken, that an unrefracted relation to the aesthetic realm is no longer possible. The concept of a cultural resurrection after Auschwitz is illusory and absurd, and every work created since then has to pay the bitter price for this. But because the world has outlived its own downfall, it nevertheless needs art to write its unconscious history. The authentic artists of the present are those in whose works the uttermost horror still quivers.

# Theodor Adorno, Critical Models

## Prologue to Television

The social, technical, and artistic aspects of television cannot be treated in isolation. They are in large measure interdependent: artistic composition, for instance, depends upon an inhibiting consideration of the mass public, which only helpless naiveté dares disregard; the social effect depends upon the technical structure, also upon the novelty of the invention as such, which certainly was decisive during television's beginnings in America, but the social influence also depends upon the explicit and implicit messages television programs convey to their viewers. The medium itself, however, as a combination of film and radio, falls within the comprehensive schema of the culture industry and furthers its tendency to transform and capture the consciousness of the public from all sides. Television is a means for approaching the goal of possessing the entire sensible world once again in a copy satisfying every sensory organ, the dreamless dream; at the same time it holds the possibility of inconspicuously smuggling into this duplicate world whatever is thought to be advantageous for the real one. The gap between private existence and the culture industry, which had remained as long as the lat-

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The "Prologue to Television," as well as "Television as Ideology," are based on studies the author conducted in 1952-1953 as scientific director of the Hacker Foundation in America. The results can in no way be applied directly to German television. However, they indicate general tendencies of the culture industry.

ter did not omnipresently dominate all dimensions of the visible, is now being plugged. Just as it is hardly possible to take a step outside of working hours without stumbling across some proclamation of the culture industry, so too are the various media it utilizes so seamlessly intermeshed that reflection can no longer catch its breath between them in order to realize that their world is not the world. "In the theater reflection is very much curtailed because of the visual and auditory amusement"—Goethe's presentiment<sup>1</sup> would first find its true object in a total system where the theater has long since become a museum of intellectualization but that in recompense works on its consumers without respite with cinema, radio, magazines, and in America especially with *funnies*\* and *comic books*\*. Only the interaction of all the processes, working together though differing from one another in terms of technique and effect, constitutes the climate of the culture industry. That is why it is so difficult for the sociologist to say *what television does to people*\*. For although the advanced techniques of empirical social research may isolate the "factors" characteristic of television, nonetheless these factors receive their effective force only within the totality of the system. Rather than being changed, people become welded to the unavoidable. Presumably television makes them once again into what they already are, only more so. This would correspond to the economically justified overall tendency of contemporary society not to try to progress beyond its present stage in its forms of consciousness—the status quo—but on the contrary to reinforce it relentlessly and reestablish it wherever it may appear threatened. The pressure under which people live has increased so much that they could not endure it if the precarious achievements of adjustment they had once accomplished were not again and again demonstrated to them and repeated in them internally as well. Freud taught that the repression of the instinctual drives never succeeds entirely or for long and that for this reason the unconscious psychic energy of the individual is ceaselessly squandered in retaining within the unconscious everything that should not enter into consciousness. This Sisyphean labor of every individual's psychic economy of drives appears to be "socialized" today, brought into direct control by the institutions of the culture industry for their benefit as well as that of the powerful interests they conceal. Television, such as it is, makes its own contribution to this. The more completely the world becomes appearance, the more imperviously the appearance becomes ideology. The new technology diverges from film in that, like radio, it brings the product into the home of the consumer. The visual images are much smaller than those in the cinema. The small picture is a source of complaint for the American public: attempts are made to increase the size of the screen, but it seems questionable whether the illusion of life-size the cinema screen affords can be

