

Between Citizen Image and Consumer Discourse: Talk-Shows on French Television – Issues, History, Analysis

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Introduction

Information media are in a paradoxical position. Participating in public life, they have a duty to inform citizens in the most exact and thorough way possible. Their credibility depends on it. However, within a market economy, they need to capture the largest number of readers, listeners and viewers to attract advertisement resources. Their survival depends on it.¹ As their financial situation has become more complicated because of the arrival of other information media via the Internet, a fierce competition has developed to acquire the now-dispersed audience. Yet, this can only be achieved through *dramatisation* and entertainment. This is particularly true for television, which mixes reality and fiction, persuasion and seduction, seriousness and amusement in and across its various programmes. Hence the emergence, since the 1980s, of *Talk-shows*, the English being used in French, expressing the idea of speech becoming a show of itself.

The show's entertaining aspect predominates, but its informative function is still important. Talk-shows can therefore be argued to constitute a 'social mirror,' giving witness to the collective *imaginaire* of a particular society during a specific historical period. It is thus interesting to understand how these shows work: what forms they have taken over the years, what social meanings they have acquired, and what tools must be developed to analyse them. This paper studies the different issues concerning television debate and the existing analytical tools which enable such an examination of this kind of programme. The aim, then, is to study the history of talk-shows on French television and identify their significant formal mechanisms.

The Issues of Television Debate²

The 'talk-show' is in some ways a vague label, used in the media professions (television and radio) to indicate a 'media contract', depending, as it does, on the

general constraints of a media *mise en scène*, as well as one of its variants: a 'debate contract'.

The 'media contract' imposes a series of constraints with a double aim: *seriousness* to justify the fact that the information is useful to the citizen (legitimising, and assuring the credibility of, the medium), and *capturing* in order to attract the largest number of readers, listeners or viewers possible and foster loyalty (assuring the survival of the medium as it competes with others). From these basic contractual facts, different journalistic genres develop as well as different types of shows for radio and television, depending on their particular modes of 'ritualisation'. This applies to the 'debate contract' which complies with a triangular mechanism between the participants in the debate, a moderator and the receiving audience, a contract in which the different actors converse according to an exchange mechanism governed by a certain number of rules.

Due to the constraints of this double contract, the *talk-show* creates a spectacle out of the moderator, who becomes a stage director, dramatising the debate by orchestrating the principles of competition and cooperation and accentuating aggressive disagreements between the warring participations. This defines three components of the talk-show: *spectacularisation*, *truth* and *the construction of public space*.

Spectacularisation

The *spectacularisation* component depends on the way television imagines its viewers, their interests and emotions: in other words, the rational and irrational aspects that characterise them depending on population categories. In this way, television could be argued to *format* its target audiences (and not the viewers) by playing on the intellect and affect. But in seeking to reach the largest audience possible, emotion triumphs over reason most of the time. *The effect of identification* must be created, by making the audience believe they are *inside* the screen, rather than in front of it. To do this, various practices are employed according to four enunciation modes:

- 'I involve you, you identify yourself': presenting ordinary, everyday people in whom the viewer can recognise himself and with whom s/he is likely to identify;
- 'Watch the real': the viewer has the impression that what s/he sees on TV is real, reality in all its authenticity, and that the opinions expressed are really those of the viewers.
- 'Come to me, I can help you': this reality being made of tragedy and suffering, all that is likely to fascinate the viewer and touch them more or less directly, one may suppose that s/he needs support. Some *talk-show* programmes play on intimacy and confession to give the viewer the impression that participants are opening up. This is the *catharsis* effect.

Truth

In the different social *imaginaires* of our modern societies, speech has an ambiguous status. Sometimes speech is considered to *express the truth*, sometimes to *conceal* it. But there is, also, another idea: speech expressing truth is a collective speech that comes from the confrontation of opinions, everyone's truth as the *consensual average of truth*. In this crisscrossing of truths, there are three types of speech: *erudite* speech (from science, specialists and experts), considered objective and unquestionable; *opinion* (the speech of ordinary individuals), subjective and, in the end, after being shared with others, a speech of *common sense*; and, finally, *unconscious* speech (hidden in each person's intimacy), unknown and only discovered through analytical work. Television seeks to echo these different types of speech by inviting experts, together with representatives of various domains of social activity and/or of civil society. This article will show that image plays an important role in producing effects of truth.

