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The peculiar public of television

for Pierre Sorlin[§]

[§] ***Translator's note.*** As the author of this paper himself point out, French and English differ in their use of the terms « audience » and « public ». In particular the use of the plural « publics » seems a little strange in English, but since this paper depends on this difference of usage I have opted to

1 Audiences or publics ?

The experience of watching television cannot simply be described in terms of the individual.

Watching television is always a collective exercise, even when one is alone in front of the set

Watching television means being part of a "reverse-angle shot" consisting of everyone watching

the same image at the same time or, more exactly, of all those believed to be watching. Such is the experience described by the American philosopher Stanley Cavell when he says that programming always includes a pivotal moment where utterance is live, allowing the audience to enter the community of those watching at the same time, to step into "a current of simultaneous event reception" (Cavell 1981). The experience of simultaneity is not unique to television. Newspapers, according to Hegel already provided modern man with a substitute for morning prayers, turning reading into a ceremony in which each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident... (Anderson, 1983: 39)

It is such an experience of "watching with" that Elihu Katz and I have tried to describe with regard to "Ceremonial Television" and the swell of emotion felt by the public when confronted with events that submerge the individual in a community both immense and fleeting. (Dayan & Katz, 1996). One finds the same idea in Michel Gheude when he talks of television as an opportunity for an "invisible meeting" (Gheude, 1994) or, in Walter Benjamin when, nearly twenty years before the advent of television, he points that 'individual reactions are predetermined by the mass audience they are about to produce' (Benjamin, 1936, : 234).

Thus the public serves as a dimension of the spectator's experience. From this point of view one cannot be a spectator without reference to a public. But beyond the subjective experience that links watching television to the imaginary community of those who are also believed to be watching, how do we understand the notion of television's public? What does this idea mean? Are there publics that can be credited with more or less reality, more or less stability than others? Are publics always a manifestation of pre-existing groups or can they form in response to unexpected situations, be called to existence by the very power of certain texts? Are there typical situations capable of triggering the existence of publics, as opposed to others that could be described as "publicidal"? Is there such a thing as a silent public? Can the concept of a "public" be totally separated from that of the "public domain" and therefore from the process of public debate? Can one, on the other hand, be part of a public through simple juxtaposition or, where such juxtaposition is lacking, as a mere statistic? Finally, how does the notion of 'public' relate to that of 'audience'?

Public: Noun and adjective.

The word "public" is both a noun and an adjective. As a noun it presupposes the existence of a real sociation, of a relatively recognisable grouping, ultimately ephemeral, but stable enough to be described. As for the adjective, we speak of

behaviour or opinions that are public, in contrast to those that are private (i.e. not in the public eye). It seems to me essential to take account of this adjectival dimension of the word public, of all that links the notion of "public" with that of the "public sphere" (Habermas, 1992). For in fact the idea of a public is self-reinforcing. The eighteenth century public was formed, so John Peters informs us, through reading and discussing newspapers where the notion of the 'public' was itself under examination. The idea of a public conveys not only the act of seeing but of being seen. Each public therefore relates to an other which is watching it. There are 'public' manners just as there are table manners. Publics display their identity by ostensibly differentiating themselves from other publics. In other words a public is not simply a group, but one characterized by a style of performance. This performance may be either consensual or provocative, but on no account can it be invisible. Those publics which are revealed to themselves by the statistical scrutiny of experts were not publics in the first place, simply because publics do not exist in limbo. Thus, the adjective 'public' introduces a clear departure from heteronomous, statistically constructed audiences. It underlines the impulse for self-presentation. In other words, a public always strikes some sort of a pose. A public both knows itself to be, and wishes to be- seen. What then are we to make of the shy audiences, of the square-eyed ghosts whose existence hovers between darkened living rooms and the bright pie-charts of market research? Such an unflattering portrait is the one usually offered when describing television audiences, but is it true to life?

Visible and invisible publics

The problem of the mass media is precisely that of determining whether they attract merely invisible listeners and viewers whose obscure activities require elucidation. Do the mass media have only audiences and are their "publics" little more than artificial construction put together by sociologists and market researchers? Is this just fiction constructed behind the backs of those concerned? If such is the case, then these publics will be left without a say, they will serve as references to be discussed by others, as evidence in support of some argument, as ventriloquists' puppets. However, even with regard to the mass media, perhaps it is possible to point to the existence of publics in the full sense of the term. Television's atomised public need not necessarily be an amorphous mass. It is not condemned to being diagnosed in the way one diagnoses an illness. It is possible for such a public to be proactive, self-aware, now dismissive of other publics, now defensive under their gaze. This public is not condemned to silence.

Public, commitment and Public life

Each public defines itself by a performance that Austin would have described as "commissive"; by an affirmation of loyalty on the part of those who belong to it. (Austin, 1962) In contrast to those bashful audiences whose obfuscations market researchers quickly learn to discount, publics emerge around the very act of taking a position. They can do so in regard to various types of television. Let me concentrate on one example: the handling by contemporary television of great "scandals", of "controversies" that extend the historical model of the "affaire" - (Boltanski, 1993; Claverie, 1999). For the latter writers, on whose work I am basing myself, the model of the "affaire" -- as in "affaire Calas" or "affaire Dreyfus" -- serves to explain the emergence of major public positions.

