

concerns increasingly trumped politics in the day-to-day decisions made by the ordinary person. In the process, she offers an intriguing exploration of what it meant to be an outsider in France during World War II.

Tamara Chaplin, *Turning on the Mind: French Philosophers on Television* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Review by Rodney Benson, New York University

Can television make room for serious thought? From Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* to Pierre Bourdieu's *On Television*, the answer of most academic critics of the medium has been a resounding no. For Postman, the problem lies in the visual technology of television; for Bourdieu, commercialism, especially as it developed in France from the 1980s onward, is to blame. But in *Turning on the Mind*, a fascinating examination of philosophers appearing on French television over five decades, Tamara Chaplin challenges both claims. French television, both before and after commercialization (beginning with the first advertisements in 1968 and culminating in the privatization of TF 1, the leading public channel, in 1987), has broadcast literally thousands of programs featuring extended discussions with a wide range of French philosophers, from Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Gaston Bachelard to Michel Foucault, Alain Badiou, and Gilles Deleuze, as well as, of course, the ever-present Bernard Henri-Lévy (BHL). Against the demands of taste leveling "cultural democracy," French television from its beginnings has defended "cultural democratization" aimed at expanding access to high culture in the hopes of eventually elevating public taste.

At first, philosophers like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre were more often seen than heard. They were valued by government television executives primarily for their status as international celebrities who could help put the luster back on faded French glory. It was not until de Gaulle left office that Sartre agreed to—and was allowed to—be interviewed on television (the philosopher used the occasion to denounce "American atrocities" in Vietnam, 49). Not coincidentally, through the end of the Gaullist era in 1969, the only philosopher "conveying distinctly political messages given consistent access to the small screen" (ibid.) was Raymond Aron, whose conservative ideas were closest to the party in power (though even Aron suffered periods when he was effectively banned from television).

Of course, de Gaulle's authoritarian control of television is not news. More surprising is Chaplin's account of early television's aesthetic dimensions. Commercialism is supposedly the force behind a more personality-driven,

emotional, hyper-visual approach to television programming. Yet, according to Chaplin, a mode of "confessional intimacy" was the "order of the day" long before there was any audience-grabbing imperative. In 1959, shortly before his death, Camus made his longest appearance on French television with an uninterrupted thirty-minute interview, featuring extended close-up camera shots. The producer explained, "What is most important is the face, for the simple reason that it is the only thing that appears as large as life on television" (44–45); thus, as Chaplin perceptively observes, the close-up was seen as providing "lucid access to truth" (45). More than two decades later, Pierre-André Boutang, producer of the public TV series *Océaniques*, went further in arguing for the unity of philosophic and aesthetic concerns. Explaining his use of close-ups to maintain audience interest during long debates, Boutang insisted that "the most beautiful landscape on TV is an intelligent face" (225).

Indeed, Chaplin's recounting of the programs, along with the images she reprints from the INA television archives, portray philosophy in (televsual) action as a uniquely exciting viewing experience. Shortly after Foucault published his *Les Mots et les Choses* in 1966 (translated into English in 1994 as *The Order of Things*), he was invited to be a guest on the Wednesday evening book show *Lectures pour tous* (a program that aired from 1953 to 1968). Co-host Pierre Dumayet began the interview with a straightforward question: "You have written what you describe as a work of ethnology, an ethnology of our own culture. What can you tell us about it?" Foucault then launches into a performance, both discursive and corporal, that according to Chaplin, is "nothing short of dazzling" (79–82). Foucault's "body is feral, coiled, leaning frequently forward, his energy propelled toward Dumayet. The camera focuses repeatedly on his hands as they dance to his argument, clenching, clapping, spreading, and emphatically marking each point." At the same time, Foucault's brief "dialogue with Dumayet is anything but facile." "With tremendous concentration, he carefully elaborates" his principal argument "that knowledge is culturally and historically defined by a series of a priori categories that necessarily determine what it is possible to know."

Chaplin offers similarly riveting portraits of Jacques Lacan, refusing "all efforts to 'vulgarize' or simplify his discursive style" (124); of Jean-François Lyotard, making creative use of the medium to raise probing questions about knowledge and authority (169–72); and of a multi-part series of discussions between Pierre Boutang (Pierre-André's father) and George Steiner on the ethical, and theological issues—in relation to contemporary events like the Holocaust—raised by "The Myth of Antigone" and "Abraham's Sacrifice" (187–99). These and other examples show that thought and the "visual" are far from incompatible and that though it may be difficult to express complex ideas in, say, five minutes, many of France's most distinguished philosophers have managed to express themselves quite well in as little as fifteen.

For Chaplin, philosophy on television is high drama, and after watching several of the broadcasts on the INA website, I am not inclined to disagree.

