

THE LAST CATHODE RAY TUBE IN HYTHE HILL

My old TV might not have been the last cathode ray tube one in Hythe Hill, where I live, but it could easily be. It is a feature of poor areas that they tend to have the latest technology for some kind of consolation, I think. On the other hand, it is also an area still high in eccentrics, so some of them might have even older sets, maybe even black and white. Anyway, I was pleased the council dump still accept old cathode ray devices, though the skip was near empty, when the skinny council man picked up my heavy load of old TV and laid it to rest. I had struggled with even getting it to the car.

Of course, the best people never had TVs, as it was considered addictive and to have a bad effect on culture. Now that 'everything's' online' (it isn't), is looking at all and any stuff now ok, or has TV really won its war on culture by stealth? I used to have to excuse even having a TV at one point, to some high-minded friends. To someone who lived alone, as I often did and as I do now, the TV though has always been a bit of the world, a bit of substitute company, noise and otherness to the self in isolation. As an old person, living alone, I no longer have to defend this position.

What I do have to defend is not watching things online, being content with the many Freeview channels that come through my aerial. How quaint! I was even perversely proud of my old, big, heavy cathode ray tube. Over ten years ago, someone was giving it away free, so I bagged it. When my ex-partner pointed out that her flat screen had the better picture, I said, 'Yeah, but it doesn't have the attractive crack across the screen that mine has.' Her smile meant I had won the competition for not caring about such things. Now, with my new, old TV, flat screened and from a charity shop, I can see the join in TV presenter men's wigs and the too much make-up and dyed blonde hair of the female presenters, who now seem to adopt an angry parrot look, especially in political interviews.

The new old set has the same connections as my old one, so I can watch Talking Pictures TV's wonderfully indiscriminate selection of 1950s films and old pop movies and happy nostalgia, with a snatch of Junk and Disorderly about selling old oil cans, which I'm devoted to, even though I have no interest in cars or mechanics. There are some people on TV who are humble, despite its egoistic demands on those who appear. Surely this ego-presenting could go, as it seems old fashioned, even to me. Maybe the universality of podcasts will inform the mainstream media, if they still really exist, that some new honesty, even a formality, might work better. Digital radio through the TV means 4 Extra, where you could hear, for instance, *Ubu Cuco* by Alfred Jarry a few weeks ago, not broadcast since the sixties and a lesson in what is possible in sound. This kind of possibility is still mostly unexplored.

TV still feels stuck in the 1970s, at the heyday and height of its falseness and here the 'rules' have stuck in a metaphorical oversize collar, a mullet and a flared trouser suit, with egos to match. Allergic to anything but the mainstream, poetry is virtually banned, for instance. Comedian (and English teacher) Frank Skinner's poetry podcast has been a huge success, but why has no TV company adopted it? Tony Harrison's TV Films are never shown. Look at Ric Burns' *Dante*. Poetry, being a visual medium, is actually readymade for TV. And so are poets, as they often wear hats and look interesting or usefully anomalous. They lend themselves to visual invention. We seem stuck in a TV world, even now, where glibness is the only virtue and celebrity is someone you've never heard of. Meanwhile the real stuff goes on elsewhere, hidden on the vastness of the internet.

The BBC is a mix of brilliance, political and cultural patronisation and an unseemly craving to compete (the one thing it should refrain from); or else to be mainstream and inoffensive. All the great documentaries BBC4 made about, for instance, Ivor Cutler, Jake Thackray, Mose Allison and Robert Wyatt; Christina Rossetti, and Stevie Smith are never shown. Maybe they should do a Viewers' Request weekend, like 4 Extra radio did, hence the Jarry. Glastonbury is an example of coverage which now ignores the diversity of the festival, poetry for example, in favour of mainstream, mainstage sameness. The very correctness of the BBC bespeaks a conservatism of Oxbridge style, with little culture outside classical music and a bit of jazz. Hardly any traditional music, hardly any poetry, ever. Sky Arts and Talking Pictures TV are often, without even trying, doing more good cultural stuff on Freeview, while the BBC show another 'cime' drama with increasingly unlikely police persons. O well, *Shed* and *Buried* will be on later. Add the French *Maigret* series on TPTV, which is my favourite slow and unbdramatic pleasure. I'll always turn it off, if someone comes to call and I'm often reading and/ or playing an instrument and/ or writing, as the TV burbles and shows away, but I make no excuse and I'm considered quaint and old-fashioned now, rather than someone potentially hooked on 'the drug of the nation', as the old rap had it. At least there is nothing 'Smart' about mine.

Smart seems to be a synonym for bullying, when it isn't lying, which is increasingly the tone of computer apps and social media. The toxicity is going to make the young turn away, eventually. I like the fact that I'm only connected via the aether, not via two-way manipulation cables. The selling is muted easily. I remember in the early 2000s, thinking that now, when the BBC's trailers had become as annoying as the commercial ads on other channels, muting way the rule.

I don't want everything to be available to me. If everything is available, nothing has value. I like seeking out the obscure gem via the Radio Times listings, even though its editorial is largely unreadable now. Once they used to have a weekly poem by Roger Woddis; some good light verse; now hard to believe. I like finding time to watch things when someone has put them on, instead of having choice, which is no choice, unless one chooses merely being easier to manipulate. I 'curate' myself in my viewing and listening, in relation to others' curation, which is at least close to culture and exchange and negotiation with the world, unlike a slew of undifferentiated 'choice', which is nothing.

The old monster in the corner is gone and the new, old flat world has come in, though connected through my old cables and aerial to the past. Was the old monster really a monster, did it have harmful radiation? Its dominant days were long past but the new world is more subtle in its dominations and in Hythe Hill, some of us still resist, via the latest stuff or the oldest stuff and we read stuff aloud and sing poetry in the street and in the old redundant church, given half a chance.

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