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Tamara Chaplin, *Turning on the Mind: French Philosophers on Television*. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2007, xvi + 334 pp. 48 halftones. \$62.50 U.S., £39.50 U.K. (cl). ISBN 0-226-50990-7; \$24.00 U.S., £13.00 (pb) ISBN 0-226-50991-5

Review by Michael Kelly, University of Southampton, UK.

Since the end of the Second World War, philosophers have been some of France's most prominent representatives in the eyes of the rest of the world. Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus and Foucault are household names and there are many others who continue to be points of reference in intellectual life internationally. However, outside France they have generally not been seen on television. Tamara Chaplin's fascinating study lifts the curtain on the secret life of French philosophers, as they appeared in the *telecafés*, the classrooms and eventually in the living rooms of millions of *téléspectateurs*. In the process, she raises some fundamental questions of whether complex thought can be communicated in the limited time frame of a television programme, and what happens to philosophy when it is presented in embodied form.

Chaplin examines how from the 1950s to the 1970s, television gradually turned philosophers into celebrities, giving great prominence to those who proved particularly photogenic. Albert Camus's good looks, Gaston Bachelard's air of great age and wisdom, Michel Foucault's passionate intensity all drew public attention. Bernard-Henry Lévy was regarded as the apogee of this process, marking the point at which the philosopher making a television appearance was succeeded by the media personality who also did philosophy. At the same time, the very close political tutelage of television by successive governments ensured that the focus was literary rather than political, and that controversial aspects of contemporary France did not disturb the tranquil waters of abstract debate, at least until de Gaulle's departure in 1969 allowed the liberalisation of the media under Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. And then the main beneficiaries were the resurgent New Philosophers, who were much more at home on television than the generation that preceded them.

Moving from the mid-1950s to the 1990s, Chaplin follows the fortunes of a series of programmes focusing on philosophy. Some of these were book programmes, such as the highly successful *Lectures pour tous* (1953-1968), with which Pierre Desgraupes and Pierre Dumayet established the formula. The genre was later perfected by Bernard Pivot's *Apostrophes* (1975-1990), which raised cultural programming to the level of a national institution. Some programmes were cultural magazines, in which the pattern was set by Dina Dreyfus's *L'enseignement de la philosophie* (1964-1970), a series designed for senior classes in secondary education grappling with philosophy in the school curriculum. Yves Jaigu's short-lived *Océanographiques* (1986-1989) built on this tradition to present ethical debates to a wider public. The genre of biographical documentary was developed under the aegis of the Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française (ORTF) by Pierre Schaeffer's Service de recherché. His series *Un certain regard* (1964-1974) was regarded as a pinnacle of cultural broadcasting, and was developed by later series such as Denis Huisman's *Les idées et les homes* (1976-1983). Chaplin's narrative concludes with the extraordinary revival of philosophy in the late 1990s, when as many as eight new television series on philosophy echoed the pervasive presence of philosophy in popular culture, with the *café philo* (discussion groups held in cafés), the *citéphilo* (philosophy festivals) and a surge of popular publications in the wake of Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World* (*Le monde de Sophie*, 1995), which compressed the history of western philosophy into a best-selling novel.

Chaplin locates her subject in several historical contexts, supported by an impressive scholarly apparatus. The history of French television broadcasting is an obligatory context, and she draws particularly on the work of such media historians as Jean-Noël Jeanneney, Jérôme Bourdon and Raymond Kuhn. She paints the picture of producers and broadcasters struggling first with heavy-handed mechanisms of state control and then with the commercial pressures of an increasingly competitive industry. Their creativity had to be directed not only at programme content but also at the political and administrative conditions in which they worked. For the earlier part of her period, there are salutary reminders of how few hours of programming were broadcast, how few channels, and how few television sets. The profile of the viewer began to shift interestingly from the public to the private sphere, as individual television ownership accelerated during the 1960s.

The history of intellectuals has been amply studied, and Chaplin draws on well-known works by Michel Winock, Jean-François Sirinelli, Tony Judt and Jeremy Jennings. Her subject is centred on the thinkers' relation to society, and on their public presentation, rather than on the specific concepts and arguments they are seeking to convey. And in addition to the social and political context of France since the 1950s, she offers some insights into the history of French education, in which the role of philosophy has been significant, if at times contested.