attained in furnished, private apartments. Perhaps the images can be projected onto the wall. Yet the need, in any case, is telling. Earlier, the miniature format of human beings on the television screen was supposed to hinder habitual identification and heroization. Those on the screen speaking with human voices are dwarfs. They are hardly taken seriously in the same way that characters in film are. To abstract from the real size of the phenomenon, to perceive it no longer naturally but aesthetically, requires precisely that ability of sublimation that cannot be assumed to exist in the audience of the culture industry and that is weakened by the culture industry itself. The little men and women who are delivered into one's home become playthings for unconscious perception. There is much in this that may give the viewer pleasure: they are, as it were, his property, at his disposal, and he feels superior to them. In this point television borders on the *funnies*\*, those half-caricatured adventure series, in which the same figures appear from episode to episode over the years. In terms of content, too, many of the television serializations, especially farces, are related to the *funnies*\*. Contrary to the *funnies*\*, however, which do not intend any realism, the discrepancy in television between the more or less naturally rendered voices and the miniaturized figures cannot be ignored. Such discrepancies permeate all products of the culture industry and recall the deceit of the doubled life. It has on occasion been remarked that even sound film is silent, that a contradiction reigns between the two-dimensional images and the very true-to-life speech. Such contradictions are apparently increasing, the more that elements of sensible reality are absorbed into the culture industry. The analogy to the totalitarian states of both varieties suggests itself: the more disparate elements are integrated under a dictatorial will, the more the disintegration progresses, the more those things disperse that do not inherently belong together but are merely combined externally. The seamless world of images turns out to be fragile.<sup>2</sup> On the surface the public is hardly disturbed by this. But it surely recognizes it unconsciously. The suspicion grows that the reality being served up is not what it pretends to be. But the first reaction is not resistance; on the contrary, what is inevitable and what one loathes in one's heart of hearts is loved, with clenched teeth, all the more fanatically.

Observations such as these about the role of the physical dimensions of television programs cannot be isolated from the specific context of television, that of home viewing. It too will reinforce a tendency of the total culture industry: that of lowering the distance between product and spectator, in both the literal and figurative senses. Once again this tendency is economically predetermined. Anything that is served up by the culture industry, simply by virtue of the function of advertising avowed in America, offers itself as a commodity, an art for consumption, proba-

bly in direct proportion to how aggressively it is forced upon the consumer through the centralization and standardization of the industry itself. The consumer is encouraged to do what he is already inclined to do anyway: not to experience the work as an entity in itself, to which he owes his attention, concentration, effort, and understanding, but rather as a pleantry rendered him, which he may then appreciate if he finds it pleasant enough. What has long since happened to the symphony, which the tired office worker tolerates with a distracted ear while sitting in shirt sleeves and slurping his soup, is now overtaking images as well. They are supposed to lend luster to his dreary quotidian life and nevertheless essentially resemble it: in this way they are futile from the start. Anything different would be unbearable because it would remind him of what he is being deprived of. Everything appears as though it belonged to him, because he does not belong to himself.<sup>3</sup> He doesn't even have to rouse himself to go to the cinema anymore, and in America whatever costs no money and requires no effort loses all the more value in his eyes. The world, threateningly devoid of warmth, comes to him like something familiar, as if specially made just for him: the contempt he feels for it is the contempt he feels for himself. The lack of distance, the parody of fraternity and solidarity has surely contributed to the extraordinary popularity of the new medium. Commercial television avoids everything that might recall, no matter how vaguely, the cultic origins of the work of art, its celebration of particular occasions. Under the pretext that watching television in the dark is painful to the eyes, people leave the lights on in the evening and refuse to close the shutters during the day: the viewing environment should deviate as little as possible from the normal situation. It is inconceivable that the experience of the subject matter itself might remain unaffected. The border between reality and the work becomes blurred for consciousness. The artwork is perceived to be a part of reality, a kind of accessory for the apartment, something that came with the purchase of the television set, the very possession of which itself is already a symbol of prestige among children. It is hardly too far-fetched to suppose that, inversely, reality is viewed through the filter of the television screen, that the meaning given quotidian life on the screen is reflected back upon everyday life itself.

Commercial television atrophies consciousness, but not because the contents of its programs are any worse than those of film or radio. Admittedly one often hears the claim in Hollywood, especially among film people, that television programs lower the standard still further. But in this case the older sectors of the culture industry, many of which are perceptibly threatened by the competition, are surely using television as a scapegoat. A reading of some television scripts, admittedly hardly reflecting the entire creative production, leads to the conclusion that they

