

# Television after the Hecatomb<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

An old question, one that goes back to Adorno's times, is whether television is capable of becoming a space for creative experimentation. The Italian program *Cinico TV*, by Cipri and Maresco, provides a radical response to this question. Making no concessions to the standards of the institutionalized television industry, *Cinico* brings us, in mournful black and white, a world resembling the day after a nuclear hecatomb, inhabited by a gallery of absurd, somewhat eschatological characters, with almost unintelligible plebian Sicilian accents, amidst a landscape of ruins, garbage, and unfinished, abandoned buildings. The program is conceived of as a pirate intervention into television. This article discusses the decadence of Italian television and Cipri and Maresco's vigorous response to it. *Cinico TV* demonstrated that television could be different, that it could take risks, moving toward becoming insubordinate to standard tastes, an audiovisual mode that expresses previously undocumented concerns, thus proving that there can be intelligent life on the "boob tube."

### Palavras-chave:

*Cinico TV*. Experimental television. Television and art. Italian television.

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## 1 Introduction

Television, as normally practiced and conceived of, is an unsurpassed space for light entertainment, home of the puerile spectacle, generally oriented toward an anesthetizing everyday environment in which the common man can relax after a day or week of hard work. Unlike other media and art forms, television takes few risks in taking the expressive possibilities of the medium beyond their institutionally-imposed limits. Precisely because of this, traditionally trained intellectuals (Adorno being certainly the most obvious example) resist seeing any aesthetic quality in television products, which in general are industrially manufactured and aimed at indifferent, unselective mass audiences. In such intellectuals' view, high quality, profound and dense cultural traditions, the result of centuries of competent critical evaluation, cannot have anything in common with the superficial, serial production designed for one-time use with a commercial goal; hence the conclusion that, with regard to television production, to speak of creativity or aesthetic quality is an exercise in futility.

But suddenly, in Italian television – precisely Italian TV, considered one of the worst in the world – we find a singular and extraordinary television experience, an experiment, for the first time radically authorial, both in the sense of constructing an individual style and a personal vision of the world, and also in the sense that the signatures of the program’s two authors appear in the opening credits, just as an artist signs at the bottom of his paintings. It is *Cinico TV*, “by Cipri and Maresco”, as it appears in the credits, referring to the program’s creators, Daniele Cipri and Franco Maresco. The program aired from 1989 to 1993, first on Televideo Market (TVM), of Palermo, and was shown afterwards during prime time on the national network, Radio and Televisione Italiana (RAI-TRE). Later, there were special programs and reruns, watched by legions of devoted fans from all over Italy. Filmmaker Bernardo Bertolucci characterized the show as the only intelligent thing to appear in Italian audiovisual programming in three decades.

The first thing that stands out about the program is the radical choice of black and white, without the slightest use of color. But it is not just any old black and white. On the contrary, through the systematic use of a *dégradé* filter, which heightens the contrast in the upper part of the screen, the clouds appear exaggeratedly dark and heavy, giving the impression of an imminent rainstorm that will unleash torrents

of water, drenching the protagonists. The overall impression given by these visual elements is that of a pirate TV intervention. During the opening and closing screens, as well as transitions between the different sketches, we see the characteristic “snow” of a TV that is off the air. Suddenly, breaking with the multicolored, spectacular, glamorous conventional television style, a strange and terrifying project comes onto the air, with a visual style that has nothing to do with what we commonly understand television to be, one that exposes the viscera of a handful of terminal, horrible, pathetic characters, amongst scenery of ruins evoking a post-nuclear landscape. According to specialists, in the event of nuclear war, cockroaches would be the only living creatures to survive. And in *Cinico TV* we have a post-cataclysmic scenario, where the surviving cockroaches have metamorphosed into human and semi-human forms, the opposite of what Kafka imagined in *Die Verwandlung* (The Metamorphosis), the story of a man who was transformed into an insect.