It allows us to understand that the act by which the supporters of these positions affirm their commitment is equivalent to a structuration of the public sphere. Such an act determines, often for some decades, both the cast of protagonists and the political language that will structure the public debate. Here one reaches the point where the performance of the public is at its most effective, since it becomes synonymous with the functioning of the public sphere. Yet these huge mobilisations of public opinion may occur without television, and in the case of the "affaires ", they occurred well before its existence. Are there other situations when publics emerge with respect to television?

A good object ... and the rest?

Proposing a radical difference between audiences and publics is a project fraught with difficulties. Cultural difficulties, in the first instance. Closely related traditions of research are based on deceptively similar terms. In French, for example, 'public' is used as the generic term, whereas the idea of the 'audience' is a marked term and therefore more restrictive. On the other hand, English uses the term 'audience' as its degree zero, and the word 'public' is used to describe favourably a particular form of audience. But the difficulties are also evaluative, since the notion of 'public' enjoys a normative status in democratic theory. The distinction between 'audience' and 'public' is in fact based on a dichotomy. The 'public' is automatically endowed with a positive value, whereas the audience is constructed as its dark doppelgänger. Audience turns to be a 'bad object', or as Livingstone would put it, an empty shell whatever remains after describing the 'public'.² Therefore it is correct to say that in comparison with the negative connotations of the "audience", a "public" is defined by a series of positive attributes. As Sorlin points out :

(1) a public consists of a milieu ; it offers its members a certain type of "sociability" and displays some amount of stability (Sorlin, 1982). (2) It is committed to, and emerges from, the practice of internal debate . (3) It is endowed with a capacity for "performance" that manifests itself through self-presentation vis-à-vis other publics. (4) These self-presentations commit their authors: a public is characterized by the loyalty expressed to certain values with reference to a perceived common good or a shared symbolic world-view. (5) A public is capable of transforming its tastes into "demands", thus taking over the role of the ancient sponsors of the arts (Baxandall, 1999). (6) Finally, a public can only exist in reflexive manner. Its existence can only arise through a capacity for self-representation, through a capacity of shared imagination, through criteria establishing who belongs.

In contrast to such a public, an audience feels no compulsion towards sociability or stability nor does it feel an obligation to perform (it remains confined to the private sphere); nor is it obliged to defer to the common good. Its attention is reactive and responds to market forces. Of course, the reality of the audience is an imagined one, as it was with the public. In this there is nothing surprising. The construction of any collective subject relies on a fiction. Yet the question is not whether the collective subject is imagined, but by whom. In the case of publics, the collective being is thought of as an "us". In the case of audiences, this community is essentially imagined in the third person. It is constructed by third parties for the benefit of other third parties.

Following from these few conceptual clarifications, it is now possible to return to television's publics . Understanding these publics is not the same thing as studying audiences, despite the fact that audiences and publics are often composed of the same viewers . We know very much about the former, much less about the latter. Thus we must concern ourselves with the new task of observing television publics, of

confronting such publics to the ideal type sketched above. Has this task already been performed? Are television audiences capable of transforming themselves into publics?

2. Audience studies: the public is required to remain silent

The methods used for audience research are full of presuppositions that give form to an implicit theory of the public', states Sabine Chalvon (1999). ' In prescribing certain features for observation, these methods offer stylized descriptions which they conceal under the supposed neutrality of figures'. Thus, the world of television viewers finds itself distilled, rarefied to the point of resolving itself into pure numbers, a process which bears a definite resemblance to marks given for homework at school.' Made with a view to assessing 'audience share' such a simplification tends to obliterate the collective dimension of viewing, and to detach the latter from its insertion into a social process.

This processual dimension is now, progressively, acknowledged. Yet the evolution of audience research is characterised by a heavy bias. On the one hand, 'indices are gaining in precision; analytic tools are ever more refined; techniques are standardised, acquiring stability, consistency, comparability. Samples are broader... a continuity of indices is being established...' On the other hand, descriptive protocols tend to reify the viewing experience, to desocialise the viewer.' Our knowledge of publics is less and less dependent on their direct intervention...'. This intervention is unwanted the criteria applied leave no room ' for the pleasure of being part of a public, or for the spectator's wish to identify with one '. 'Objectivity', to a large degree, consists in excluding the possibility of hearing the public; in depriving it of opportunities for self-expression; in denying it of its say. Its views no longer count. Indices make them redundant. Of course, such views are not always easy to nail down since listeners and viewers often restrict their reactions to the domestic level where they escape scrutiny. Nevertheless, writes Pierre Sorlin, the positions taken by this invisible public 'are much more numerous and interesting than one might imagine. Readers have been writing to the papers since the nineteenth century and they continued to do so with television and radio networks in the subsequent century. At the start of the thirties, the BBC used to receive two thousand letters a week; in the course of the same decade, five million written messages were addressed to the American broadcaster NBC' (Sorlin, 1992).

During the eighties, a student preparing a thesis on the Indian station *Doordashan* was invited to investigate the mound~, near the broadcaster's building. These mounds turned out to be paper, thousands of readers' letters, the envelopes still sealed, soaked by the rains.