are no less worthwhile than film scripts, which by now have become totally normalized and ossified.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the television material is probably worth more than the *soap opera*\* so popular in radio, those serializations of family novels in which a mother figure or a seasoned older gentleman always helps the tumultuous young people out of their embarrassing predicaments. Nonetheless there is something to the claim that television makes things worse and not better, similar to how the invention of sound recording lowered the aesthetic and social quality of film, though such a claim should not imply demanding the resurrection of silent film or the abolition of television today. The responsibility lies with the How, not the What. That awkward "intimacy" of television, which allegedly engenders a community through the effect of the television set around which family members and friends sit idiotically who supposedly would otherwise have nothing to say, satisfies not only an avidity that allows no place for anything intellectual unless it is transformed into property but, moreover, obscures the real alienation between people and between people and things. It becomes a substitute for a social immediacy that is being denied to people. They confuse what is mediated through and through—the life deceptively programmed for them—with the solidarity they are so acutely deprived of. This reinforces the regression: the viewing situation itself stultifies, even when what is being viewed is no more stupid than the usual fodder fed to compulsive consumers. The fact that they probably indulge themselves more in television, it being convenient and inexpensive, than in cinema and more than in radio, because they receive the visual on top of the acoustic, contributes further to the regression. Addiction is immediately regression. And the increased dissemination of visual products plays a decisive part in this regression. Whereas certainly the sense of hearing is in many respects more "archaic" than that of sight, which is devoted to the world of things, nonetheless the language of images, which escapes the mediation of the concept, is more primitive than the language of words. Yet because of television, people's familiarity with language is growing even more tenuous than it already is throughout the world. The shadows may speak on the television screen, but their speech—if possible even more than in film—is nothing more than an aural translation of the visual, a mere appendage to the images, not an expression of intention, of thought, but rather a clarification of gestures, a commentary on the directives emanating from the image. In the same vein, occasionally in comic cartoons the words are written in balloons above the characters' heads, so as to insure that what is going on will be understood quickly enough.

Only more differentiated research can conclusively ascertain viewer reactions to television today. Since the material aspires to affect the

unconscious, direct questioning would not help. Preconscious or unconscious effects are inaccessible to direct verbalization by those being questioned. They would produce either rationalizations or abstract statements to the effect that television "entertains" them. What actually occurs in people could be detected only with difficulty, for instance, if one used television images without words as projective tests and studied the associations they evoke in the subjects. Complete information could probably be obtained only through numerous psychoanalytically inflected individual case studies of habitual television viewers. First of all, one would need to determine to what extent the reactions are actually specific at all and to what extent the habit of watching television simply serves the need of killing meaningless free time. All the same, a medium that reaches countless millions and that especially in adolescents and children often dulls every other interest should be considered, as it were, a voice of objective spirit, even when it no longer spontaneously results from the play of societal forces but instead is industrially planned. To a certain degree industry must still take its consumers into account, if only in order to find a match for the specific commodities of each program's patrons, the *sponsors*<sup>4</sup>. However, notions to the effect that television as the culmination of mass culture is the authentic expression of the collective unconscious falsify the object by putting the emphasis in the wrong place. Certainly mass culture taps into the conscious and unconscious schemata, which it rightly assumes to be widespread among its consumers. This source consists primarily of the repressed, or simply unsatisfied, instinctual impulses of the masses, which are either directly or indirectly accommodated by cultural commodities—mainly indirectly: as the American psychologist G. Legman, for example, has emphatically shown, sexuality is replaced by the representation of desexualized brutality and acts of violence.<sup>5</sup> In television this can be demonstrated even in its apparently harmless farces. Nonetheless, by virtue of these and other modifications the will of those in charge enters that language of images,<sup>6</sup> which so much wants to pretend it is the language of its consumers. By awakening and representing in the form of images what slumbers pre-

<sup>4</sup> The interpretation of mass culture as a "hieroglyphic writing" is found in the unpublished part of the chapter "Culture Industry," sketched out in 1943, in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. The same concept is used completely independently of this context in the article "First Contribution to the Psycho-Analysis and Aesthetics of Motion-Picture" [sic] by Angelo Montani and Giulio Pietranera (*Psychoanalytic Review*, April 1946). The differences between the two treatments cannot be discussed here. The Italian authors also contrast the status of mass culture with the unconscious of autonomous art but do not elevate the opposition to the level of theory.

conceptually in people, it also shows them how they should behave. Whereas the images of film and television strive to evoke those that lie buried in the viewer and indeed resemble them, they also, by flashing up and slipping away, approach the effect of writing. They are grasped, but not contemplated. The eye is carried along by the film as it is by the line of a text, and in the gentle jolt of a scene change a page is turned. As image, the image-writing is a medium of regression in which producer and consumer meet; as writing, it makes the archaic images available to modernity. Disenchanted enchantment, they do not convey any mystery; rather they are models of behavior that corresponds to the gravitation of the total system as well as to the will of the controllers. The perplexing thing about the interaction, which promotes the mistaken belief that the moguls' own spirit is the spirit of the age, lies in the fact that the manipulations, which condition the public<sup>6</sup> according to the requirements of behavior well adjusted to the established order, can always appeal to characteristics of the conscious and unconscious life of the consumers themselves and thereby with apparent legitimacy put the blame on them. Censorship and the inculcation of conformist behavior, which are conveyed by even the most anodyne gestures of any television program, not only have to reckon with people who have had drilled into them the schema of mass culture, which dates back to the beginnings of the English novel at the end of the seventeenth century and has in the meantime attained an air of nobility. On the contrary, these types of behavior had established themselves throughout the early modern period long before they were deployed in ideological manipulations, and so are now internalized as second nature. The culture industry grins: become what you are,<sup>7</sup> and its deceit consists precisely in confirming and consolidating by dint of repetition mere existence as such, what human beings have been made into by the way of the world. The culture industry can insist all the more convincingly that it is not the murderer but the victim who is guilty: that it simply helps bring to light what lies within human beings anyway.