It all started a little before, in 1986, on the TVM station of Palermo, capital of the province of Sicily, in economic terms the poorest region of Italy, birthplace of organized crime, the Mafia. TVM was one of the first free TV stations, not only in Sicily but in all of Italy. The free radio and TV movement in Europe, which succeeded the previous pirate TV and radio movement,

1 I am grateful to Marta Lucía Velez (Universidad de Caldas, Manizales, Colombia) for her assistance in obtaining programs, Italian translations, an interview with one of the directors and, above all, for the dialogue about this paper and assistance as the ideas took shape.

sought to counter the so-called state monopoly on electromagnetic waves, in other words, the concentration of all power over radio and TV emissions into the exclusive hands of the national government. At first, it was a movement of contestation, led principally by the left, but later this movement served as a battering ram for privately-owned commercial communications companies in pressuring the government to open up radio and television to the private sector. After various confrontations and changes, many free television stations were legalized and transformed into local community TV stations. Such was the case of TVM. After legalization, this station dedicated itself mainly to programming on local issues, but in order to survive, since it was not a public TV station, nor did it have the support of big advertisers, it offered a number of tele-sales programs (thus the name Televideo Market). It was on this station that Cipri and Maresco, both natives of Palermo, were able to make their first experiments with television, through programs directed at youth, jazz aficionados (a passion of theirs) and even parodies of tele-sales programs. In exchange for their work, TVM lent them cameras and gave them access to the editing tables so that they could try out their more experimental ideas. Thus, they were given the opportunity to create, in an entirely independent way, a number of short essays that eventually were shown in the intervals between the TVM's own shows. The

shorts took a dry, comical tone in addressing local problems in Palermo, such as poverty, violence, solitude, abandonment, organized crime and urban chaos. From this emerged the idea of *Cinico TV*, a program with a fragmented narrative style, small sketches that were later assembled into daily editions with running times of around five to ten minutes, occasionally a bit longer, which were aired on TVM.

In 1990, journalists Didi Gnocchi and Mimo Londezzo, who had a program on RAI-UNO called *Isole Compresse* (Long Islands), a kind of geographic census of Italy that was also a journey through free Italian TV stations, became interested in what Cipri and Maresco were doing on TVM and invited them to participate in their program. But the duo ended up making few contributions to *Isole Compresse*, because they were censored and fired early on, following a show that referred explicitly to Silvio Berlusconi, the Big Brother of Italy, who controlled all of the public and private communications media, as well as being the country's Prime Minister (in Italy, equivalent to president). In this sketch, entitled *A Silvio*, Francesco Tirone, the cyclist character of *Cinico TV*, appears seated before a TV with an image of Berlusconi on the screen, as a voice over is heard, asking, "Is it true that Berlusconi wants to buy Sicily?"<sup>2</sup> And Tirone, with a thick Sicilian accent, replies:

<sup>2</sup> All of the program dialogue quoted in this paper, as well as those from texts published in languages other than Portuguese, were translated by the author into Portuguese and then re-translated into the English version of this paper.

Berlusconi can buy the entire island, he's a millionaire and no one can stop him, not even Onassis with his fleet of ships. I think Berlusconi wants to spy on me by radar, I think he is following me, he sees me and controls everyone. To me, Berlusconi is more powerful than the Pope, because he controls everyone's TV. Berlusconi is everywhere, in the clouds, in the air, everywhere on earth, in the water, inside the storms.

That same year, a few sketches by Cipri and Maresco were presented on *Fuori Orario* (Off Hours), directed by Enrico Ghezzi<sup>3</sup>, a night program on RAI-TRE dedicated to cutting-edge film and video. Finally, in 1992, *Cinico TV* began to be shown during *Blob*, a program whose name came from an American B-grade horror film. *Blob*, which was also directed by Ghezzi and was shown on the same public network, is a 30-minute program that is still shown today during prime time, at 9 P.M. Its sometimes implacable criticism of Italian television focuses on programs aired in the preceding days (FAVA, 1993). Quite aptly, Aldo GRASSO (1992, p. XXIX) classifies it as an example of meta-television, television that takes TV itself as its object of analysis. From that point, *Cinico TV* came to be called *Blob – Cinico TV*, a program within a program, but without losing its independence, its unique characteristics and its intent to appear to be a pirate intervention in TV programming.

