

The Mass-Observation Project

Spring 2003 Directive

Part 1:

Television & images of the 1950s/60s

This directive is about the impact of television on the way we lived during the 1950s and early 1960s, and also on the role of television in influencing the way we think about this period of history.

There are two sections to part 1. The first part is primarily for those of you who remember living through those years. There is quite a lot of detail in the questions below - possibly more than usual. You may find them useful to prompt your memory, but please don't feel constrained by them. If they don't apply, please ignore. And as usual, please feel free to answer the way that is best for you.

The second is for everyone, whether you lived through the period or not. We are interested in how our collective history is established, so everyone's images of this time, whether from lived recollections or just an understanding of how life was then will be equally useful.

As usual, please start your reply to Part 2 on a new piece of paper and remember to include at the top a very brief mini-biography: your M-O number, (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

Television and everyday life

Your first TV set

Can you remember the role television played in your life during the years from the Coronation (1953) to The Beatles (1963)?

Can you recall when you or your family first brought your own TV set? What were the circumstances? Did it, for instance, take precedence over other household goods or improvements?

Was there agreement or disagreement over its purchase? Were there conditions attached to its viewing - especially for children, or maybe the set was bought for older family members?

If you had a television set, where was it positioned in the house? Was it visible from the kitchen or dining room? Was the furniture arranged around it? Did its arrival have

an effect on family life and routines? Were meals or social events changed for viewing purposes? Did television influence your food, shopping habits, home decoration, etc?

Programmes: which programmes did you watch and why, and was there friction over who watched what? Were 'soaps' a favourite, or youth shows, or American imports such as 'I Love Lucy'?

Health issues: Were you in any sense caught up in the public anxieties about the health risks around this 'new technology'?

ITV and advertisements: can you remember the coming of ITV and advertisements, and what did you think of them? Did this affect your loyalty, if any, to the BBC or change your viewing patterns?

TV and your own everyday life: did you feel television shows reflected your own day-to-day life? Was it just entertainment, or did it offer ideas and ambitions for alternative lifestyles or careers? Was the television a companion in the home? How did it fit in with your own life, for example, whether you were working outside the home, or based indoors? Did it alter childhood expectations and patterns of childcare?

Memories and images of an era

For older people: what are your dominant memories of the 1950s and early 1960s?

For younger people: what images do you have of the 1950s and early 1960s? If you are too young to clearly recall these years, where do these memories come from? Can you trace links with any television programme or films?

For everyone: do your images stem from shows that depict everyday life then, or maybe from ones that actually originated during those years? (For example, 'I Love Lucy' episodes from the 1950s are still shown regularly on television, 1990s films such as 'Pleasantville' and 'The Truman Show' were set around an understanding of 1950s small town America). Do you feel your understanding of this period stems from an Americanised portrayal?

Do you feel nostalgic for this time, and if so, can you explain why?

Are there any products, sights or sounds you associate with these years?

If your memories are based on your own experiences, can you trace the influence of the coming of television on your own life, your relationships, career, family, expectations, and current circumstances?

How much of a part does it play in your life today?

Part 2:

Saturday afternoons & evenings

From time to time we have asked you to keep a diary of a day or for a short period.

This time, we would like you to record your activities from 12 noon to 12 midnight on four Saturdays.

They don't have to be any particular Saturdays - they can be the next four after you receive this directive, or any other four within the next three months (but please give the actual dates on your report). They don't have to be consecutive.

As usual, please start your reply to Part 2 on a new piece of paper and remember to include at the top a very brief mini-biography: your M-O number, (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

Please note down not only what you do but whether it has been a typical Saturday for you (if you have typical Saturdays). Make a note of where you went, what you did, who you were with (no real names please). It is useful to give details about the food you ate, the costs of anything you paid for, how long things took and so on.

If you do very little on Saturdays (eg "watched TV all afternoon" or "slept most of the time" then that's fine too). If you go to work on Saturday, please say so and give details. It doesn't have to be an eventful day to be recorded.

Please wait until you have recorded all your Saturdays before sending in your reply.

Part 3: War with Iraq

Thanks to all of you who have been keeping a continuous or occasional diary of your reactions to and observations of the current international situation. I would be most grateful if you could continue to do this. At the time of writing, it looks as if war is inevitable but it is hard to predict what might happen. I would be particularly interested to know if you took part in the big **anti-war demonstration in London on 15 February**. If you did, any reflections on the experience, and any views on anti-war campaigns?

As those of you who have written for us for many years know, we can't - as part of this project - send out spontaneous requests for reactions to events as they happen so we rely on you to note down your reactions and your opinions as and when you feel you can.

Send in what you have accumulated with the rest of this directive reply. Then - as we are not sending out a Summer Directive this year - please keep a diary over the summer for returning with your reply to the Autumn Directive.

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