

An example from Chile:

TV for the Poorest Sectors

By Valerio Fuenzalida*

1. The poor relationship between the churches and television

The Christian churches – together with many progressive sectors concerned with the fortunes of those who are most poor – generally have a bad relationship with terrestrial TV in underdeveloped countries². They want didactic television scheduling, education in values and virtues. They bitterly accuse TV of having, conversely, an entertainment schedule which is distracting and alienating.

This tension is quite obvious and it has not been beneficial either to television nor to the poor. This tension, in my opinion, arises from a great misunderstanding in these sectors towards television and the media; more specifically, it arises from a lack of understanding of the televisual language, the devaluation of the reception situation in the home and of the awkwardness that causes the administrative operation of the industrial condition of television. The televisual language has an intrinsically ludic-affective³ and dramatic character and it is due to this that it is most suited to entertainment. However, in the Christian tradition and in rationalism, entertainment has been negatively portrayed as a useless distraction and something which takes away from the more important chores in life. Furthermore, television is principally received in the home; a place that has traditionally been considered to be rather more concerned with behaviour and awareness of daily life than with learning; learning has been understood uniquely as a systematic education and something which takes place outside the home – in schools or in training centres for young people and adults.

The intention of this article is to motivate in the search for a more positive relationship with TV, demonstrating that the home is a very necessary place of learning for the poorest sectors of society and that televisual entertainment could be highly educational. In effect, other positive conceptions do exist that value entertainment not only as relaxation but also as a motivating factor and as a fantasy, useful to the extent that it widens self-understanding and the comprehension of reality.

2. The educational needs of the poor

Quantitative and qualitative audience studies indicate that the poor and the less wealthy sectors of Chilean society – and of other underdeveloped countries – have in general, high

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educational expectations in terms of television as a media; educational expectations that do not manifest themselves as regards the written press and radio.

However, the depth of these educational expectations has produced many surprises. This is because they are neither related to children's schooling nor to the training of young people or adults – a didactic function which is considered to belong to schools and to other educational or training establishments. It is from here that one of the major contradictions arises, that while social directors associate education uniquely with school and therefore only appreciate formative television as long as it is educational, the formative expectations of the audience itself are related to needs in other areas thought to be very important such as improvement of the quality of daily life – the growth in self-esteem and self-confidence and the exploration of feminine and young identities.

a) Improvement of the quality of everyday life: It is within the home that poverty affects daily life most severely: it manifests itself in somatic and psychological illnesses, violence among the couple or against children, poor sexual and emotional relations, poor academic performance, drugs, delinquency, etc. Through television, received in the home, it is particularly the main female of the household who would expect help to improve in those aspects that affect her quality of family life.

As regards this necessity, a very successful programme on TVN is the morning show *Buenos Días a Todos* (Good Morning Everyone), which is shown from 8.00 a.m. until midday from Monday to Friday, in all a weekly total of twenty hours air-time. The programme is a magazine style show, adapted to the attention quality of the viewers at this time of day, that is to say that the attention of the viewers is more towards the audio than the visual. This happens when people have another primary activity and only turn their attention to the television screen now and then. The programme's primary function is to provide company for and to communicate with the audience, inspiring them to be happy and energised in their everyday chores and difficulties faced in their home lives. On this affective and stimulating communicational basis, the brief segments emphasise useful information which aims at helping to solve the numerous needs of the home.