*Cinico TV* was a *sui generis* program, at the margins of any known TV format. With no

explanation, the screen would go blank for a few seconds, and the “snow” of a channel off the air would appear for a few seconds, followed by a host of absurd, somewhat eschatological characters. Some were catatonic, others aphasic, while still others were mute or stuttered so badly as to be incomprehensible. Those who could speak at all had almost unintelligible working-class Sicilian accents. All this in mournful black and white, in a strange peripheral neighborhood of Palermo (the center of the city is never shown, much less its famous Mediterranean shoreline), with an urban landscape of cadaver-like unfinished and abandoned buildings, trash dumps, and mounds of construction debris. Interior scenes take place in decrepit, empty shacks. Absolute, almost metaphysical solitude reigns, and there are no people on the streets, apart from defeated, directionless, zombielike sub-lumpen proletariats, never numbering more than a dozen or so, who, in an atmosphere of total desolation, drag their miserable rags along with them. Those who are dressed at all, that is: most are nude or nearly so. It is the underbelly of late, global, technological capitalism, a wasteland of unwanted objects and useless refuse, peopled by individuals who were drawn there because their lives are complete failures.

Although the episodes of *Cinico TV* were produced according to certain aesthetic

<sup>3</sup> Enrico Ghezzi, in addition to being a TV director, is also an intellectual and scholar of mass communications phenomena, well known in Italy. Among his many published works, the following stand out: *se Il Mezzo è l'Aria* (1997) and *Paura and Desiderio. Cose (Mai) Viste* (2003), important contributions to the understanding of contemporary media.

concerns, as we will see further on, Cipri and Maresco were not concerned with making programs that were technically polished according to industrial standards of “quality control.” At first glance, the program appeared to be trash, but it was not merely this, as some other international examples were, the similarities were only superficial. In the beginning they used VHS, moving on to Umatic and much later filming in Betacam. No artificial light was used, only natural illumination. They produced a total of 49 programs, all filmed in the bowels of Palermo and mailed by cassette to Rome, to be aired on RAI-TRE. When a new cassette arrived, the *Blob* production staff would begin to tremble, just imagining the content!

## 2 Poor Sicily

Southern Italy has been considered, at least by Northern Italians, to be a backward region with little interest in adopting standards of progress. Its inhabitants are stigmatized as ignorant peasants, corrupt *mafiosos*. The Mafia arose in this region in the 1800s, in the form of highly organized family clans that dedicated themselves to crime and to taking the law into their own hands, with the support (or negligence) of the State, the Catholic Church and the communications media. Sicily was home to the famous bandit Salvatore Giuliano, who, according to legend, robbed from the rich to give to the poor, but in fact cleverly served the government and the Mafia at the same time.

On the other hand, the reduced agricultural production just after World War II and the rise of the Mafia as a typically rural phenomenon generated large migrations of the peasant population to urban centers in the south of Italy. The city of Palermo underwent chaotic growth, with no urban planning whatsoever. At the same time, the difficulty of occupying buildings in the center of the city, because of damage from World War II bombings, led to a chaotic proliferation of constructions and jerry-rigged buildings in Palermo’s urban periphery, with no infrastructure. A large part of these buildings were abandoned still unfinished, like deranged phantoms. These parts of the city also came to serve as dumping grounds for rubble from the war: condemned buildings, ruined, bankrupt industries, cemeteries for trains and automobiles, dumping grounds where the dead were buried *en masse*. It was in this desolate landscape that *Cinico TV* was shot.