The Construction of the Public Space

One could say that television contributes to the construction of truth in the public space by staging political discourse, where speech and images circulate. Many points of view concerning the organisation of political life are confronted on television: *political speech*, during the struggle for power (election campaigns), or during the exercise of power; *civilian speech* where the opinions of those more or less organised into associations or pressure groups are heard; *private speech*, not to be heard in the public space but which enters it nevertheless. Television stages these different positions, creating mechanisms of controversy where *declaration*, *revelation*, *opinion*, and *analysis* interact. Sometimes television even attempts to penetrate the intimacy of individuals, to reveal private thoughts in order to uncover the man or the woman behind the politician.

History of Staged Speech on French Television From Debate to Talk-show

As demonstrated elsewhere,³ the transition from debates to talk-shows in France in the early 1980s was concomitant with a degree of State disengagement and the inevitable deregulation of the previous media system accompanying the arrival of private operators. This period was first characterised by a considerable expansion of the number of programmes offered and, consequently, a multiplication of discussion shows. In terms of content, citizen and partisan opinions related by non-experts, as well as the emergence of themes until then rejected as conflicted or trivial, resulted first of all in the disparaging of the ceremonial form of expert discussions. The canonic mechanism of such discussion shows was quickly deconstructed. These shows substituted the pugnacity and impudence of new moderators for the previously respectful debate management. In addition, these

programmes gave priority and foregrounded the live speech of anonymous callers with no special expertise to offer, to the detriment of erudite and informed comments.

Behind these new productions could be perceived profound transformations in the production space. Indeed, with this expansion, the regimented and overpowering editorial proposals (to instruct, inform, entertain) of programme departments, were destabilised and forced to adapt to a new competitive environment. Organising the *televisual* flow of the big generalist channels, two programme departments responsible for discussion programmes emerged, one for themes of society and the other for entertainment shows. Careful observation of the status of these new creations reveals their arbitrary distribution between these two components within the channels. More specifically, this distribution revealed a fracturing, a rupture between people involved in the medium. On the one hand, some shows presented themselves clearly as a continuity of the journalistic field. They sometimes used professionals from the editorial staff of a particular channel (for shows on social themes, for example) and displayed openly an informative aim. Others, taken over by production units managed by moderator-producers⁴ or associated with their personalities, exposed their objective of capturing the biggest possible audience. Indeed, this system of freely dividing up the programmes, which characterised the generalist television stations of the mid-1980s as they operated in a competitive atmosphere, helped dislodge the journalistic hold on legitimate knowledge. This development authorised new television personalities (mostly non-journalists) to seek the audience's verdict directly (to turn to ratings for their endorsement). Cultivating new territories, their shows led them to encroach progressively on academic means of gathering social expression.

Mirror Television

Following the 'glitter television' of the first years of this new era, a first generation of reality shows appeared at the beginning of the 1990s. First put on air by the commercial channel TF1 and, passing through the P.A.F (*Paysage Audiovisuel Français*),⁵ these shows were initially very successful, only to disappear suddenly at the end of the decade. Focusing on intimate subjects, they pushed to the extreme an exhibition of individual personal experience that, for certain critics, flirted with voyeurism and, occasionally, obscenity. They overdid the multiple forms of public display of privacy: confessions, the mediation of conflicts between spouses or the glorification of individual behaviours. This 'mirror television', removed from sociological argument or the distance of social discourse, crudely revealed its hesitation to *subjectivise* social experience. The set up provided a public stage for individual expression, brutally putting it under the spotlight. Under the compassionate leadership and benevolent companionship of a new kind of 'therapist'/moderator, the medium of television inaugurated, and ritualised, a new act: the '*disintermediation*' of private speech. Yet, if this *televisual truth* presents itself as revelation and intimacy, it nevertheless drifted towards certain individual

excesses, if not the stigmatisation of participants. Despite their popular success, these shows, for as long as they lasted, provoked fierce reactions and unanimous criticism from journalists. Some researchers, studying producer discourse, perceived a new configuration of public space as well as a transformation of the function of the medium: interventionist and performative. According to Dominique Mehl,⁶ the products of this 'compassionate television', in the context of defaulting state institutions, had taken the form of a veritable 'enterprise of relational services' which, by trivialising exemplary cases, helped individuals to feel normal. Highlighted here is the dynamic that inside this new landscape, in just a few years, the ordinary individual and his/her personal experiences significantly became the central reference of these new ceremonies of *televisual* speech, more than any social issues or civic questions. Thus this medium, a collective institution working towards the edification of an imaginary national collectivity changed, according to Dominique Wolton,⁷ at least momentarily into a new genre; into a television of individuals and a machine to explore questions of the private sphere.

