

Jeremy G. Butler



TELEVISION

Critical Methods

and Applications



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*Critical Methods and
Applications*

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University of Alabama

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P R E F A C E

Should we take television seriously?

Should we take television seriously as a cultural or aesthetic medium, as a text capable of producing meaning? Should we take *The Simpsons* seriously? Should we commission studies on *As the World Turns*' visual style? Should an interpretation of the discourse of *The Beverly Hillbillies* be permitted in an academic journal? And, most pertinent to this book, should there be college courses on these programs? Should *The Love Connection* be allowed in today's syllabi?

Yes, we should study television in school. And, yes, we should take television seriously. Why? Because television provides meanings, many meanings, as it entertains. It is the predominant meaning-producing and entertainment medium of the last half of the twentieth century. As such it demands our scrutiny. We need an understanding of how narrative is structured, and how sets are designed, and how the camera positions the viewer's perspective, and how sound interacts with image, to dissect the pleasures and meanings that television affords us.

Television: Critical Methods and Applications supplies the student with a toolbox of implements to disassemble television. It explains how television works, how television programs and commercials are made, and how they function as fertile producers of meanings. *Television* does not attempt to teach taste or aesthetics. It is less concerned with evaluation than with interpretation. It resists asking, "Is *Northern Exposure* good?" Instead, it poses the question, "What meanings does *Northern Exposure* signify and how does it do so?" To answer this question brings us closer to understanding television as a meaning-producing phenomenon, and thus helps us stay afloat in a sea of competing meanings.

The form of analysis stressed here asks the viewer first to explore the structures of narrative, informational, and commercial television material. Second, *Television* questions how those structures emphasize certain meanings (and repress others) to viewers, who approach television with many varying understandings of how the world works. And third, it considers how television's images and sounds work together to create its programs, commercials, and assorted televisual flotsam and jetsam. Thus, this textbook works from the concrete (light and shadow on an illuminated video screen, accompanied by sound) to the abstract (discourses on many aspects of the human experience)—and back again.

Accordingly, Part One introduces the principles organizing television's narrative and nonnarrative content. Part Two explains how that content is communicated to the viewer through the medium's style, its manipulation of image and sound. Part Three pursues a brief tangent and addresses some of the television forms that exist on the medium's periphery: music video and animation. Part Four departs from a consideration of television texts to survey the nonsocial scientific, "critical" approaches that have been applied to the medium. This part of the book offers the student grounding in fields such as genre study, ideological analysis, feminist criticism, and so on. Part Four concludes with some guidance for writing papers about TV. A sample analysis of *Designing Women* utilizes the principles of textual analysis developed over the previous chapters. It illustrates how a close examination of a program enables us to better understand television's meanings and pleasures, and how they are constructed for the viewer. Hence, it serves to summarize the book's basic critical principles.

Television was born of my frustration as a teacher of television criticism. Many television textbooks deal with the history and structure of television as an industry, but few offer students a way to analyze that industry's products from a critical perspective. Other TV textbooks emphasize the nuts and bolts of video production (how to operate cameras, microphones, etc.) to the extent that they seldom have space to consider television's meanings and how they are generated by those nuts and bolts. Textbooks that do address television or mass communication research and theory are largely empirical in their orientation—relying upon models first presented in psychology and sociology—and often neglect the issue of critical interpretation.

The authors have relied upon nonempirical models for inspiration. Much of *Television* will look familiar to readers who have encountered film criticism textbooks such as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film Art* and Louis Giannetti's *Understanding Movies*.*

*David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993); Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, 6th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993).

Moreover, this book also bears the marks of literary criticism, semiotics (the study of signs and meaning), ideological criticism, and speech communication paradigms. It draws upon each of these approaches where appropriate, but the authors are concerned above all else with analyzing television as television. Consequently, *Television* remains alert to the significant differences between television and other media.

Finally, it should be noted that *Television* does not cover the entire spectrum of television and video sources—which currently includes stations broadcasting over the air, cable channels, channels beamed directly from satellites, video cassettes and discs, computer games, home video cameras, and the rest. To keep this book comprehensible (and to reasonable length), the authors have had to set some perimeters—even though they occasionally stroll across them.