Were most French similarly enthralled? Here Chaplin is necessarily more ambiguous. On the one hand, she argues that the French public is uniquely situated to appreciate the pleasures of televised philosophy. Can one learn philosophy from television, André Comte-Sponville was asked in a 1994 program entitled "Why is Philosophy So Popular," to which he replied, "Not unless one is already schooled in the discipline" (11). In fact, since 1809, when Napoleon decreed that in all French lycées "there shall be a year of philosophy," and especially since 1874, when philosophy became a mandatory subject during the final year of secondary studies (26, 90–91), philosophy has been a central part of French public education. By the end of the twentieth century, as Comte-Sponville notes, if 70 percent or more of the French population now possess the baccalauréat, it is no exaggeration to say that 70 percent of the French public has at least some schooling in philosophy.

On the other hand, Chaplin concedes that philosophy on TV clearly isn't for everyone, and that this fact has become more transparent as audiences and the choices available to them have increased. When the news program *Cinq colonnes à la une* broadcast "Portrait of a Philosopher," featuring an interview with Gaston Bachelard, in 1961, it was watched by an estimated 83 percent of television viewers (13)—an astonishing figure until one realizes that there was only one channel and that less than a quarter of French households even owned a television set at the time. When *Lectures pour tous* began, it aired on prime time on the only television channel in France; by the time it was canceled in the late 1960s, it appeared after 10 p.m. on one of the two public channels then available to French viewers. During this period, its audience dropped from 50 percent to 5 percent (85). From the beginning, there were signs as to who was watching and who was not: though studies sometimes contradicted each other, and there was always the comforting anecdote about the shopkeeper who was a big fan, working class and rural viewers were clearly a minority of philosophy program audiences.

All in all, this is a remarkable, beautifully written book and an exemplary piece of scholarly research and analysis. Even so, I wasn't entirely convinced by Chaplin's argument of a supposed natural fit between television and (especially French) philosophy. At least since the era of Socrates, her argument goes, philosophy has been a fundamentally embodied and dialogic practice: it is meant to be both seen and heard. In addition, French philosophy's penchant for personal ethics, autobiography, public expression, and clarity (as opposed to the tortured complexities of German philosophy, though this claim may come as a surprise to some readers of French poststructuralist theory) are also supposedly quite compatible with the demands of television, even in its commercialized form. Yet in the end, what really seems to make the difference in keeping philosophy alive and well on French television is the freedom to take risks afforded by public television, a freedom paradoxically linked to restrictions on the market that the French state has never entirely abandoned. If, in the age of commercialization, high quality philosophizing continues to be

broadcast, it is mostly in the most market-sheltered corners of French television, or when on popular entertainment-driven programs like *Apostrophes* guests such as Michel Foucault use their considerable charisma and authority to place sensationalist, quick-thinking demands "in abeyance" (137). And if at least some French audience members, more than in most countries, are receptive to watching philosophy on television, it is because the French state has long assiduously worked to develop and promote this taste.

For an American critic such as Chaplin, it is *de rigueur* to lament the patriarchal, universalist obliviousness of French republicanism, even as France itself becomes more "multicultural" in spite of its elites' best efforts to repress difference. From this perspective, philosophy on French television, recruited implicitly or explicitly on behalf of republicanism, can be reduced to just another "disciplinary" maneuver. Maybe so, but not only. The accumulated detail of Chaplin's case studies offers powerful proof of the democratic, emancipatory potential of televising philosophy, whatever its shortcomings. Must one choose, really, between serious philosophy in the "western" tradition and multicultural diversity? In fact, as Chaplin shows, the steady rise of a BHL-style mediagenic philosophy of personal ethics, driven as much by publishers hoping to sell more books as by television executives eager for higher ratings, has come in addition to, rather than to the complete exclusion of, more academic approaches and formats. In the end, it doesn't seem impossible that the French will figure out a way to have their cultural democratization—and their (multi-)cultural democracy too.

Pap Ndiaye, *La Condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2008).

Review by Elisa Camiscioli, Binghamton University

On the whole, Pap Ndiaye's *La Condition noire* has been well received in France, where he now enjoys the status of "public intellectual." Ndiaye is credited with highlighting and politicizing the "black condition," despite the dominant Republican narrative that France practices color-blind universalism. By synthesizing a large body of French and Anglo-American research on empire, African and Antillean migrations, and the construction of racism and racialized identities, Ndiaye's work has enlivened the debate on diversity and discrimination among French critics.

La Condition noire is also a fascinating read for American scholars. For those of us who have been working on the topic of race in France for some time, the positive response to Ndiaye's book is a welcome surprise. This is

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