Mechanism, Communication Space, Thematic Space

How can these transformations in the way of handling social experience on television be explained? Why did these obviously transitional and fleeting broadcasts, these reality shows, historically initiated in the 1990s and brutally interrupted towards the end of the decade, appear, on both the public service channels as well as those of the private sector? With today's hindsight, we can explain what appears to be a symptomatic episode in the programming policies of French television. To do this, it is first necessary to observe carefully the continuity in programming and to understand television in terms of systemic flow. That is to say, we need to interrogate this incessant game of musical chairs that seemed to dictate the production of generalist television and, more precisely in the last few years, that of shows oriented towards collecting and expressing social speech. It is thus necessary to study this programme schedule, which constitutes a sort of palimpsest, making it possible to determine slots occupied by the new shows as well as other kinds of shows replacing them when the first are no longer broadcast.

To answer the first part of this question, it is readily apparent that these reality television shows progressively replaced the talk-shows that we will refer to as first generation. Talk-shows had already overtaken the traditional debate shows. Paradoxically, the reality shows were themselves immediately replaced by what we will temporarily call second-generation talk-shows. We can thus sketch a line of continuity and filiations in the programming policy of French channels as follows:

Debate → talk-show 1 → reality-show → talk-show 2 → Informal conversation

Later, it will be useful to further the study of these three moments by analysing some of the semio-discursive elements of these shows: first their system, then the

configuration of communicative space set up, as well as the nature of the spaces of thematisation of speech:

- What we call the system of a television show is made up of all the situational elements mobilised, the place in the programme schedule, the topological space, décor, status of the participants, visual *mise en scène*, etc.;
- The communicative space organises the communicative roles of the participants, defines how and when they intervene, and participates in the construction of *narrative identities* attributable to the different speakers during linguistic interactions;
- Finally, the space of *thematization* of speech covers a range of cognitive elements and attitudes related to the area of reference and certain values mobilised in the exchange.

The components of these three groups interact to build a participative framework⁸ and provide the elements that set up the relation with the programme recipient. This inter-semiotic and syncretic process, applied to certain domains of discourse, results in the transfer of interpretive resources, relating to the objects or subjects of the world, towards a particular audience. But, at the same time, some elements of these programmes give us precise clues as to new modes of consumption and use of this medium. We will therefore, first explore these three particular moments of television *discursivity*, taking note of these three levels successively, and in contrast to each other.

From Debate to Talk-Show or the Intrusion of the Audience in the Screen

Broadcasting the first-generation talk-shows transformed the means of gathering and expressing social speech on French television (until then strictly framed by the imaginary ‘conversation of reason’⁹ of the debate genre). One of the components of these two genres remained practically unchanged however: the space of *thematization* of speech. Indeed, tables 1, 2 and 3 (see below) illustrate most of the themes raised in the public discussion of social and civic issues.

Put simply, debates and talk-shows of the first generation dealt with citizen issues interrogated through public debate. The space of speech *thematization* defined by these talk-shows widened by proposing new themes (mainly linked to politics after 1981 with *Droit de réponse*, amongst others). This space nevertheless developed its content from essentially the same themes used in traditional debates.

On the other hand, these two genres differed with regard to their mechanisms as well as to configuration of communicational space. Concerning the mechanism, the debate genre constrained itself mostly to an exclusively *televisual* space (the bare stage of the *Dossiers de l'écran*), functional in nature (closed) like a living room as much as a television studio. At its centre, experts and actors timidly obeyed the presenter-moderator's ritualised solicitations. This filmed discussion

Table 1: Debate. Les Dossiers de l'écran, Antenne 2, 1 January 1967–6 August 1991; TF1, 12 December 1981–19 September 1987

<i>Les Dossiers de l'écran (Dossiers of the Screen)</i> (1967–1991) was the archetypical debate show. For two decades, it provided a space for public discussion of general themes of interest. It was cancelled at the beginning of the 90s not long after the deregulation of the P.A.F.	
	Où en est le syndicalisme ? (where is syndicalism at?)
	Les arnaques et les jeux (scams and games)
08/01/91	Faut-il avoir peur de vieillir ? (should we be scared of growing old?)
	Les voies mystérieuses de l'argent international (the mysterious paths of international money)
	L'avocat, la justice et la vérité (lawyers, justice and the truth)
	Il y a 50 ans l'avortement menait à l'échafaud (50 years ago abortion led to the guillotine)
	Etre juif (being Jewish)
	Touristes, le monde est à vous (tourists, the world is yours)

Table 2: Talk-show 1. Questions debated on Droit de réponse and used to describe the content in the TV listings.