Television is principally about commercial broadcast television. And its examples are drawn largely from U.S. television (with occasional reference to Canadian and British TV). Broadcast television, in this sense, refers to the material that is broadcast over the air at some point in its life span. *Television* inevitably strays from broadcast television into the realm of cable, which is too widespread in the U.S. to ignore. But this book's scope is limited chiefly to channels that resemble the commercial broadcast TV model (with the significant exception of MTV). It would be dangerous to assume that this particular model of television defines everything we see on the television set, or that it is an unchanging monolith, or that it is the same throughout the world. Clearly it is not. But still, television originated as a commercial broadcast medium and, particularly in the United States, it seems unlikely in the foreseeable future to be wholly changed by new developments in technology, aesthetics, industry standards, or governmental regulations. Moreover, comprehending the U.S. model is important because of the international impact of Hollywood's products, especially in English-speaking countries such as Canada and England (where, for example, *Dallas* and *Dynasty* were enormously popular).

Television, then, does not pretend to be a comprehensive guide to deconstructing all television everywhere. It does, however, offer the student an introduction to a better understanding of television's principal manifestation: the ever-present, ever-flowing, commercial broadcast television system.

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Jeremy G. Butler
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

PART ONE

**UNDERSTANDING
TELEVISION'S
STRUCTURES
AND SYSTEMS**



Television's Ebb and Flow

Many publications that list television programs have taken to using a grid to represent an evening's schedule. In many of them, the channels run vertically down the left side of the grid, while half-hour time "slots" run horizontally along the top. (Fig. 1.1 shows one such grid for July 2, 1992, a Thursday chosen at random.) The reasoning behind this array is obvious. At a glance, we can fix our location in the grid, noting the axis of channel (say, channel 9) and the axis of time (say, 7:00). After figuring that location, we can quickly see what will follow the current program in time (horizontal) and what is happening on other channels at that same time (vertical).

Grids such as these may help us understand the basic structure of TV and the experience of watching television. Most listings emphasize programming time slots rather than the individual programs themselves. *TV Guide*, with a few exceptions, does not describe TV programs separately from their time slots. Only movies on "premium" cable channels (HBO, Showtime, Disney, and so on) receive special status in this regard.¹ In addition to noting movies in the listings grid, *TV Guide* isolates them from other television programs and indexes them, film by film, in the back of each issue. There is no corresponding index for any other type of television program. The editors of *TV Guide* evidently believe that viewers experience movies differently from other television programs.

The grid in Fig 1.1 and *TV Guide's* format illustrate that television programs are positioned by network programmers and experienced by viewers as one program within a sequence of other programs in an ongoing series of timed segments. Further, programs are also associ-

ated—potentially linked—with other programs by their shared time slot. During the time that a television set is on in U.S. households—seven and a half hours per day, on average—we are carried along in the horizontal current of television time, flowing from one bit of TV to the next. Equally important, we may move vertically from one channel to another, creating associations between concurrent programs. A listing grid depicts visually these two axes of television's structure: sequence (one thing after another) and association (connections among simultaneous programs).

We begin with this brief consideration of program listings because it illustrates the fundamental principle of commercial television's structure. As Raymond Williams first argued in 1974, television differs crucially from other art forms in its blending of disparate units of narrative, information, and advertising into a never-ending flow of television.² Although we commonly talk of watching a single television program as if it were a discrete entity, more commonly we simply *watch television*. The set is on. Programs, advertisements, and announcements come and go (horizontal axis). Mere fragments of programs, advertisements, and announcements flash by as we switch channels (vertical axis). We stay on the couch, drawn into the virtually