In the 1980s, when Cipri and Maresco met, the streets of Palermo were the stage for constant confrontations between organized crime, the police, and the army. The result was infinite numbers of dead and wounded on all sides, even among the civil population that had nothing to do with the conflicts. Swimming against the tide, Cipri and Maresco created a film club called Rosebud (a reference to the famous train in *Citizen Kane*), where they projected film classics to neighborhood audiences. In an interview about their first years of work, Maresco recalled:

In a dead zone of the city, inhabited by the excluded and delinquents, we screened films from the new German cinema, classic cinema, Stroheim, Bergman and we rarely had audiences of more than five people. It was necessary to overcome not only mental barriers but also practical problems, to the extent that there were often five deaths a day and helicopters were flying constantly over the neighborhood, which was another disincentive to potential spectators.<sup>4</sup>

*Cinico TV* is an abstraction of this urban, political and social scenario of the city of Palermo. In the program, Palermo is transformed into a metaphysical city, recalling certain surrealist scenes by Magritte and de Chirico, where everything that takes place surpasses credibility. Permanently covered by heavy clouds, Palermo always seems to be motionless, deaf, mute, inhabited by a few scattered, terminal individuals who are paralyzed, passively awaiting the day of final judgment. These characters, nearly always nude or semi-nude, some with physical defects, appear dragging themselves through the rubble, without lamenting their fate or emitting cries of pain, but infinitely sad and incurably desolate. The only thing that moves, that speaks without pausing, that attempts to strip these characters and scenarios of their torpor, is a television, via the staff of *Cinico TV*, histrionic as one imagines all television to be, futilely attempting to extract some kind of meaningful from this human refuse.

Curiously, there are no women in *Cinico TV*. Although many of the characters complain that

they were unsuccessful in finding a female companion, frequently admitting to being *voyeurs*, women are physically absent from this world. There are rape scenes, but the victim is either off camera or, when she makes an appearance, turns out to obviously be a man dressed up as a woman. But even rape, when it occurs, is just one more banal act of violence, cold and mechanical, with no erotic motivation and no pleasure. As Maresco (2009) relates, “this was a world where there could be no desire, where there could be no Eros”. Nothing could be more tragic than a completely monosexual world, because if it were homosexual, at least there would be some kind of affective relation. In the Palermo of *Cinico TV*, everyone is irrevocably abandoned, stranded in their own solitude, with no possibility whatsoever of love, affection, or pleasure, not even companionship. What’s worse, the impossibility of male/female eroticism, as Maresco (2009) observes, signals the impossibility of hope, of the continuation of the species. It is the end of humanity.

*Cinico* is a cruel program whose humor comes from the sheer absurdity of the situations it depicts, but the comedy is a tragic one. Viewers catch themselves laughing at human misery, and swallow their laughter in embarrassment. Ciprì and Maresco poke fun at Sicilians and Italians in general, who, although they are hailed as the founders of the Renaissance and

modern civilization, today elect leaders such as Berlusconi and the famous “pianists” of the national legislature and watch the worst television in the world. But the fable is not restricted to the feudal Italian, it is also of a more universal scope and can be applied to any part of the world where marginality is radical, where solitude has no end, and the impossibility of the world is fate. There is something of the theater of the absurd, of Pirandello and Ionesco, of Camus' *La Peste*, and especially of Samuel Beckett, to whom Cipri and Maresco admit having an unquestionable debt. The tragic gladiators of *Cinico TV* spends their entire life vainly waiting for Godot. According to Maresco (2009):

What the more attentive audiences surely must have perceived is that we had not only a different content, a different Sicily, but also a different type of narrative style. Our way of telling a story was more like what in those days was referred to as Beckett theater: his theater hinged upon the use of space, of territory, just as ours did.