The most engaging parts of the book are those in which particular programmes are examined in greater detail. Chaplin conveys the visual impact through vivid verbal images. She brings alive, for example, the "feral, coiled" Foucault, propelling his energy towards Dumayet as his hands "dance to his argument, clenching, clasping, spreading and emphatically marking each point" as he expounds the ideas of *Les Mots et les choses* in 1966 (p.80). And she gives a clear image of Bachelard depicted on *Lectures pour tous* in 1957 as the "embodiment of philosophy—philosophy signified" with "his aged face, tufted beard, broad forehead, halo of white hair, mischievous eyes, and aura of wisdom" (p.69). These descriptions give force to her argument that philosophy gains embodiment on the television screen. She points out that philosophers are "*significant*" who draw their meaning from the social and cultural associations they mobilise. She argues that they carry out a key function in the construction of French national identity, conveying a certain idea of France, which at least until 1969 corresponds to the Gaullist vision of the nation. The pantheon of television philosophers is then used to embody the post-war French "brand," combining innovation and modernity with strong cultural values, among which philosophy figures as one of the most prestigious components.

Chaplin argues that because of its complexity, philosophy best supports a top-down approach to culture and democracy which emphasises the national specificity of French culture (the French exception), and the need to make high culture accessible to the masses. Philosophy always felt less at ease with the alternative approach that gained ground in the 1980s, of giving the masses greater means to express their own popular culture.

This is a very wide-ranging and interdisciplinary study, taking up the challenges of both cultural studies and cultural history to combine the critical analysis of texts and images with presentation of detailed technical and institutional history, and with analysis of the cultural and socio-political contexts. The combination of these aspects is always suggestive, and at times strikingly insightful, as when she confronts the multicultural opening credits of *L'enseignement de la philosophie* with its relentlessly white male French content. At times, though, the flow of the discussion switches too rapidly from one aspect to another before the full implications have been teased out. For example, Chaplin vividly describes the controversial lecture by Jacques Lacan on *Un certain regard* and press reactions, but does not linger to consider what light the broadcast may have thrown on Lacan's thought or on his intellectual strategies. The structure of the book is partly thematic and partly chronological. This approach gives a recursive feel to the arguments, as some discussions are reprised—the recurrent appearance of Bachelard is particularly noticeable.

Chaplin gives only limited attention to the philosophical or intellectual context of the half-century. She is necessarily selective in the group of philosophers she discusses. They are largely confined to existentialists and structuralists. She does provide occasional lists of subjects or participants from other schools of thought that have featured in a series. Examples include Catholic (e.g. Mounier, Teilhard de Chardin), Jewish (Weil, Lévinas) and Marxist intellectuals (Lukács, Althusser), but their philosophical positions or media profile are not examined. Alain Badiou is discussed at some length, but only in terms of his screen presence and his memories of programmes: his Marxist philosophy and far-Left politics are not acknowledged. Similarly, the point arises intermittently that some of the broadcasters (and many philosophers) were out of sympathy with government, and it would have been interesting to explore the interactions between them. For the most part, the regime figures as a threatening and restricting bureaucracy, but it would be useful to have a more detailed analysis of successive government policies and how they were (or were not) implemented.

The question of whether complex thought can be communicated in the limited time frame of a television programme is given a nuanced answer. When it is presented in embodied form it may succeed in conveying some key concepts and a desire to know more, but it inevitably directs attention from the content to the performance. Philosophers then become actors in the realm of what Barthes called mythology, and contribute to constructing a wider French national identity, which includes mastery of the most challenging cultural domains. They may be co-opted by the state to provide a cultural alibi, masking the point that television programmes may be the only contact that most of the population have with philosophy, and moreover, that the number of viewers is relatively small.

Other media provide an important context for television. Chaplin frequent refers to broadcasters moving between television and careers in journalism, publishing, cinema or radio. And she is aware of the merchandising connections, especially between book programmes and book sales. It would have been useful to draw a stronger connection with radio, which provides a particularly important context for the early part of the period. Not only did radio share an institutional base in RTF/ORTF, but several intellectuals made broadcasts or were interviewed on it: Sartre and Camus appeared frequently, and Mounier had his own series. Chaplin does not examine these issues, and also hints that there would be more to say about broadcasts from other stations than the French national channels.

Chaplin's book is visibly based on an impressive amount of trawling through little-used archives, viewing many hours of broadcast material and interviewing significant participants. It sometimes reveals the difficulties of access to materials. Despite the Herculean efforts of the Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA) most of the early television broadcasts are now lost, and can only be imagined through the written programme summaries. This lacuna poses challenges with which historians are only beginning to grapple. Inevitably, scholars coming to the material from different perspectives will regret that there is not more information on, or more discussion of, various aspects of this very broad subject area. But that is perhaps a token of Chaplin's achievement. Her book opens up a new and largely unexplored area of investigation, and leaves the reader with an appetite for more.

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