<i>Droit de réponse (Right of Reply)</i> was a decided departure from the televisual <i>mise en scène</i> of speech. Moderated by Michel Polak and broadcasted (1981–1987 by the public (still in 1981) channel TF1, it contributed in breaking public discussion standards. This show was cancelled in 1987, once the channel was privatised.	
	Faut-il raser les grands ensembles (should big building complexes be torn down)
	Les radios libres (pirate radio)
	La télévision en procès (television on trial)
	L'argent (money)
	L'empire Hersant (the Hersant ¹⁰ empire)
1983	Faut-il chasser les chasseurs (should hunters be hunted)
	La police (the police)
	Science et astrologie (science and astrology)

Table 3 : *Talk-show 1 Ciel mon mardi*, TF1, 10 May 1988–30 June 1992.

<i>Ciel mon mardi ! (Heavens, My Tuesday!)</i> ¹¹ (1988–1992) broadcast on the (now) commercial channel TF1 and relied on the personality of its presenter Christophe Dechavanne. It was a composite show that presented, under a discordant format, issues often capable of inciting public anger.	
07/06/1988	La tauromachie (bull fights)
14/06/1988	Agences matrimoniales (matrimonial agencies)
17/01/ 1989	Le nucléaire (nuclear energy)
24/01/89	Le RMI (minimum insertion revenue)
31/01/1989	La peine de mort (the death penalty)
14/03/89	L'euthanasie (euthanasia)
26/05/92	Les végétariens (vegetarianism)
26/05/92	Le versement des pensions alimentaires (alimony)
16/06/92	La prévention du Sida (AIDS prevention)
23/06/92	Le permis à points (retractable points driving license)

was subject to the distribution of speech, the camera mechanically following each participant as he took his turn to talk. The 'communicational synchrony'¹² was the constant method, putting the viewer in the role of observer of the speakers as they spoke. The audience's presence was only acknowledged by a polite greeting at the beginning and the end of the show, quickly overshadowed by the conversations and dialogues on the set. The viewer, detained by this mechanism, occupied an asymmetrical position with regard to the participants, and was quickly relegated to a minor role, becoming little more than an accessory. Moreover, the absence of spontaneity in the conversations, their predictability, as well as the accepted control of *thematized* space and kind of knowledge selected, made the audience more demanding and kept them in a position of asymmetry and inequality similar to the experience of academic pedagogical conferences.

On the contrary, verbal exchanges on these talk-shows took place at the centre of a false forum, an amalgamation of theatrical décor and the public space. Inhabited by active participants, their clearly ornamental space, often close to theatre, remained resolutely open to a live audience, but also to those who could bring anonymous testimony often received as revelations. The words of each and all, spontaneous authentic speech, carrying subjective positions, distinct from the objectivity of conversations based on reason, erased any semblance of rationality and truth. New *narrative identities* caused this upheaval. According to Erving Goffman's categories,¹³ these citizen-speakers appeared to be actually in charge of their own verbal engagements. No longer, in fact, would they seem like simple

'moderators' managing the affirmations and arguments of others, such as spokesmen of authority or experts.

Breaking from the communicational space of debate, the presenter now assumed different masks: that of moderator, partisan, accomplice, debater, etc. Repeatedly, he would address viewers directly, as a spoken pause that placed viewers not only in the role of witnesses but also official participants. The camera focused on each speaker in the successive exchanges, thus fragmenting the viewers' visual experience and continuously reconstructing and *narrativising* the scene of interaction. As a ritual, the small screen became a window frame¹⁴ from which the viewer could, in turn, be watched. This deliberate attempt at direct contact with the viewer, as well as the examining action creating the images, gave the interpreting subject a new level of access to the televised event: he became integrated, among the protagonists on the set, into it. The viewer was no longer held at a distance, their immersion *inside* the scene of exchange now guaranteed, reinforced by the mirrors constructed through the presence of an audience on set and by the narrative identities of the participants. Mixing narcissism and voyeurism, the communicational mechanism of the talk-show would thus draw a maximum benefit from the scopic (visual observation) and phatic (the language used to establish contact with one's interlocutor) logic of the small screen.¹⁵

Talk-Show Versus Reality Show

At the end of this first reconfiguration of discussion programmes, the anonymous individual invited onto the stage by the first-generation talk-show would never again leave it. The reason is that exposing themselves deliberately in the spotlight, they would be summoned to recount parts of their lives. And it was their intimacy that was to constitute the material and cement to build new programmes. The reality show, shedding the pugnacious glitter of talk-shows, would also relegate the debaters of the *res publica* to the shadows and effect noticeable transfer of civic speech to private speech. Simultaneously, by accentuating the intimate, or confession, the system of reality shows would significantly narrow down the circle of protagonists giving priority to the construction of strong narrative identities; presenter, therapist, hero, victim or the guilty would now come face-to-face. These programmes obviously broke with previous productions, on the thematic and systemic levels, and in the construction of a specific communicational space.