From these thousands of unwanted messages and from their american counterparts, one thing emerges: ' They were completely disregarded. A few letters had been read and commented upon on air to give the impression that they were being taken seriously, but the mail had never been systematically gone through. No one had ever paid it any attention'. (Sorlin, 1992) The analyses of Chalvon, just like those of Sorlin, demonstrate the profound indifference of media institutions towards a viewer who is socialised, has something to say , affirms tastes and allegiances. The fact that viewers might form publics seems to interest no

one. Publics are not "significant" realities Their existence is sacrificed on the altar of indexical empiricism. But, at some point the situation changes;

3. Reception studies: the mute shall speak

During the eighties, many sociologists of the media turn away from quantitative audience assessment and the problems of impact in order to address the question of reception. This question -that of a social circulation of meaning.-- calls for a renewed attitude . Understanding the recipients' culture involves some recognition of its legitimacy. To study television reception means accepting that the worlds of meaning inhabited by viewers could be characterised other than in terms of alienation and deficit. Critics and researchers are encouraged to look beyond their own cultural world, beyond its textual centrism, beyond its didactic tendency. They are encouraged to emulate ethnographers in their critique of ethnocentrism, in their ambition of starting a dialogue with a profoundly different culture. The culture of viewers is therefore to be taken seriously. Such viewers are no longer to be reduced to behavioural clues, no longer to be referred to in the third person. It is no longer acceptable to dismiss them and speak on their behalf. Time has come to listen.

The text-reader model

Such a perspective adopts a theoretical framework that combines textual analysis and empirical research, literary theory and the social sciences; a framework that abandons individual psychology and the study of the structural coherence of a text to concentrate on the nature of the relationship between text and reader . Thus ' text-reader model' (Livingstone, 1990, Dayan, 92.) can be summarised under four headings:

- (1) The meaning of a text is not an integral part of the text. Interpreting a text is not a passive absorption of prefabricated meanings, but a production of meaning. This invalidates a major claim of textual analysis, namely the ability to deduce the reading (and the reader of a given text solely by studying the text.
- (2) The rejection of textual analysis implies abandoning any model that privileges the knowledge of the analyst. As soon as research lays claim to an empirical approach, it has to recognise that the structures of a text are only virtual just as long as readers or viewers fail to activate them. The knowledge of a text, be it never so sophisticated, does not allow for the interpretation it will receive.
- (3) The readers and viewers are varied. Breaking with a linear conception of communication, the principle according to which all codes present at the "production" of messages, should automatically be put into play at the time of its "recognition" by the recipients (Veron, 1988), is likewise rejected. As soon as one accepts the diversity of contexts in which reception takes place, and the multiplicity of codes circulating within the same linguistic and cultural space , there is no longer any reason why a message should automatically be received in the terms in which it was uttered. The coincidence of "encoding" and "decoding" may be frequent. It remains, nonetheless, a coincidence.
- (4) Reception is the moment when the meanings of a text are constructed by the members of a public. These meanings, rather than the text itself, are the actual starting point for the study of "effects". In other terms effects stem not from the text as "conceived nor from the text as "produced, nor from the text

as "broadcast", but from the text as "received". Any text is received in specific ways by distinct publics or audiences.

On the basis of this theoretical framework, the great contribution of reception studies consists in demonstrating the diversity of readings, the various ways of constructing the meanings attributed to broadcasts and as a consequence, the diversity of publics. But are publics defined solely by their diversity? If not, do reception studies address the question of publics ? Or do they simply describe the diversity of audiences?

4. The voice of the audience: a case of mistaken identity

It may be possible to maintain that in fact, reception studies concentrate above all on audiences, and that, victims of a case of mistaken identity, they treat such audiences as if they were publics. Thus audiences are credited with performing skills and given a spurious sociability. In eliciting statements that the viewers did not directly choose to make, in expecting precise wordings to describe reactions whose nature was often private and non-discursive, and in further asserting the legitimacy of the viewers' opinions, researchers provoke these viewers into entering an almost public realm of discourse. Viewers are therefore encouraged to assume the role that goes with their granted status as public personae, to engage in "self-presentation" marked, as the case may be, by eagerness to please, challenge, or suspicion. Thus one creates a specific artefact: public discourse on the part of those viewers for whom such a performance is exotic or incongruous.

The awareness of such a problem leads to the generalised adoption of an ethnographic mode of participative observation. Rather than pushing individuals towards the limelights, students of reception will only observe "interpretive communities". But whether based on good or bad criteria, the limits of such communities are usually determined by the researcher and this intervention creates yet another artefact, rendering collective an activity which may or may not have been so. Instead of an artificial performance, we end up with an artificial sociability.

Giving voice to an allegory

When the two artefacts are associated, research on reception ends up inventing a fictitious public and giving it a voice. Indeed such a public does not make claims to existence. The 'us' it constitutes is imposed from without, assembled by invitation. But the recruits do not necessarily share a collective identity. The individuals involved in reception studies are usually unaware that they belong to publics. Like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, they do not realize that what they speak is 'prose'. 'Publics' of this type are not capable of speaking for themselves, simply because they only exist on paper. They are no more capable of speaking for themselves than classic allegories such as Liberty or Equality would. To summarize an argument developed by Hartley (1988) the reality of such a public is physically invisible, but observable textually, and textually only. But this public, which exists only as a textual reality, as a conglomeration decided from without, as a performative categorisation, has indeed a name: it is an audience.