The programme does not go into conceptual discussions about whether daily life in the home is a place of alienation for the woman, as was maintained by some feminists in the past. Neither does the programme talk about today's sociologists who claim the same, or who discuss the most adequate socio-political conditions to confront the current crisis of the family. Neither does it recite idyllic poetry about the beauty of the family, nor deliver severe sermons regarding the obligations of this life and it does not attempt to replace the religious groups that reflect upon a conjugal-familial spirituality, that some couples have today. This programme does not attempt to provide an academic diagnosis concerning family life through a verbal code which analyses reality but rather it provides the family with a useful aid in the ludic-affective language of television; in other words, through audio and visual images, which communicate affects and emotions interwoven with information, and which together help people to face up to the adversities in the home. In this way the home can be encouraged to help itself in its conversion to an active centre in the improvement of the quality of life and in overcoming poverty.

b) Increasing self-esteem and self-confidence. It is not only in the country-dwelling and urban popular adult sectors but also in children and young people that television



can have a very necessary formative impact: that is, in increasing self-esteem and self-confidence in their own capabilities so that they can articulate their energies and therefore face up to problems or adversity.

An important trend exists today which is all for doing more than taking stock of the failings of the poor, it precisely diagnoses their capabilities and resources to provide them with potential and to transform them into active agents in their battle against poverty (Cfr. Parker, 1999). Rather than educating in terms of knowledge and skills, the popular sectors need television to guide them into learning their own self-confidence. This learning is indispensable in overcoming self-pitying attitudes and devaluation, which encourage passive and paternalist behaviour. People and groups with increasing self-esteem reinforce their enterprising capacity and they themselves look for the necessary knowledge and learn the required skills.

As an example, *Tierra Adentro* (Inside Land) is a magazine which is shown on TVN every weekend in the afternoon. In contrast to the normal broadcasting of innovations, in the programme they do not bring experts on to teach the audience; instead the presenter travels across the Chilean countryside and also the cities and coastal areas of the country, showing the innovation and creativity of those who own their own concerns in the agro-industrial sector. The presenter does not come across as a teacher nor as an expert who teaches the viewers but rather as a communicator who shows in each episode the creativity and innovation in the area of agricultural production, forestry, fishing and all that is involved in a serious ecological concern.

The programme does not attempt to demonstrate a country-like, compassionate folklorism nor one that lays claim to a nostalgic past. It is a programme that hopes to unite productive learning with anthropology, the differing identities of the countryside with the customs of daily life, the memory of the past with a creativity that looks towards the future; therefore, young innovators often appear alongside older people who conserve memories. The cultural identity and the diversity stop being abstract ideas, or discussions between intellectuals and instead appear in faces, landscapes, sounds, traditions and innovative energies. The programme shows the innovative energy of a civilised society spread out right across the country in hundreds of people and places, so that it can reach out to the audience to potentialise their capacity for self-empowerment.

c) Exploration of feminine and youth identities. In an era of great changes in the social role of the woman, the female television viewer can explore her identity potentials, particularly in fictional stories such as in the Latin American soap operas. The important curiosity about the world of affections and love affairs between young people and adults – the sexual-erotic theme being taboo in family conversation – means that



Source: IZ: Adult Education and Development 1995/

the woman watches a lot of soap operas. There is evidence to show that some soap operas, especially those about the embarrassments of youth, facilitate conversations between fathers and sons about unlikely situations or about inadequate ways of facing up to problems.

3. Forms of educational knowledge on the television

Much evidence exists, obtained through televisual reception studies, which indicates that the way in which the audience learn from television is very different to the way in which they learn at school. While school education is systematic and based on abstract concepts, through television, learning comes in a more anecdotal form – particularly in the popular sectors, including children and young people. Learning also occurs through personal accounts that facilitate the recognition of and the identification with concrete experiences.

This explains the lure of the soap opera stories where situations and characters appear that make it possible to recognise differences and similarities. Thus, the preference for programmes in which the viewer feels as if they have a friend and that they are loved – that is, entertained – instead of programmes which make the viewer feel criticised, or taught by experts and teachers whose knowledge makes them different and inaccessible. This also explains the preference for television presenters with whom it is possible to empathise and identify oneself with and aspire to, instead of passively listening to academic debates or political discussions.