Breaking away from theatres (as places), the televisual space changed into a ceremonial one to receive intimate speech. Verbal interactions were reduced to simple dialogues, regulated by a presenter, restricted to the role of interviewer-midwife. On a purely cognitive plane, another kind of rupture could be detected, distinguishing these new productions and identifying, from now on, two kinds of cognitive content: 'knowledge' and 'beliefs'.¹⁶ The first belonged to the public sphere and results from formal knowledge and techniques, initially objectified by information specialists; namely, the journalists. The second came from private attitudes, and corresponded to informal knowledge that is not objectified but,

rather, produced through a cathartic process giving body to strictly personal attitudes and beliefs. During the programme, mediators handled this content with relational skills based on the management of exchanges involving interpersonal relations.

It would seem that these shows have tried to activate the second type of cognitive content and failed, in part, to do so. There are two possible explanations for this. By confronting these spaces of *thematization* based on the private sphere, individualising examples of private life (the mechanism of these shows was now locked *ad hominem*), the reality show tried to formalise knowledge and practices dependent on the informal knowledge mentioned above, which by definition could not be formalised. If we push this argument further, those shows proved incapable of prescribing individual attitudes or behaviours – and certainly forbid themselves from doing so. This is because dispensing rules of behaviour or morality put this medium at the ethical risk of becoming a substitute for ‘evangelist television’. The weight of the democratic ‘*imaginaire*’ of free will, characteristic of our societies (which, nevertheless, mediators must obey) have prevented this from happening. And it is important to note that this *televisual* expression of compassion (individualising the model of compassion) cannot last without wearing itself out and becoming senseless in the absence of any real act or mission, contrary to other kinds of shows relying on a form of collective catharsis (*Téléthon*, *Sidaction*,¹⁷ etc.).

Moreover, on another level, this fact indicates the structural impossibility of television to expose cathodic confessions, even in a crude way. These programmes are destined to fail, explicitly seeking, as they do, to reconstruct the receiver/viewer into a postulated object of his own gaze. In contrast, radio has been able to transform the listener into the object of his own listening successfully for many years: for example, the radio programmes of Méné Grégoire, Françoise Dolto, Macha Béranger, etc.) Indeed, radio is better adapted to this form of ‘private public confession’,¹⁸ for which any translation into images is too costly in terms of their impact. The coding of individual problems in psychological or idiosyncratic terms, under the auspices of a strictly individualising model, appears destined to fail on television. Rather, the television terminal seems to impose a reflexive mechanism: namely of a ‘community of belonging’ or a situation of ‘seeing with’, as described by Daniel Dayan.¹⁹ The intimate and subjective components of human experience must be reactivated on television, and mediated by passing them through the collectivity and the fusion of each of us watching together. Second generation talk-shows would bring an end to the staging of oneself, by inserting each one in a common space of mediation through discussion and confrontation.

However, reality shows, from the point of view of *televisual discursivity*, are only a relative failure. Indeed, if some observers insist on the pedagogical dimension of reality shows, this didactic activism, which seems to characterise them, did not so much target the ordinary citizen (who, after all, has also experienced emotions or personal dramas), but rather the viewer-individual: this cathodic citizen, the child of television programming. These programmes indirectly

Table 4. *Talk-show 2 Ça se discute, France 2 September 1994–2009*

Jean-Luc Delarue's show (1994–2009), with a very evocative title <i>Ça se discute</i> (It's arguable), was a composite programme proposing special reports on life experiences, the protagonists of which were invited in the second part of the show, to participate in a discussion. An evolution of themes can be noted, towards the end of the 90s, slipping imperceptibly from civic interrogations to questions of a private, if not intimate, order.	
1994	Autodidactes ou diplômés (self-educated or graduates)
1998	Élever seule un enfant (raising a child alone)
1998	Quelle vie de famille pour les couples homos? (what kind of family life for same sex couples?)
1998	Qu'est ce qui gêne chez les gros? (what is disturbing about fat people?)
1999	L'homosexualité féminine ? (female homosexuality?)
1999	Devenir mère à 16 ans (motherhood at 16 years old)
1999	Peut-on se remettre d'un viol ? (can one recover after rape?)
2000	Comment vivre quand on ne s'aime pas? (how to live when one does not like oneself?)
2000	Que reste-t-il des hommes ? (what is left of men?)

allowed the catholic citizen to develop a new capital of interpretative resources and above all, they taught him that television had become a major social influence overriding any sense of reserve in public.

The Talk-Show, a Cultural Televisual Form

With the reality-show, the catholic confession mechanism, as well as the communicational space of therapy or public confessions disappeared, as if the universe of affect and the singular exposition of private testimony implicated audiences too much and the de-intermediation process set up in such programmes turned out to be insufferable and unmanageable. However, the spaces of speech *thematization* that these shows contributed in developing survived.