Instead of paying tribute to the unconscious by elevating it to consciousness so as to fulfill its urge and simultaneously pacify its destructive force,<sup>8</sup> the culture industry, with television at the vanguard, reduces people to unconscious modes of behavior even more so than do the conditions of an existence that promises suffering to those who see through it and rewards to those who idolize it.<sup>9</sup> The rigidity is not dissolved but hardened even more. The vocabulary of the image-writing is composed of stereotypes. They are defended with technological imperatives, such as the need to produce in a minimal period of time a terrific quantity of material, or the necessity of presenting vividly and unmistakably to the

viewer the name and character traits of the protagonists in the sketches, which most often are only a quarter-hour or half-hour long. Criticism of this practice is countered with the rebuttal that art has always operated with stereotypes. But there is a radical difference between the die-cast stereotypes calculated with psychological cunning and those that are clumsy and awkward, between those that intend to model human beings like mass production and those that try to conjure up objective essences out of the spirit of allegory one more time. Above all the highly stylized character types, like those in the *Commedia dell'arte*, were so removed from the everyday life of its public that no one could possibly succumb to the idea of conceiving their own experience in terms of the model of the masked clowns. On the other hand, the stereotypes in television resemble externally, up to and including intonation and dialect, every Tom, Dick, and Harry, and they propagate maxims—such as that all foreigners are suspect<sup>10</sup> or that success is the supreme goal of life—while they also, through the simple behavior of their heroes, present these maxims as though they were divinely sanctioned laws cast in stone once and for all, before one might draw a moral that sometimes even means the inverse. That art supposedly has something to do with the protest of the unconscious at being disfigured by civilization should not serve as an excuse for misusing the unconscious so that civilization may more radically ruin it. If art is to render justice to what is unconscious and pre-individual, then to that end it requires the utmost effort of consciousness and individuation; if instead of making this effort, one gratifies the unconscious by mechanically reproducing it, then the unconscious degenerates into mere ideology in the service of conscious objectives, no matter how stupid the aims may ultimately turn out to be. In an epoch where aesthetic differentiation and individuation have increased with such liberating energy as in the novelistic work of Proust, such individuation is being recanted in favor of a fetishized collectivism that has become an end in itself and a boon for a few profiteers: and this surely sanctions barbarism. During the last forty years there have been enough intellectuals who, whether out of masochism or material interests or both, have joined the heralds of this tendency. They must realize that what is societally effective and what is societally just do not coincide and that today the one is nothing less than the opposite of the other. "Our participation in public affairs is mostly only philistinism"—Goethe's statement from Makarie's archive<sup>11</sup> also holds for those public services the institutions of the culture industry claim to provide.

It is impossible to prophesy what will become of television. What it is today does not depend on the invention, not even on the specific forms of its commercial exploitation, but rather on the totality in which the mar-

velous wonder is embedded. The cliché about modern technology being the fairy-tale fulfillment of every fantasy ceases to be a cliché only when it is accompanied by the fairy tale's moral: that the fulfillment of the wishes rarely engenders goodness in the one doing the wishing. Wishing for the right things is the most difficult art of all, and since childhood we are weaned from it. Like the husband who is granted three wishes from the fairy and who proceeds to use two of them by making a sausage appear and then disappear from his wife's nose, so too whomever the genius to dominate nature has granted the ability to see far into the distance, sees only what he habitually sees, enriched by the illusion of novelty that gives its existence a false and inflated significance. His dream of omnipotence comes true in the form of perfected impotence. To this day utopias come true only so as to extirpate the idea of utopia from human beings altogether and to make them swear their allegiance all the more deeply to the established order and its fatefulness. In order for television to keep the promise still resonating within the word,<sup>12</sup> it must emancipate itself from everything with which it—reckless wish-fulfillment—refutes its own principle and betrays the idea of Good Fortune for the smaller fortunes of the department store.