There exists a type of report – called Agonal reports – which is particularly appropriate as a televisual form that permits the viewer a look at the effort and the self-empowerment of real people solving their problems. This type of report could exist as a unit-based programme and could be used as a brief note within news bulletins and magazine shows. It is also a form that could be used in the production of videos with reports and documentaries for group teaching.

Some children's programmes allude to self-esteem, to self-confidence for the reaffirmation of the capacities for success, to astuteness for survival during hardships; these programmes are constructed with ludic-dramatic entertainment schemes, which are very different from the scholarly methods of education.

Educational Needs

Programmes with ludic-dramatic schemes

Self-esteem and Self-confidence

- Identification with fiction
- The dim-witted adult and the clever child
- Fight between the strong and the weak
- The crazy child

a) Identification with history and characters. The American series *Bobby's World*, for example, ludically narrates the adventures of a pre-school child who lives in a family that goes through the normal conflict between brothers and sisters in the various stages of personal and familial growth. Bobby comes across as an imaginative child, reflective and full of questions, with a joy for life and knowledge. His family is the place where he belongs, where we see the loving protection of his parents, with brothers and sisters seeking out their own ways to develop, with conflicts of interest, but in an atmosphere of humour and love. In the Japanese series inspired by the book *Pinocchio*, the puppet goes through various adventures in each episode, in the majority of which he is fretting explicitly due to an intense desire to "become a real little boy". Pinocchio's search for transformation is shown to the child-viewer as a metaphor

for his own motivation to become a big boy, to grow up into an adult⁴ In these programmes, through the pleasure of recognition and of clear identification, the child can affectively feel attitudes of happiness and strength to grow in the world.

b) The scheme of the dim-witted adult and the intelligent child. Various children's comedy programmes are built around the generative scheme of the dim-witted adult, who carries out various activities very badly and with little skill; the scheme is completed, to make it more eloquent, with skilful children who do very well what the adult cannot; this is clearly shown in the series *Inspector Gadget* and in *Donald Duck* with his nephews. According to some studies, the child finds this representation fun because his cultural-genetic development demands that he acquire skills (in the home and in school). The scheme entertains children; but furthermore it is useful in satisfying the need to neutralise the fear of failure – by laughing at the dim-witted adult – and in affectively reaffirming the capacity to succeed in life – by identifying with the clever child.

c) The scheme of the fight between the weak and the strong. In practically the majority of cartoons we come across, another very basic, although notably attractive to children, generative scheme: it is the scheme of the fight between the strong and the weak. The dramatic action in the cartoons featuring the situation between the cat and the mouse is entertaining to children. According to some studies, the cat symbolises the adult, with his monopoly on strength and power, while the mouse, who is frequently more astute than the cat, represents the child who is physically weaker but a trickster, quick and ingenious. These cartoons are metaphoric fantasies, with a ludic-affective lesson that confirms the capacity of the intelligent child to survive in the face of an adverse, apparently stronger world.

d) The scheme of the dim-witted child. Another scheme which is very entertaining to children is that of the character which represents „the dim-witted child“: it is the generative scheme of *Daffy Duck*, *Woody Woodpecker*, *Dennis the Menace*, *Bugs Bunny*, *Garfield*, and it appears in *Top Cat*. The scheme allows „crazy or evil people“ to live symbolically, including their particular tendencies to cause chaos. Some psychologists value the stage of „infant craziness“ as complementary to the need for routine habits, and as something that motivates the imagination and creativity.

The schemes of children's programmes reveal the internal structure of televisual entertainment and simultaneously they appear as ludic-dramatic forms of knowledge and affective education. These television programmes can enrich the family atmosphere with valuable formative elements, especially necessary in deprived sectors. These formative elements are not concerned with cognitive materials to memorise the academic curriculum, but rather with affective attitudes and motivating factors such as those which clearly appear in the aforementioned programmes.