The story of an ambiguity

The mistaken identity of the audience can be traced back to a turning point of media research. Dedicated to the study of a televised news programme and carried out by Charlotte Brunsdon and David Morley, one of the most famous studies on reception, provided an empirical demonstration of the varied readings brought to bear on the same programme. (Brunsdon and Morley, 1978 ; Morley, 1980) Thus the programme under study -- Nationwide- could be read according to the makers' intentions ('dominant' readings). or in opposition to them ("oppositional" readings), and more often than not, as a mixture of the two ('negotiated' readings). In his contribution, David Morley noted that the 'oppositional, readings displayed in the course of the inquiry derived almost entirely from a small group of viewers. The latter were capable not only of objecting to certain propositions contained in the news, but also of reformulating them according to their own view of society.

These viewers had one thing in common. They were active trade union members. They formed a social milieu, were aware of their militant identity, knew how to defend publicly the values to which they subscribed. In other words, they constituted a public and their interventions were of an entirely different order from all those of the other viewers questioned. Morley thus brought to light an essential distinction.

Curiously, his study did not stress this distinction. Morley in fact chose to treat audiences and publics as if they formed a continuum (which was facilitated by the ambiguity of the English word 'audience'). This indifferenciation had serious consequences on the countless projects inspired by Morley's work, amongst which was the indiscriminate attribution of the ability to make 'oppositional' readings to all viewer, and an incentive for producing a touched up and rather utopian image of audiences, rather than identifying 'publics'. While he was the first to distance himself from such an interpretation of his work (1992) Morley may have nurtured it. ³ Yet the question remains: are there television publics ?

5. Publics after all?

Even when faced with the mass media, it seems that there are publics that see themselves as such , viewers or listeners that consider that they belong in a community and evolve rituals to confirm it . These are, for example, the punks and other devotees of pop music whom Dick Hebdige (1979) shows to be able to develop complex networks of activities and criteria for establishing membership in their respective groups. Similarly- the prospective viewers of certain televised events exercise pressure for these events to take place at a certain venue and in a particular manner. Thus, many English viewers demanded a state funeral for Princess Diana. Do these active media users really form a public?

Let us consider two examples. One clearly belongs to the field of reception studies. This is the work of Dominique Pasquier on the *Culture of Feelings*. The other broaches the problem of reception from the angle of symbolic anthropology and concern what I have attempted to define as a Ceremonial Television.

Fans as public

La culture des sentiments (Pasquier, 1999) provides a precise description of the world of young girls and female teenagers who acknowledge themselves to be fans of the

French serial "Hélène et les garçons". This world characteristically displays (at least) four of the features that characterize publics. (1) The conscious feeling of sharing a community with imagined others: The fan is aware of the existence of other fans whom she does not know personally (2) The ability to make strictures or demands on the plot, an ability that translates into thousands of letters sent by children to the actors in the serial. (3) The emergence of a serial-induced sociability Every evening, at home, after school, the serial allows a playful reenactment of the world of school, thus providing a privileged arena for initiation into the complex rules of the social game... (4) A capacity for performance in public : "The task of presenting oneself as a television viewer is an integral part of the process of viewing in itself" (1999: 21) The viewers of Hélène et les garçons seem to display the majority of those elements which are characteristic of a public, including a tendency to define oneself in opposition to some other public (girls and boys refuse to follow the same serials). Nonetheless, do they form a public?

Only if one accepts that a public can function alongside a society, in a sort of parallel universe. The activities of the fan reflect a world of play and mimicry, a social reality that

could be described as closed off, marginal, a game. Something essential seems to be lacking.

Here is a public without a commissive dimension without a sense of seriousness. Are the rules that govern publics compatible with the world of "make believe" ? with the world of play ?

The public of ceremonial television

It is another potential television public that Elihu Katz and I have attempted to analyse in *Media Events* (Dayan & Katz, 1992) , by describing the viewers that follow the live transmission of great events presented as "historic" . Such a transmission is usually accompanied by an interruption of schedules and characterised by the simultaneous presence of two types of spectators: the demonstrative spectators, who seek to participate in the event by taking to the streets and cheering or booing the protagonists; the domestic viewers, whose reality ceases to be invisible thanks to a norm peculiar to such events: the norm of collective viewing. Thus, the spectators who stay at home congregate into small celebratory communities whose members are perfectly aware of the millions of other similar communities all equally engrossed in the unfurling of the live broadcast.

The impact of events of this type is best described in reference to Austin's performative. Their main effect consists in taking place. They are an authorized exercise in imagination aiming at the "figuration" or at the "reconfiguration" of a society. As such these events punctuate the public sphere, activate, or reactivate national debates, and their effect is to elicit publics. Certain political initiatives, like Sadat's visit to Jerusalem or the Pope's tour of Eastern Europe, invite the viewers to commit themselves, to become witnesses, apostles or propagandists. Witnesses to the event become, in a way, its real media. In so doing, they transform themselves into publics. (Other ceremonial events, presidential debates for instance or major public trials aim at creating a divided public. a confrontation between publics laying claim to conflicting values).

In a word, the interest of work on *Media events* is that it brings to light the process, which transforms the day to day audiences of television into publics: (1) A feeling of belonging begins to emerge: the small celebratory communities do not think of themselves as independent of each other but as a huge festive "diaspora". (2) Specific networks of sociability are reactivated through hospitality, open houses, intense

telephone activity; (3) There is a propensity to make demands on the course of, or indeed the very existence of the event, and (4) a willingness when faced with other publics to defend the values embodied by the event.