In fact, the world presented in *Cinico* is at an absolute standstill. The frames are open and fixed (there are no more than half a dozen panoramic views in the entire series and not a single zoom), and the style recalls that of silent films, even in the use of a diffuser obscuring the borders of the frame. The landscape is motionless, the clouds static, the streets deserted, the trains no longer in use. Even the leaves on the trees are unmoved by wind. In the background, the city of Palermo is seen, paralyzed and somewhat out of focus. It could be any other city. The characters seem to

live outside the constraints of time, their fixed, lost gazes focused on some enigmatic point in the universe. They are as still as statues, except in sequences in which they dance to some obscure song from the 1920s or 30s, with catatonic or robot-like movements, or when they are seized by spasms, as though overcome by an epileptic fit. They make muffled murmurs, voiceless screams, are off key when they feign singing, their peals of laughter are histrionic, but brusquely interrupted. They speak only when directing themselves to the television interviewer. Those that can speak, that is, for many cannot. They spit frequently, sometimes in each others' faces, but more often while looking upward, so that the spit falls in their own faces.

### 3 A parody of television

Italian television has always been a space of disputes for power and political control. Silvio Berlusconi, who has been the prime minister of the country for three terms, controls the three national public stations and is also the owner of the Mediaset empire, in addition to the main private communications media in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. He also owns banks and entertainment companies, is president of AC Milan, one of the country's main soccer teams, and, as though this were not enough, is frequently accused of having Mafia connections. According to *Forbes* magazine, he is the richest man in Europe, with an estimated fortune of 12 billion dollars. Statistics show that at his height,

Berlusconi controlled nearly 98% of Italian audiences and because of this always won the elections. He is also one of the main targets of *Cinico TV's* satire. In one of the episodes, the Zucato brothers (Pietro and Francesco) sue Berlusconi for one billion and one hundred million lira for having made their younger brother, Marcelo, turn stupid. From watching so many of the prime minister's TV programs, Marcelo had lost his wits. This was only possible because RAI-TRE, which broadcast *Cinico*, is the network that suffers the least from Berlusconi's influence, since it is in the hands of the opposition (in Italy, public television networks are distributed among the main political parties). It is no accident that, of the three public networks, RAI-TRE is the one that Berlusconi hopes to privatize.

*Cinico* is ostensibly a critical parody of the kind of television that Italians are obliged to swallow every day. All of the ingredients of television are there: the interviews, which serve no purpose, since the reporters themselves do not know what to ask, and since those who are interviewed have nothing to say; the breaks, which also have no purpose, other than interrupting the flux of information, since there is nothing to be sold in the commercial breaks; the serial structure, which serves only to repeat *ad infinitum* the well-known suffering of the poor devils of Palermo's urban periphery. Here or there, there is an unfortunate attempt to replicate a music video, with the nearly inaudible voice of the so-called "singer;" pathetic "musical" performances,

which are worse than any talent search program; a character that represents a beggar's feces or a third-rate condom already used by a gay couple. And, above all, there is the authoritarian voice of the television throughout, the voice over of an always invisible interviewer (played by Franco Maresco), as though he were a god, à la Samuel Beckett, berating the poor, without a shred of mercy for the miserable who are voyeuristically exposed before the camera, always in search of sensationalistic topics, such as suicide bombers, an on-camera murder, a potential suicide lying on the train tracks waiting for the locomotive (which is always delayed and hardly ever arrives).

Time, in *Cinico*, is controlled in a contradictory way. Usually, in television, time is measured by the inexorable authority of commercial spots, which limit program time and make it necessary to use a quick editing style, with no pauses or intervals of silence. On TV, time is money, even in increments of seconds. In *Cinico*, the biggest victim of this is Giordano, a character who never manages to answer any of the interviewers questions before *Cinico TV's* time is up. But, paradoxically, there are also long sequences in which nothing happens, entire programs in which all that happens is a character spitting on himself, or eating frantically without stopping, until he begins to vomit facing the camera. Everything happens quickly, but then suddenly it all stops and there is nothing more to hear or see. It is as though *Cinico*, in its more privileged moments, wanted to put the brakes on the



television, halt the flood of images, in favor of an opportunity for reflection.