FIGURE 1.1

TV Program Grid

THURSDAY--JULY 2, 1992							PRIME TIME
	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	
Broadcast							
ABC	<i>The Sting II (movie)</i>				Prime Time Live		
CBS	Top Cops	Moment of Truth	Street Stories		Bodies of Evidence		
Fox	Simpsons	Michael Jackson	Beverly Hills, 90210		Hunter		
NBC	Different World	Cosby Show	Cheers	Wings	L.A. Law		
PBS	MacNeil, Lehrer		Johnny Shines: On and On		Mystery!		
Cable							
AE	Nature's Kingdom		World at War		Brute Force		
AMC	<i>Conn. Yankee... (movie)</i>		<i>The Big Lift (movie)</i>				
BET	Desmonds	Video Soul			Generations		
CNN	News		Larry King Live		News		
DISC	Carriers	G.I. Diary	Beyond 2000		Coast to Coast		
ESPN	Bowling		Boxing				
FAM	That's My Dog	You Asked For It	Scarecrow and Mrs. King		700 Club		
LIFE	L.A. Law		<i>To Save a Child (movie)</i>				
MTV	Day in Rock-Duff				Real World	Duff	
NICK	F Troop	Superman	Get Smart	Dick Van Dyke	Dragnet	Alfred Hitchcock	
TBS	<i>Alcatraz: The Whole Shocking Story (movie)</i>						
TNT	Centennial				<i>Greatest Show on Earth (movie)</i>		
USA	Murder, She Wrote		<i>Young Frankenstein (movie)</i>				
Premium							
DISNEY	Return to Treasure Island		<i>Summer Magic (movie)</i>				
HBO	Steven Wright		<i>Summer Heat (movie)</i>			Roseanne Arnold	
CINEMAX	<i>End of Innocence (movie)</i>				<i>Lipstick (movie)</i>		
SHOWTIME	<i>Victor/Victoria (movie), cont.</i>		<i>Commando (movie)</i>			<i>Red Shoe (movie)</i>	

ceaseless flow. We watch television more than we seek a specific television program.

The maintenance of televisual flow dominates nearly every aspect of television's structures and systems. It determines how stories will be told, how advertisements will be constructed, and even how television's visuals will be designed. Every chapter in the remainder of this book will account in one way or another for the consequences of televisual flow. Before we start, however, we need to note three of this principle's general ramifications:

1. Polysemy
2. Interruption
3. Segmentation

POLYSEMY, HETEROGENEITY, CONTRADICTION

Many critics of television presume that it speaks with a single voice, that it broadcasts meanings from a single perspective. During the 1992 presidential election campaign, Vice President Dan Quayle singled out the pregnancy of the unwed Murphy Brown as indicative of television's assault on "family values" (a euphemism for a conservative ideology of the family). For Quayle, the meanings presented on TV had systematically and univocally undermined the idea of the conventional nuclear family: father, mother, and correct number of children; the father working and the mother caring for children in the home; and no divorce or single parenthood. Television's discourse on the family had become too liberal—even decadent, according to Quayle and his supporters.

What Quayle failed to take into consideration, however, is the almost overwhelming flow of programs on television. *Murphy Brown* is but one show among the hundreds that comprise TV flow. And its endorsement of single parenthood, if such indeed is the case, is just one meaning that bobs along in the deluge of meanings flooding from the TV set. The many meanings, or polysemy, that television offers may be illustrated by excerpting a chunk of the television flow. Look at the Thursday-night schedule reproduced in Fig. 1.1. Let's presume that a typical viewer might have watched *The Simpsons*, followed by *The Cosby Show*; then taken some time off to put the kids to bed, and concluded the evening with *Roseanne Arnold*, departing from broadcast network television for this HBO special.³ (Of course, this doesn't even take into consideration the channel switching that might have gone on during a particular program; but for the sake of illustration, we'll keep

it simple.) What meanings surrounding the U.S. family, we might ask, do these three programs present?

TV Guide describes *Roseanne Arnold*, the special: "The comedienne comments on women's rights and dysfunctional families in stand-up." Arnold, in some respects, exemplifies Quayle's comments. Her publicly available private life, frequently represented in television "magazine" programs such as *Entertainment Tonight*, illustrates the decay of the conventional family: her acrimonious divorce, her pregnancy while unmarried (and the child she gave up for adoption), her allegation of abuse as a child, and so on. In this special, she describes her family:

There's Dad in his greasy T-shirt slopping down a beer and eating a big bowl of Capt'n Crunch. Mom's passed out on the couch while her horrible little dog licks her sweaty feet. My brother's dressing up like a girl, my sister's dressing up like a guy. I'm stealing food out of the fridge hand over fist, while my younger sister, who weighs all of 80 pounds, is upstairs doing jumping jacks for two hours 'cause she just ate a whole can of green beans and thinks she's too fat.

Thus, one meaning connoted by *Roseanne Arnold* the program—and even Roseanne Arnold the person—is that the traditional family is disintegrating, dysfunctional, and oppressive.