Pretend publics, publics for a day

But the limits of such a transformation need to be recognised. First of all, there are televised ceremonies, which are used to create discord not to elicit debate; to destroy rather than create a public arena. These are the events whose tumultuous progress through recent history or, in the case of the United States, not so recent history, James Carey tries to reconstruct: ritual moments of humiliation and degradation; inquisitorial "senatorial hearings" reserved for Judge Bork, Judge Thomas and Bill Clinton; cross-examinations before the Committee for un-American activities, hearings before Senator MacCarthy (Carey, 1998). Each of these episodes seem to be marked by the disappearance of all reference to the "common good", by a divisive sectarianism. This sectarianism has grave consequences, and it is not to be taken lightly. Yet, sectarian media events do not preclude the emergence of publics. They can lead, for example, to the emergence of outraged publics.

The second reason why it is difficult to talk of the emergence of publics is at once less tragic, and, in terms of definition, more serious. It has to do with the ephemeral nature of the viewers' commitment; the transitory aspect of their interest, be it in their own history or in the distant events that concern others. Audiences turn into publics for the duration of an event, but this metamorphosis (1) only concerns a section of the viewers, those who belong to the national public sphere activated by the event. (2) and this public sphere, while activated, or polarized by the event, will only be activated for a limited period. The brevity of such a mobilisation resembles the marginality of children's television. The publics of festive television, just like those of children's television, are capable of performance but their performance takes place either in a parallel universe or in suspended time. They proceed to self-presentations, but these presentations are placed between brackets. The latter are pretend publics, the former publics for a day.

The publics of media events may of course enjoy a prolonged life and become "real" publics. Such is the Israeli public that demonstrated for the implementation of the Oslo accords, or the Poles who thronged the streets in the aftermath of the visit of John Paul II defying the party-state "in a massive, resolute, but nevertheless supremely pacific way" (Ash, 1990: 133). But is the role of television here more than one of accompaniment?

These publics are real publics, but they are no longer the publics of television.

6. Either /or ? Publics or television?

Setting out on the search for a public peculiar to television, I have apparently to concede defeat, I have certainly found audiences, but not any publics. The only one that I have found is the "publicum in fabula" the public which features within those programmes where the public is invited to play itself on stage. The function of such a public is far from being negligible. If the notion of a public reflects, as I have suggested, the existence of a set of normative performances, there must be a place where these norms are learned. Television would be the ideal site for such a socialisation. Such, for example, would be the meaning of the sempiternal invocation of the judicial process that seems a trademark of American serials. Swarms of lawyers, of prosecutors and

judges address themselves to a privileged group of citizens, summoned to take cognisance of the case, to debate it and then "reach a verdict". This celebration of the jury might seem naive. It is nevertheless one that shows how a public does or should perform. Other publics might thus find themselves "depicted". They might include all those people that one brings into televised discussions as witnesses or experts. This cast of characters, this 'publicum in fabula,' establishes a frame for the viewers' participation, (Livingstone & Lunt 1992 ; it gives these viewers indications on the community of viewers they are about to join (or to avoid joining). 4 It also provides a powerful pedagogic tool.

Depicting the public ?

Is such a tool effectively used? And if so, is it used to illustrate what an active public should be? Both Dominique Mehl, in her study of talk shows and Eric Macé, in his own discussion of 'poor man's television' would agree that the displayed cast of characters offers a 'mirror' of audiences rather than a model of publics. (Mehl, 1992; Mace, 1992). Such conclusions are confirmed in a striking manner in a study by Dominique Cardon and Jean-Philippe Heurtin on the 'active' public of telethons. (Cardon, Heurtin & al., 1998).. Telethons commit their viewers to intense, visible activity, often captured on location. This activity for which television acts as the 'trigger' involves reactivating numerous social networks. The mobilisation of viewers is undeniable. They undertake public performances, display specific modes of sociability, are constantly made aware of their very mobilization. Thus telethon viewers seemingly display many of the features, which allow us to identify a public. Do they really constitute a public then? Let us focus on one criterion: the public's self-awareness .

The self-awareness of this public is guaranteed by a crucial device, the *cashometer*, an instrument designed to add up the many charitable gestures made in favour of the programme's beneficiaries. The ever-present cashometer continuously 'focuses attention on the exemplary nature of the public's unity and solidarity'(Cardon & al 1998:37) The cashometer 'shows us society as it should be'. It provides the viewers with a 'subjunctive' self-awareness. Situated at the centre of the event, it becomes its embodiment or emblem. Yet one might wonder why a reifying tool of measurement should have been selected as the emblem of a public's self-awareness; why the awareness in question should concern a grouping defined in quantitative terms. The awareness postulated here is curiously an awareness in the third person. It is not a question of "who we are" but of knowing "how many of us there are". Though an "us" constructed by the event does indeed come into being, it varies from minute to minute and reveals itself far too ephemeral to effectively offer the site of a subjective identification. In fact the format of the show is meant to preclude any distinction between stable and last minute commitments. As the authors write: 'The telethon 's dimension of intentional commitment .. is considerably attenuated since the very form of the displayed activities forbids any preliminary discrimination between those who strongly support the sponsored cause and those whose link with it is much slacker..' (1998: 30). In other words, Cardon and Heurtin tell us that the adopted format is meant to prevent a distinction between an active association and an aggregate of individuals between a real group and an accidental regrouping. This indistinction is all the more significant since it concerns an exemplary public, a "publicum in fabula", a constructed fiction a normative model. The offered model is a marvellous subject for study. This study however, is not that of a public.

To concern oneself with the public or with television?