#### 4 Two cinephiles on television

While *Cinico* can be seen as a parody of television, the program is more than just that. There is something more, which has to do with its intrinsic qualities as a work of audiovisual art. Overt cinephiles with a long history of cinematic experience,<sup>5</sup> Cipri and Maresco brought to their television work a visual sense born in cinema, such as their use of black and white, depth of field, careful framing, plasticity in image treatment and the visual frame, without special effects. In this sense, they adopt a subversive approach, in relation to what is supposed to be television's "specific" aesthetic, defined as: an emphasis on the foreground, a shallow image, a hybrid frame replete with superposition effects, hot pop colors, etc. When *Cinico* appears on the television screen, it has an air of *démodé*, as though it were an old film from the 1930s or 40s, with a marked cinematic aesthetic that bears some experimental ruptures, as in the early work of Buñuel, Maya Deren, Brakhage, Godard and Pasolini. From the beginning, cinema, especially experimental cinema, was a passion that brought Cipri and Maresco together, but the only available resources in poverty-stricken Palermo were TVM's video cameras, and television was the only

screening possibility. Why not take advantage? Why not utilize TV techniques and aesthetics, while also bringing in a sensibility that had come to maturity in cinema over the course of more than a century? Clearly, the expressive resources of television were not rejected; the videographic grain is exploited as a visual element, with electronic distortions of the broadcast signals of sound and image, an emphasis on fragmentation, on seriality and on breaks that interrupt the program. This approach was also employed by cineastes such as Rossellini, Bergman, Godard, and Kluge, among others, who also had a history of television work; but with Cipri and Maresco, the investment is more systematic and without concessions, suggesting something akin to experimental television. This is clear in a significant statement by Maresco (2009):

I was not interested in video or electronics, but for reasons that I have already explained, in making necessity into a virtue, in utilizing video as though it were cinema. That is exactly where the use of black and white came in, of some *dégradés*, the use of filters and some lens. But what characterized *Cinico TV* was the utilization of an essentially cinematic framing. With the use of *dégradés* and filters, and with black and white, we sought to recreate the great black and white of classic cinema.

But although Cipri and Maresco emphasize their relationship to cinema, this bond is not exempt from criticisms. Frequently, they use cinema as

<sup>5</sup> Cipri and Maresco were assistant directors to Pasolini on some films and they dedicated a feature-length documentary to him. They themselves directed a number of feature length films, such as *Le Zio de Brooklyn* (1995) and *Il Ritorno di Cagliostro* (2003), but their best-known cinematic work is *Totò che Visse Due Volte* (1998), mainly because of the controversy over its censorship by the Italian Censorship Committee.

a source of burlesque and parody, as for example in the *L'Alba del Killer* episode, in which the characters Giudice, Tirone and Martino beat Pietro Giordano with the butts of their pistols, just as the monkeys did with their bones in the beginning of *2001, a Space Odissey*, with the same soundtrack, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, by Richard Strauss. As Maresco (2009) recognizes:

We were really ironic quoting that cinema. Our quotes were obvious, like in a jazz composition. In jazz there is a tendency to quote. So, we also liked to use quotes.

Apart from this, in Italy Cipri and Maresco are often considered to have ties to the Italian art video movement (LISCHI, 1996, p. 29; SOSSAI, 2002, p. 111-113). In fact, the implacable critique of television, made from within TV itself and using television's resources, the subversion of the medium's expressive resources and, above all, the use of apocalyptic themes, bring *Cinico TV* close to a good part of Italian art video production. In the first projects that Cipri and Maresco did for TVM there are more conceptual programs that are closer to art video than they are to cinema, as for example in the desolate, silent landscapes of the city of Palermo, where the ruins vibrate from an electronic effect resulting from a quick panorama by the video camera. Or a jazz clip in which a man appears seated on a low wall, reading a newspaper, while the image begins to fade out from an accumulation of stains on the frame. The directors themselves admit this relationship, stating that:

We brought our visionary sensibility, our sensibility as cinephiles to television. Why not introduce image research, the meaning of framing, of composition? We brought contamination, the possibility of inserting the camera, video, and art into the palimpsest of television. It's because we believe that it is also possible to experiment with making television, it can be more than just trash. (*apud* MORREALE, 2003, p. 78).