Formatted differently, researched and held at a distance by narrativised life experiences, first reported, and then closely inspected through public debate, the same themes would reappear in the second-generation talk-shows. In these new productions, collective speech offered a concrete alternative to the exhibition of the intimate sphere by immersing it in a form of a collective interaction close, in form, to group dynamics.

This diversion, for personal ends, on the small screen, which Dominique Mehl saw at the heart of 'truth-television' was suddenly interrupted. Leaving compas-

Table 5. *Talk-show 2 C'est mon choix, France 3, 23 November 1999–2004*²⁰

This show, <i>C'est mon choix</i> (It's my choice- 1999–2004) was a forum in which several participants discussed their singular choices with the audience of the show.	
26/01/2000	Vous me préférez en drag queen ou en homme ? (Do you prefer me as a drag queen or a man?)
02/03/2000	Je suis macho (I am macho)
03/03/2000	J'ai quitté ma femme pour un homme (I left my wife for a man)
07/03/2000	J'aime les grosses (I like fat women)
11/04/2000	Je ne peux pas révéler mon homosexualité (I cannot come out)
20/04/2000	Je suis bisexuel (I am bisexual)
29/05/2000	J'aime deux hommes à la fois (I am in love with two men)
25/05/2000	Je ne veux plus voir mes enfants (I do not want to see my children anymore)
09/06/ 2000	Je fais tout pour me faire remarquer (I do all I can to be to noticed)

sion aside, as outcasts of culture, love or life, the unique characters or victims of the reality shows became respectable speakers in the new talk-shows. The mechanism of public and collective debate made a horizontal and transversal identification possible. The collective function of the medium triumphed and the public display of the individual affect became the people's concern. From then on, to paraphrase one of these productions, *ça se discute!*, this sharing of personal experience brought back a rational exchange. The individual was still in the spotlight; an individual rather than a victim or hero, one amongst others, equal to all, claiming his/her due, deserving of equal treatment. The multiple voiced space of the talk-show allowed for spontaneous speech in many different versions, to express all things intimate and ordinary. From then on, the egalitarian machinery of the new talk-show would make it possible for everyone to speak and perhaps to say everything.

If the first kind of talk-shows, in constituting an organisation of space *thematization* based on the main narratives and public interests, offered, at last, a horizon of open discussion to the modern individual, second-generation talk-shows were, especially, a post-modern form. They were marked by fragmentation and a foregrounding of the 'concern for the self', and escaped from the inertia of the social superego (see tables 4 and 5). Television no longer addressed itself to an 'infantile population', but instead sought to create a network of individualities. In this dialectic movement, the reality-show offered the necessary time to master these new spaces to *thematise* private individuality, even if it was seen as a 'pornographic' encounter between the *subjectivisation* of experience and its public revelation.

The Natural Conversation or Daily Sociality

The most recent model is that of informal, spontaneous conversation, around a table, in a bar, a reactive model of quasi-natural sociality. Talking about nothing and everything, the guests' subjective intimate ethos is mobilised; as if a second project exists behind the television show, designed to renew social and inter-subjective links in order to establish an on-going cathodic discussion. Aimed at making discussion as informal as possible, this new mechanism is characterised not only by bringing to the *televisual* space modes of interaction specific to open and non-regulated conversation, but also by perceptibly changing roles and discursive behaviours, as well as the scenography and situational framework on the set.

This kind of programme began in the domain of sports news, with the show *On refait le match* (*Let's Relive the Match*) (2001–present), which, constituting a novel approach, was a 'transmedia' programme initially broadcasted on radio (RTL) and LCI, a continuous news channel and, later, Itélé, another French continuous news channel. This sports talk-show was presented by veteran football journalist Eugène Saccomano, accompanied by a host of others, most of whom came from the sports press (generalist and specialised), and, sometimes, by well-known personalities (trainers, former players) who had migrated into commentary. The expected discourse was *apriori*, one of journalistic distance and professional expertise; but this did not happen. Overplaying the media image of passionate Latino, the presenter did not behave as a moderator or regulator. Often letting the participants intervene freely and interjecting his own bold opinions into the discussions (on performances of the players or teams), the presenter was the activating agent of often highly polemical exchanges. Most of the participants objected to his comments, making their behaviour not simply discursive. As a consequence of this particularly liberal organisation of exchanges, participants asserted more than they argued, frequently interrupting each other. Endlessly implying and presupposing, they did not hesitate to question the relevance and impartiality of their colleagues' comments, accusing them, for example, of being bipartisan (favouring a particular team, being a fan of a particular player). What was offered to viewers was not a well-informed and considered debate between experts, but, rather, a deconstructed conversation, comparable to the informal, animated conversations of football fans in a bar after a match. The title of this long-lasting and successful programme actually suggests this. Similar programmes for other sports can also be found, for example those focused on rugby.