Perhaps research into television audiences should turn towards other themes focussing, as de Certeau, Appadurai or Silverstone have done, on the phenomenology of consumption. Perhaps, like the latter, it should undertake an anthropology of urban domesticity. But, by focussing on these subjects, research would progressively distance itself from the study of publics. By the same token, research concentrating on publics might equally tend to distance itself from any essential interest in television.

For those studies that focus on publics, the point is no longer to remain preoccupied with the response (whether good or bad, homogenous or diverse) given to texts or programmes; the question is no longer that of the quality of a "regurgitation". It is rather that of the formation of a common sense or public opinion. The public is situated at the heart of this process, process in which the relationship to television becomes less central. This relationship no longer needs to be direct, nor need it involve the viewer's attention. It can become a relationship of hearsay, a relationship at second hand, a tangential relationship of 'friction', to borrow the term used by Dominique Boullier (1987). This relationship takes place in a media ecology whose general configuration is more important than the relationship of viewers to any given texts.

Research concerned with publics changes its time orientation. . From being retrospective it develops a prospective ambition. It focuses on a key process which is no longer that of viewing , but that of the conversational exchange for which television serves as a resource . Thus Dominique Boullier studies 'TV conversation'. William Gamson analyses the media resources mobilised in 'political talk'. Elihu Katz proposes a return to Gabriel Tarde's programme of 'Media, Conversation and Public Opinion', stresses its central element : conversation (Katz, 1992; Gamson 1992)

Seen from this angle, a public does not form around a medium (or a text) but in relation to a problem and with respect to other publics, existing or potential, mainstream or minority. These publics possess an (internal) sociability and an (external) performance. This performance consists of taking up a public position, with reference to an agenda. What is involved here is the process of formation of public opinion, a process that depends on interventions by differentiated publics: for example, the activist minorities described by Serge Moscovici, or the "hard core "minorities described by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann (1992). In all these cases, viewers are depicted at the moment when they are distancing themselves from the medium , when they are turning their back on it in order to step in the public arena. It is not, therefore, in front of television sets that we have to go looking for publics. Does this mean that publics and television are incompatible realities ?

7. Television publics or coopted readers ?

The construction of Europe says Philip Schlesinger is characterised by the emergence of new and supranational arenas areas of communication, and by that of the publics, which constitute them. ' By introducing a new, 'higher' political level above that of the nation state, the shift to a supranational formation begins to transform the established communicative relations between national publics and state centred systems of power (Schlesinger, 1999: 1).' Such communicative activity takes place not in a single coherent European public arena, but rather in an often contradictory field of political forces.

Consequently, rather than imagine a single European public sphere as the likely outcome of economic and political integration we should think about the growth of

inter-related spheres of European publics.' (99 :18)..Are such European publics already visible? And does television play a role in their emergence ?

A certain public (that of politicians and European economic leaders) has been built around such publications as *The Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *The International Herald Tribune*. Through the existence of this public a conversation takes place within the European space. However, this is a very narrow conversation , a discussion between elites. It mostly takes place in the press. It is conducted for the most part in English. The creation of television channels dedicated to European affairs could change this situation by initiating a conversation no longer limited to the elites, but open to the participation of other groups as well. Thus the emergence of a large European public would possibly compensate for the so-called "democratic deficit" of the European Union.

This enlarged public would need to fulfill a certain number of specific conditions. If we think beyond elites to a putative network that knits together a range of European publics, ideal-typically, these would be composed of citizens who have (1) an equal and widespread level of communicative competence ; (2) relatively easy access to the full range of the means of communication; and (3) a generalized communicative competence which embodies sufficient background knowledge, interest and interpretative skills to make sense of EU and its policy options and debates ..' (99 :18) In distinguishing "communicative" skills from those, which are merely "interpretative", and in making clear that the public of which he is speaking is a public composed of citizens. Schlesinger's definition introduces both a dimension of "performance" and a dimension of " commitment". But can one see his normative public of citizens actually emerging in response to the broadcasts of already existing news stations such as Euronews? Not really explains Schlesinger, since as he points out..'television is now increasingly capable of finding niche markets prepared to pay for specific services , as the growth of digital technology is ensuring that this medium too will be capable of targeting elites.' (99:11:) Thus Euronews seems to be essentially targeting such elites, and " it remains to be seen whether this niche audience for news can offer a route to creating a transnational public.'.. For the time being, ' in as much as a media-sustained supranational communicative space is presently emerging because of European integration, this is class inflected and has become predominantly the domain of political and economic elites, and not that of a wider European public. 99: 1)

In other words, European publics exist but these publics are not mass publics and -to return to the central argument of the present article- they are only incidentally television publics. Their members tend to rely on other media. As for television, all it does is try and coopt such publics , by adapting to needs and habits that were formed elsewhere . Thus, if European publics exist today, they are neither the normative publics of democratic theory nor the publics of television.

Back to 'Uses and gratifications ?'

Let us, however, reflect on these elite publics. Such publics are not fundamentally defined in terms of their relationship to media. On the contrary, they form milieux whose members effectively interact, they are part of ' fields' in which they develop longterm strategies, they perform for each other and towards larger publics. Communities of "euro-policy-makers " (politicians, bureaucrats, business men) exist independently of the media.

