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Hesse's book is not an interesting and original contribution to the philosophy of science. It is therefore to be recommended to the advanced student, though to one who is not familiar with the subject it may prove a little difficult.

JOHN FORGE

Television tomorrow

Television: Technology and Cultural Form. By Raymond Williams. Pp. 160. (Fontana/Collins: London, 1974.) 45p.

WHEN Raymond Williams was television critic of *The Listener*, he tried to appraise television as a phenomenon in spite of the convention among reviewers that what counts are programmes, as isolated units. In this book he is able to stand back and take a very long view. Television—what is it? Technology, or social force? What does the experience of watching television consist of? How did the institutions of broadcasting develop out of the technology and what kinds of institutions may arise to serve up television in its new forms—video cassettes, cable television, international broadcasting?

The author (now reader in drama at Oxford) concludes that there was nothing inevitable in television's emergence as a form of mass entertainment consumed by individuals in the privacy of their homes. He does not swallow the argument that "I Love Lucy" was as inherent in the vacuum tube as some believe the atomic bomb was in the splitting of the atom. Television, he maintains, emerged in its present form because it was under the control of the broadcasting institutions that had developed radio. And radio's growth was determined, even forced, by the equipment manufacturing industry. But between the two media (it is possible to use the word in the plural) there is a profound difference. Radio is cheap. Television is expensive. And the contradiction remains. No country, even the United Kingdom, has satisfactorily solved it. How to recover the enormous costs of television from a mass audience of individual viewers?

Mr. Williams devotes a long chapter to the comparative incidence of various types of television programmes on five television channels—three British and two American—during a single week. The results are hardly surprising. (BBC1 led the pack in public affairs discussions, with 8.3 hours, while Channel 7 in San Francisco was tops in commercials, with 18.4 hours.) A mild point made by the author is that the formal category of programme matters less than its manner. A serious documentary may be trivialised. A panel quiz game may illuminate rela-

tionships between husband and wife.

The most interesting thesis of Mr Williams's book, to my mind, is the idea that television is the whole package. He calls it "flow". The programmes, news and weather breaks, commercials, trailers for later programmes, the lot. By this standard, the BBC is full of commercials—for itself. He is amusing when he recounts the difficulty, in Miami, in trying to follow the plot of an old movie. Not only were the advertisements inserted more frequently as the viewer became hooked on the programme but there were added as well trailers of two other old films, to be shown on subsequent nights. He also observes that on the San Francisco channel, the news that some pharmaceutical companies had been accused of false advertising claims was part of the same news bulletin that contained a commercial for a pain killer.

Looking ahead, Mr Williams is worried by the paradox presented by the new technology. He sees the promise of cable (multi-channelled, wired) television and international satellite broadcasting as that of democratising communications, of bringing a new universal accessibility to television. Yet he sees (by looking back) that these developments could be stifled by existing broadcasting organisations, by international advertisers and governments. At the same time he sees that uncontrolled development of cable television could destroy what is good in national broadcasting. His main suggestion is that there should be more independent television production companies. These could diminish, without destroying, national broadcasting while providing content for cable systems to transmit. Cable he would have as a national utility.

There are a few quibbles one must make. Cable television will not be universally available in the United States by 1980. And it is unlikely to reach 30% of television homes in Britain by that time either. Its growth has been stopped dead, by restrictive rules and by shortage of investment capital. Similarly, the author's recommendation that proper international agreements on satellite television should not involve bodies with weighted voting (like Intelsat) is unrealistic. The fact is that, as the United Nations' experience has shown, a system of one vote to a country is a form of weighted voting itself, for it allows small countries a disproportionate influence from sheer numbers.

It is a pity that this book is not more readable for there is much in it that will interest media buffs. On the future of British Broadcasting, Lord Annan's committee should find it stimulating.

BRENDA MADDOX