This 'informalisation' of *televisual* speech was accompanied by a tendency towards its privatisation, marked by changes in the situational framework and a correlation with the true French art of gastronomy. One of the first signs of this was the broadcast on the cable channel *Paris Première* of a show called 93, *Faubourg Saint Honoré* (2003–7) later adapted in Quebec.²¹ This programme was produced and presented by Thierry Ardisson, known in France for introducing a provocative and laid-back style to the late night talk-show. The show took the

form of a dinner party where the presenter's guests were filmed conversing and eating at the home of this leading figure of French television. The programme was segmented according to the different moments of a traditional dinner. The arrival of each guest is accompanied with a camera accompanying them in, from the street to the elevator and into the apartment, followed by drinks in the kitchen while waiting for the others to arrive, until, finally, they are called to the table by the host. The show brought together a disparate collection of guests, the common denominator of which was notoriety and presence in the media.

Observing the seating arrangements across the four seasons reveals that most of the protagonists invited around the dinner table were personalities: mostly from entertainment, but sometimes politicians or intellectuals in the media. It is significant that the show became mono-thematic and more coherent as to the status of the people seated around the table each time; no doubt in order to guarantee, if not absolute conviviality among them, at least a situation of supposedly shared knowledge. Thus, on 25 September 2006, a group of television critics and presenters were invited to a 'TV dinner' to comment on the new television season.²² They discussed new programmes, the successes and failures of the schedules and what might happen to them in the 'musical chairs' of this decisive moment in the season. Throughout the evening, the atmosphere between the guests was convivial, each recognising the others as equals/peers (using the second person singular 'tu', or at least calling each other by their first names). Well aware of table manners and the art of worldly conversation, the presenter was a perfect Amphytrion, ordering and commenting on the various dishes, orienting and reviving the discussion, but without being directive or aggressive as he was prone to being on a more traditional talk-show set. Just as with any convivial dinner, a connivance of good taste progressively set in among the guests, some allowing themselves to make an aside or to interrupt others as they spoke. The informal interactions that were generated made it possible for each guest to shine. The enjoyment of fine wines, propitious to witty remarks, liberated their conversation, which moved from absent colleagues to the different television institutions that some of the guests worked for, allowing them to momentarily speak from 'outside', suspending any obligation of discretion or neutrality; a freedom comparable to that which would be open to them if they were at a more conventional dinner party. The visual *mise en scène* paralleled this openness. To authenticate this 'dinner party' uniting the *happy few*, the camera regularly offered shots from the outside of the bright apartment windows at 93, Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré. There were also many shots of inside the kitchen, where the different dishes were being prepared, before being highlighted in close-ups as they were presented to the guests.

The association of *televisual* speech and culinary art to introduce social relations and conviviality was reproduced in a programme called *Rive droite* (2011–12) presented by Guillaume Durand on *Paris Première*. This was also the model for *C'est à vous* (2009–11), a programme on public service channel France 5. This show took place in a real loft divided into two distinct but adjacent spaces: the kitchen, where a chef prepared the meal during the programme and

a living-room/dining-room, where the presenter, different reporters and guests arrived in successive sequences. These were not autonomous spaces; on the contrary, the presenter (Alexandra Sublet) created a constant link between them. She would regularly go to check on the preparation of the meal, establishing the cook not as a secondary role but as an actor in the whole operation, especially since he finally came to the table to share the meal with the main guest and reporters. The importance of culinary art in the programme *C'est à vous* (less sophisticated than in 93, *Faubourg Saint-Honoré*, and more concentrated on nutrition and health), of the details of the cooking processes as well as of the content of the dishes, was confirmed by communicating the recipes to the viewer. This defined the programme as a hybrid, between the generalist talk-show and cooking shows that have multiplied on French television over the last decade. Indeed these programmes cannot be separated from the increasing number of 'service programmes' dedicated not only to nutrition, but also clothing, real estate, decorating and gardening.

Displacing the situational framework, as well themes handled in these programmes, cooking steps in, to drain any attempt at seriousness in the handling of different subjects ranging from culture to politics in line with the concept of these late afternoon 'omnibus-programmes', the model for which, in France, is *Le Grand Journal* on Canal Plus. Presented by a person known for her enthusiasm, the show works on introducing humour and triviality into public speech. Therefore, it accentuates the function of television as a social mirror by setting it in this contemporary hedonist everyday nature marked by a desire to reconcile the concern for social link and the accomplishment of the self.