They do rely on media responsive to their needs, but their relationship to such media is best described without the media-centrism that characterizes much communication research. This relationship rather calls for an approach inspired by the 'uses and

gratifications' tradition, albeit translated in collective terms . 5 Publics as "milieux" manifest themselves not only through the choice of certain texts or programmes but also through the shaping of media themselves in response to their needs . Media can then cater to various sorts of needs, including those of traditional communities . Can they lead to the emergence of publics within such communities? And can it be so, in particular, for television ? This is a question tackled by recent work on migrant communities and their media.

Migrant communities, media and publics

New publics appear amongst populations living a scattered existence as migrant communities. In the (increasing) number of such groups, one can mention the "classic" diasporas (Jewish, Armenian), but also the migrant communities of Kurds and Palestinians, Iranian exiles in the United States, the North African or Turkish communities of continental Europe and the Indian and Pakistani communities of Great Britain. These scattered communities are spread across the territory of several nation states, but they form small islands of sociability at a local level: 'projects ', 'housing estates', 'street corner societies'. They are characterised by an original use of the resources offered by the 'mediascape' of contemporary developed societies (ordinary, mainstream television programmes ; or programmes aimed at minorities). They are also characterised by their recourse to a whole gamut of small media (video and audio cassettes, sermons on tape, religious images) bound up with family and religious practices. (Srebemy-Mohammed, 1994; Gillespie, 1995) Above all, they are characterised by the appearance of a wide range of media productions aimed at strengthening presumably fragile identities : papers, dailies, weeklies, monthlies, radio programmes, television stations Television , in this context, is almost reinvented as a medium . Is this medium able to create publics?

It is to varying degrees . In his study of Exile Cultures, Hamid Naficy (1993) describes at least three types of television transmitting to migrant communities.

(1) Transnational television essentially consists of national television stations broadcasting directly to the exiles from their country of origin. (2) Exile television consists of ad hoc transmissions produced by exiles themselves, in their new surroundings. Erratically scheduled, often produced on a shoestring, such transmissions are meant to help other exiles through the traumas of cultural assimilation. (3) Ethnic television emerges when migrants no longer see themselves as exiles but as new minorities in their adopted country Production becomes professionalized. Formats cease to be unpredictable. Broadcasting hours are no longer erratic but inserted in the schedules of specialised stations.

With regard to national or transnational television, exile populations are not radically different from other viewers. They constitute audiences. Reception studies underline the peculiarities of the interpretive behaviour of these audiences, (Gillespie, 1995) but such peculiarities are rendered predictable by the reader-text model, and as Kevin Robins points out, they should not be exaggerated. On the contrary, viewers of exile television and those of the initial still militant, wave of ethnic television are no longer mere audiences. They display the majority of those characteristics which define publics: intense sociability, frequent interactions, stability of the group, self-awareness (combined with a deep-felt marginality) , willingness to debate and evaluate programs (leading to the creation of media) , and finally, an orientation towards the public sphere . This however, is a dual orientation.

Exile television, and the complex of minor media of which it forms a part, fulfils a function of differentiation. In promoting the formation of arenas of communication for the groups concerned, it provides these groups with 'micro public spheres' (Dahlgren, 1994). These small public arenas are for the internal use of the group. Exile television is intended to be a vehicle for particularism. But exile television runs the risk of betraying the ethnic intentions that often lead to its creation. In fact it is hard to see how the small public spheres could succeed in hermetically sealing themselves off from the public sphere at large how they could prevent the circulation of styles of debate and patterns of behaviour in both directions. Such a circulation certainly takes place. It becomes manifest in the evolution of these groups. It explains the disaffection with exile television that heralds the appearance of ethnic television. 6

The latter is no longer simply orientated towards the internal affairs of a community. From now on it participates in a dialogue between communities. It marks the entry of an identifiable group and discourse within the general public domain. This public sphere 'at large' can be conceived of as a site where 'interaction between heterogeneous publics takes place, a forum where different publics enter into competition with each other'. In other words, the emergence of ethnic television, coincides with the group's access to a 'sphere of publics' (Fraser, 1995; Calhoun, 1995; Schlesinger, 1999).

Extending from the birth of exile television to the inauguration of ethnic television, there is a period during which diasporic publics emerge, a period during which the new forms of television catering to such publics are not just other elements in the mediascape.

In the course of this period the diasporas give rise to both media and publics. But, if these publics are indeed publics (by their sociability, by their stability, by their capacity of debate, by their capacity of taking positions publically) are their media really part of what we usually call television? Questioning the notion of a 'medium', Eliseo Veron highlights the different uses to which the same technical apparatus can be put. Can we still speak of one medium, when the same technical system is 'submitted to various forms of social construction', and used as a vehicle for radically different modes of discursivity?

(Veron, 1994). Leaving aside the 'technical apparatus' which they share with mainstream channels, are the varieties of television which spring up in exile, with their hybrid discursivities, their hastily improvised programmes and their erratic scheduling, really part of the institution that we call television? Are't they rather do-it-yourself activities that broadcast images?

8. A public, but with reservations ?

As a result of this exploration of the various situations in which a public could emerge as a public of television, we have encountered four types of public. The first type concerns us only indirectly. As we have seen, broadcasts or programmes often construct their participative frame on the basis of a portrayed public. Serving as a model, this "publicum in fabula" usually offers a normative message. Thus, in his research on public service television in Norway, Espen Ytreberg (1999) identifies the "legal-rational" public depicted in the course of news and political programmes.