## 5 The main characters

The cast of *Cinico TV* is formed by a group of non-professional actors, ordinary people from Palermo who were willing to take on the most eccentric and degrading roles. Some have a grotesque physiognomy, while others are full of tics and spasms and still others simply deviate in some other way from the usual television norms. They comprise a gallery of freaks that is terrifying but also ironic, comical, and revealing of the infernal abysses into which a human being can fall. According to Sossai (2002, p. 111), they are caught by the camera,

[...] in the immobility of a state of mystical trance, in the act of releasing maniacal urges, or of an elementary, animalesque physiognomy. Dialogue loses its primary communicative function and is transformed into a long interrogation and into a mortifying self-defense.

**Francesco Tirone** plays a bicyclist with a strong working-class accent. He is one of the few characters who speaks and also sings (horribly). He also plays Mafiaman, a "super-hero" who helps others, although it is not clear if they are good guys or bad guys, because in *Cinico TV* the boundary between the two is hazy. In nearly all

of the sketches he appears in, he concludes with: “*Ah! Ah! Siamo davvero pietosi!*” (Ah! Ah! We are truly merciful).

**Pietro Giordano** is the most lamentable of all. He plays a variety of roles: hunchback, rapist voyeur, excrement, a used condom, the owner of a dead dog, a bomb waiting for the magistrate to arrive, the president of the association of Italians who are failures in life, the ridiculous “Tarzan of Palermo”, or simply a miserable deaf-mute, who spends his days weeping and spitting into his own face.

**Marcello Miranda** is the most rigid and silent character, the personification of the most absolute desolation. He does not speak, does not move, does not look at anyone or anything. His arms hang downward and his shoulders are hunched. When someone spits in his face, he merely takes out a handkerchief and wipes it away, then returns to his previous stance. He is the character who was turned into an imbecile by Berlusconi’s TV shows and whose brothers filed a lawsuit claiming damages. He has attempted suicide with a gas bomb.

**Carlo Giordano** is the oldest of the group. He sometimes appears with a fistful of balloons that are always popped by an anonymous hand with a pin. His dream is to be able to fly, but he never has enough balloons. He likes to tell dirty jokes and read porn magazines, and when he starts to laugh, goes on like a maniac, only stopping when an off-camera interviewer’s voice asks him

a question. The questions always end with: “*The sun is going down and we only have a minute.*”

But Carlo Giordano never manages to finish his reply, because the TV goes off the air while he is in mid-sentence.

**Giovanni Logiudice** is a lyrical singer and almost always shown in a kind of music video, singing tacky songs and making clichê gestures, like a candidate in a talent search show, always amid desolate scenery and rubble.

**Giuseppe Paviglianiti** is a dwarfish man who nearly always appears semi-nude, with an obscenely huge stomach, often eating and drinking without stopping, farting loudly, with one eye gazing off to the side. There is a special episode of *Cinico TV*, one of the most eschatological, in which he eats crazily for nearly an hour, belching and finally vomiting on camera, then returns to eat.

**Giuseppe Fillangieri**, the youngest character, wears exaggeratedly thick glasses. He is a mystic, only speaking of things of the spirit realm, when he speaks at all. He lives in perennial fear of the indiscreet questions that come at him from off screen. He rarely manages to answer any questions because he begins to stutter and can’t get a word out. When he speaks, it is always with a fragile, timid, nearly inaudible voice.