But the potential formative influence is not mechanical or direct – as the behaviourist theorists believe; according to them, it is enough to watch one episode of a television programme to fatally convert the viewer towards good or evil. However, the polysemy of televisual language does not guarantee that the viewer will catch on to whatever the programme proposes. The educational influence requires familiar and scholarly mediation; in this way the usefulness of these programmes for families and children would really increase if the programmes were enjoyed and discussed in the kindergarten, in school and in the home.

Televsual entertainment, understood in this way, is not like the sugar which is added to a nasty tasting medicine. Televsual entertainment is a natural structure different to the didactic academic structure, but from which we sometimes learn a useful lesson for our lives; the lesson that we learn is less by means of rational conceptual analysis but rather more by means of recognition of situations which allude to our own life and by the identification with significant people – whether they be real or fictional (Fuenzalida, 1997).

4. Conditions

The programmes that are useful to audiences in our underdeveloped countries require a terrestrial TV channel. To create and maintain a terrestrial TV station is a long and complex job in which certain difficult conditions need to be overcome:

- The diffusion of entertaining/formative programmes in the indicated direction, rather than high culture or academic-didactic programmes.
- A programming schedule which is widely accepted by the audience, then the elite and marginal stations would not have social influence.
- A station which is professionally managed in terms of both production and administration.
- An industrially solid and competitive station; capable of obtaining funds from the existing publicity market and from other sources of public and private funding.

A TV station which is useful to the development of a country is a challenge which systematically ties together aspects which have frequently been disassociated and devalued, such as ludic-dramatic entertainment, the formative needs of the particular audience susceptible to being satisfied in their own homes and the intrinsic industrial condition of the television for production and funding.

² Terrestrial TV or broadcasting, different to cable TV, satellite or closed circuit TV.

³ Ludic, from latin Ludus: playful, characterised by play. Cfr. The classical book *Homo Ludens* by Johan Huizinga.

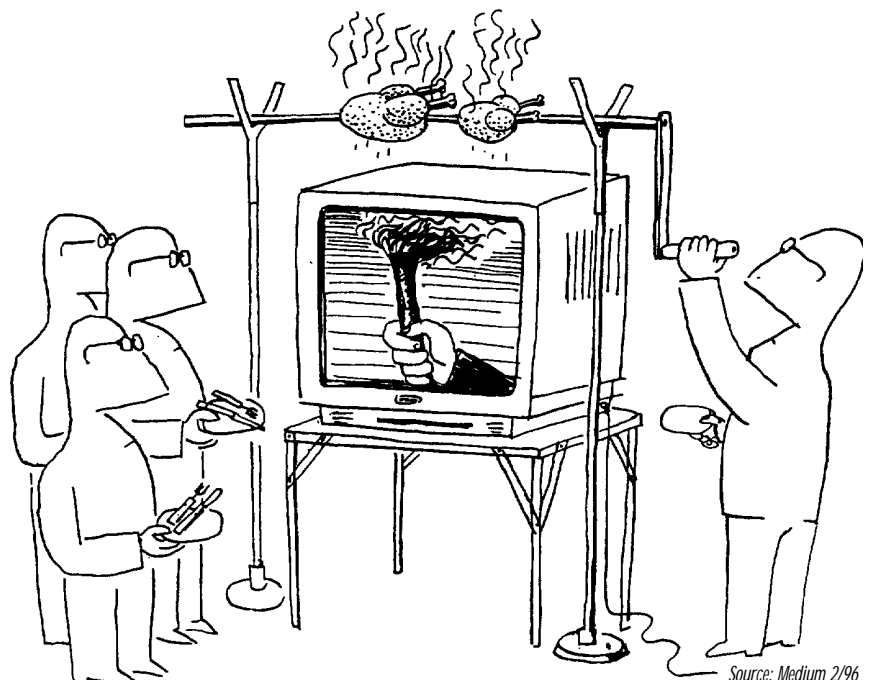
⁴ The metaphor is a feature of language in which, from a different reality, we allude to a similar aspect or analogue.

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