Translated by Eloïse Villez

Notes

- 1 See, Patrick Charaudeau, *Les médias et l'information. L'impossible transparence du discours*, De Boeck-Ina, 2005; reprinted in 2011.
- 2 On this subject see Patrick Charaudeau and Rodolphe Ghiglione, *La parole confisquée. Un genre télévisuel: le talk show*, Dunod, 1997.
- 3 Guy Lochard and Jean-Claude Soulages, 'Les imaginaires de la parole télévisuelle, Permanences, glissements et conflits,' *Réseaux*, 63, 1994; reprinted in Paul Beaud, Patrice Flichy, Dominique Pasquier, Louis Quéré, eds, *Sociologie de la communication*, CNET, 1997.
- 4 Like *Ciel, mon mardi!* presented and produced by Christophe Dechavanne, whereas *Stars à la barre* (1988–90), *Mardi Soir* and *Durand la nuit* (1992–93) were presented by journalists (respectively Daniel Bilalian and Guillaume Durand) without, however, the same success or duration (see Table 3).
- 5 French Audiovisual landscape. (*Paysage Audiovisuel Français*)
- 6 Dominique Mehl, *La télévision de l'intimité*, Seuil, 1996.
- 7 Dominique Wolton, *Eloge du grand public, une théorie critique de la télévision*, Flammarion, 1990.

- 8 Sonia Livingstone and Peter Lunt, 'Un public actif, un téléspectateur critique,' *Hermès*, 11–12, 1993, 150.
- 9 Guy Lochard and Jean-Claude Soulages, 'Les imaginaires de la parole télévisuelle,' 1994.
- 10 Hersant was a press mogul like Rupert Murdoch.
- 11 Editor's note: The title of this talk show is a play on words. It originally came from vaudeville and early comic theatre, when a woman on stage with her lover, suddenly heard her husband come home. She would exclaim, '*Ciel, mon mari*' ('Heavens, my husband') and this evolved into the phrase for '*Oh dear, oh no.*' Here the title literally is '*Heavens, my Tuesday*,' the show being aired on Tuesday.
- 12 Communicational synchrony corresponds to a demonstrative communication type certifying an almost systematic alignment of the visual to the verbal. For development of these notions see, Guy Lochard and Jean-Claude, Soulages, 'Talk-Show, la part de l'image,' *Psychologie Française* T38–2, Dunod, 1993; reprinted in Patrick Charaudeau and Rodolphe Ghiglione, eds, *Paroles en images, images de paroles, trois talk-shows européens*, Didier Érudition, 1999.
- 13 Erving Goffman, *Les cadres de l'expérience*, Les éditions de minuit, 1991, p. 510.
- 14 Jean-Claude Soulages, *Les rhétoriques télévisuelles ou le formatage du regard*. Média Recherches, INA – De Boeck Université, 2007.
- 15 See, Jean-Claude Soulages, 'Le formatage du regard,' in R. Gardies and M-C Taranger, eds, *Télévision: questions de formes*, Ss la dir. L'harmattan, 2001.
- 16 Patrick Charaudeau, 'Une problématisation discursive de l'émotion, à propos des effets de pathémisation à la télévision,' in Christian Plantin, Marianne Doury and Véronique Traverso, eds, *Les émotions dans les interactions*, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2000, pp. 125–55.
- 17 Editor's note: *Sidaction* is a telethon to raise money to fight Aids (in French le 'Sida' thus 'sidaction'= sida+ action).
- 18 It is important to note that this is one of the main *mediagenic* assets of radio; alone, I listen to all those voices, whereas with television I watch, along with others; we together are watching this scene exposed to everyone's looking. In a way, radio can be considered as the putative mother of the talk-show, although unable to lead directly to it since the specific *mediativity* of radio (the absence of the para-verbal, which is to say, the absence of the visual stratum and its expressive stream of phatic indicators considerably widening the communicational spectrum) prevents collective exchanges (exchanges are unclear because interlocutors are unseen) by limiting radio interactions to dialogue sometimes multiplied and delocalized (for example, call-in radio shows).
- 19 Daniel Dayan, 'Télévision: le presque public,' *Réseaux*, 100, 2000, 427–56.
- 20 It is interesting to note that this programme was produced by *Réservoir Prod*, Jean-Luc Delarue's (both presenter and producer of *Ça se discute*) production company.
- 21 The title of which is 3950 in reference to the presenter's (Luck Mervil's) personal address.
- 22 The French television personalities who appeared, included Benjamin Castaldi, Éric Zemmour, Pierre Lescure, Laurent Baffie, Beatles Story, Laurence Ferrari, Charlotte Le Grix de la Salle and Élisabeth Lévy.