**The Abbat brothers**, Franco and Rosolino, are employees at a funeral home and every day prepare innumerable corpses for burial. They

are ridiculous, both speaking at the same time and repeating the same stories, in exaggeratedly loud voices, as though they were screaming hysterically. Their only problem is when they need to prepare a female cadaver, because they find it embarrassing.

## 6 Final considerations

*Cinico TV* was thus a demonstration that television could be something else, it could be experimental and creative, it could take risks toward becoming an audiovisual form that is not submissive to standardized tastes, an audiovisual form that gives voice to silenced concerns and ways of thinking, it could, in sum, prove that there is intelligent life on the small screen. The authors defended the view that commercial demands and an industrial context do not necessarily make artistic creation unviable, unless we identify art as necessarily hand-crafted, with the aura of a unique object. The art of each epoch is made not only with the media, resources and demands of its times, but also within economic and institutional constraints, even when the art form overtly contests such constraints. As severe as we may be in our critique of mass entertainment, it cannot be forgotten that industry is not a monolith. It is complex and replete with internal contradictions, and it is within those gaps that the truly creative can penetrate in proposing quality alternatives. Thus, there is no reason that, within the entertainment industry, it should not be possible

to identify products – such as *Cinico TV* – that in terms of quality, originality, and density, rival the best “serious” art of our times. There is also no reason why these qualitative products of mass communication cannot be considered the true creative works of our times, whether or not they are labeled as art.

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## A televisão após a hecatombe

### Resumo:

Uma velha questão, que remonta aos tempos de Adorno, refere-se à possibilidade da televisão vir a ser um espaço de experimentação e criatividade. O programa italiano *Cinico TV*, de Cipri e Maresco, dá uma resposta radical a essa pergunta. Sem fazer nenhuma concessão aos padrões institucionais e industriais da televisão, *Cinico* traz à cena, num preto e branco lúgubre, um mundo que parece o *day after* de uma hecatombe nuclear, habitado por uma galeria de personagens absurdos, um tanto escatológicos, com um sotaque siciliano e plebeu quase ininteligível, num cenário de ruínas, dejetos e prédios inacabados e abandonados. O programa é concebido como uma intervenção pirata na televisão. O artigo discute a decadência da televisão italiana e a resposta vital que lhe dá Cipri e Maresco. *Cinico TV* foi uma demonstração de que a televisão pode ser outra coisa, pode arriscar-se em direção a um audiovisual de insubmissão ao gosto padronizado, um audiovisual de expressão de inquietudes não catalogadas, de modo a provar que há também vida inteligente na tela pequena.

### Keywords:

*Cinico TV*. Televisão experimental. Televisão e arte. Televisão italiana.

## La televisión después de la hecatombe

### Resumen:

Una vieja cuestión, que se remonta a los tiempos de Adorno, se refiere a la posibilidad de la televisión como un espacio de experimentación y creatividad. El programa italiano *Cinico TV*, de Cipri y Maresco, da una respuesta radical a esa pregunta. Sin hacer ninguna concesión a los patrones institucionales e industriales de la televisión, *Cinico* pone en escena, en un blanco y negro lúgubre, un mundo que parece el *day after* de una hecatombe nuclear, habitado por una galería de personajes absurdos, un tanto escatológicos, con un acento siciliano y plebeyo casi ininteligible, en un escenario en ruinas, deshechos y predios inacabados y abandonados. El programa es concebido como una intervención pirata en la televisión. El artículo discute la decadencia de la televisión italiana y la respuesta vital que le dan Cipri y Maresco. *Cinico TV* fue una demostración de que la televisión puede ser otra cosa, que puede arriesgarse hacia un audiovisual no sumiso a los patrones, un audiovisual de expresión de inquietudes no catalogadas, para probar que hay también vida inteligente en la pequeña pantalla.

### Palabras clave:

*Cinico TV*. Televisión experimental. Televisión y arte. Televisión italiana.

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