The second type of public may be found in front of television sets, yet it is only incidentally a public of television. This type of public adopts certain forms of television, but television did not determine its emergence. It was constituted earlier, elsewhere, and often in an interaction with other media. Such are, in the first case, the elite publics of European media who entertain a privileged relationship to the press, and in the second,

the marginal publics of immigrant media- who formed cohesive milieux, before embarking on their media experiences The remaining two types of public are perhaps the only ones that can accurately be described as publics of television.

Both present peculiarities that prevent us from considering them as 'fully fledged' publics. One is a "make-believe" public, the other a public "for the day". The public of fans is stable and self-aware. It possesses an undeniable sociability, and it is ready to confront other publics over matters of taste. However its existence is accompanied by a suspension of seriousness. Reproducing the rules that, in our societies, govern the social construction of childhood, the public of fans situates itself in the parallel world of make-belief. The public of major media events is not a pretend one. On the contrary, it is very serious, deferential even reverential. It demonstrates all the characteristics required to form a public, save one : stability. It is in an elusive public: a public for one or several days; sometimes a public for an hour or two. Emblematic of live transmissions, such a public

partakes of aesthetic of "simultaneity, speed and saturation". (Gitlin, 1996 , 2,000). The simultaneity is that of an experience offered live to millions or to hundreds of millions of participants. The speed is that of the accelerated process in which networks of sociability specifically related to the event come together and dissolve. The saturation is that of televisual space by an event whose attraction depends much less on the continuity of a tradition than on the immensity of the audience it reaches. Thus a lightning public, a throw-away public comes into being,. Rapidly mobilised and rapidly dissolved, its life is meteoric, that of a 'fugitive community

Be it a pretend public or the public of a moment, the public of today's dominant forms of television presents itself as an imperfect one, as a public subject to reservations. These reservations perhaps lead us towards its essential features. In one case this public displays strong links with the world of play, with the transitional space in which Silverstone, following Winnicott, locates the viewers of television. In the other case, its fleeting existence, its intermittent or stroboscopic manifestations suggest equally strong links with that temporal dimension which constitutes a ma or feature of Victor Turner's liminality . In both cases the commitment of the television public turns out to be weakened either by the marginality of its fictional objects or by its fugitive time - span. In other words, if a public exists in relation to television, its existence must be qualified. It is an almost public.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

1 Thanks to Pierre Sorlin , whose seminal essay " le mirage du public " has clearly inspired this piece . While still a work in progress, this text amplifies several themes discussed in previous papers (Dayan 1992a, 1996, 1998).

2 This comment was made by Sonia Livingstone, in response to my presentation of an early draft of this paper at Roger Silverstone's seminar. LSE, London, Feb 2,000.

3 David Morley was present when I discussed this point during the "Globalisation, Media, Culture " session of Jostein Gripsrud's seminar on " Cultural Disorders" at the University of Bergen (May 2,000) I must thank him for accepting (quite graciously) my remark on the definitional heterogeneity of the Nationwide audience/ public , but also for

explaining how this heterogeneity emerged from the very logistics of the project
, and
finally for sending me his and Charlotte Brunson's chronicle of a study that
took place
long ago and far away .."

4 A crucial element of reception studies consists of identifying the dynamic of audiences.

It involves a process that, following the work of John Fiske and Sonia Livingstone, I would call "audienciation". For Fiske, audiences are not "substances" (which one can therefore analyse in representative" samples). They are mobile formations, the ebb and flow of viewers ; not groups but regroupments.

Freezing such a movement effectively destroys the object of study. One ought, therefore, to conjugate "audience" as a verb and to this end Fiske proposes to create the verb "to audience": to focus the study of reception on the moment of "audiencing", on what one might call in French, 'audienciation' and which I would define as an acceptance of the collective identity proposed to the viewer in the act of transmission. (Fiske, 1992)

This process is mediated. A certain image of the public is displayed in the broadcasts, and it helps constituting a 'participatory framework' . This 'participatory framework' refers to members of the public that may be real, but at the point of reception, their status is essentially an imagined one. (Livingstone & Lunt, 1992) One of the essential elements which leads to the activation or inactivation of 'audiencing' consists, therefore, of accepting or rejecting the presence of these imagined others; of feeling part of an image judged to be desirable or, on the contrary, unacceptable. One joins the game or beats a retreat, channel-hopping on the way . In other words, the process described here is the process of joining (or leaving) an imagined community of television viewers. (Dayan, 1992, 1998)

Such an imagined community need not be a public. Receiving a broadcast is to engage in

a "para-social" interaction and can remain only that. Thus, the process of "audiencing"

describes not the construction of a public, but that of an audience. It is a phenomenological

contribution to the 'demography of ebb and flow' . Chalvon & Rosental suggest "that the

public present in the course of a programme undergoes events similar to those experienced by any human population... It is born at the beginning of the transmission (the set is switched on), dies at the end of it (the set is switched off); it undertakes migrations (leaving or joining other stations); and it experiences epidemics." (Chalvon & Rosental, 1999). ' Audiencing ' allows us to better understand the experiential factors behind these demographic changes.

5 The tradition of "uses and gratifications" seeks to avoid mediacentric assessments of the effects of the media. It does not look for media impact, but for the uses to which media are put.

6 Later, ethnic television will become one more resource in the "mediascape" and its publics

will the audiences of mainstream media. But to go back to the origin of such publics, it

must be emphasised that they seem to be linked to changes in the history of groups, rather than changes in the nature of television. In fact the different styles of television mentioned here can serve as symptoms of this historical evolution.

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