As a premium cable service, HBO promotes itself as providing material that is not seen on broadcast television. HBO's programs contain violent and sexual material forbidden by ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC. It would be misleading, therefore, to assume that *Roseanne Arnold* typifies television's representation of the family. For that we must look to *The Cosby Show* and *The Simpsons*.

On *The Cosby Show* the traditional family is far from disintegrating, dysfunctional, or oppressive. Quite the contrary, *The Cosby Show* illustrates the strengths of the nuclear family—not surprising, considering that producer Bill Cosby has a doctorate in education and uses the program to propound his approach to child rearing. There may be occasional friction within the Huxtable family, but in the final analysis it provides an enclave, a safety zone, of affection and nurturing. In the episode rerun on July 2, 1992, the Huxtables' married daughter, her husband, and twins are moving out of the Huxtable house. This allows for some joking by the father, Cliff (Bill Cosby), about his pleasure in getting rid of his daughter, but the centerpiece of the episode is a scene in which Cliff babysits the twins alone. This scene reinforces Cliff's skill with children (echoed in Cosby's Jello commercials) and emphasizes the importance of the (grand)parent-child relationship. In short, Cliff and Clair Huxtable signify all that is positive about the conventional family structure.

Are Quayle's "family values" associated with our final example, *The Simpsons*? Yes and no. *The Simpsons* exists somewhere in the middle of the spectrum that places *The Cosby Show* on one end and *Roseanne Arnold* on the other. *The Simpsons* does chip away at some of the foundations of the conventional family, but in the end it comes to reaffirm those foundations. Homer Simpson, for instance, is a much less satisfactory father figure than Cliff Huxtable. On this particular Thursday, the Simpson family faces a crisis: the dog is sick and requires a costly operation to survive. Homer's response—typically ungenerous and self-serving—is to tell the children about "doggie heaven" and prepare to put the dog to sleep. Obviously, this is not the behavior of a caring patriarch such as Cliff. After Marge Simpson (a rather conventional mother figure, except for her hairdo) calculates a plan to finance the operation, Homer finally agrees to it, muttering, "lousy manipulative dog." By the end of the episode, the Simpson family—Homer included—has rallied around the dog, drawing close, as sitcom families always have. The "family value" of the supportive clan with the nurturing mother is reasserted.

As this small portion of the televisual flow illustrates, television contradicts itself frequently and haphazardly. It presents many heterogeneous meanings in any one night's viewing. This polysemy contributes to television's broad appeal. With so many different meanings being signified, we are bound to find some that agree with our view of the world. This raises an issue that, for many TV scholars, is crucial to understanding the television experience. That is, how do we receive and process what we see on television? How might it affect us? And how might our processing of broadcast material affect its significance?

Many contrasting schools of thought are attempting to answer these questions about the viewing process and the meanings associated with television. Some of these viewer-oriented approaches are outlined in Chapter 12, "Alternatives to Empirical Study," so we will not detail them here. However, we do need to clarify our own position with regard to the viewing experience and the creation of polysemy. Three axioms guide our approach to television in this regard.

Axiom 1. A televisual text—a segment of the televisual flow, whether it be an individual program, a commercial, a newscast, or an entire evening's viewing—does offer a multiplicity of meanings. When Roseanne Arnold describes her family, it signifies, among other things, "my family was dysfunctional." This meaning may seem self-evident, but some television scholars maintain that meaning is produced—constructed—only through the interaction of viewer and text. The televisual text alone contains no meaning for these scholars; meaning only arises in the "reading" process. From this viewpoint, reading closely resembles the act of interpretation, and may be used to refer to any interpretative act—e.g., reading a book or watching television. We

could "do a reading" of *Gilligan's Island*, for instance. While the authors do not dispute the importance of understanding viewers' comprehension of TV, *Television* will largely emphasize the devices of the text rather than the mechanisms of the viewing situation. Consequently, the following chapters focus on specific textual elements: narrative and nonnarrative structures, mise-en-scene, camera style, editing, sound. This book will present ways for students to better understand how these devices mount potential meanings for the viewer's consideration. How the viewer uses these meanings is better dealt with elsewhere.

Axiom 2. The text does not present all meanings equally. Through dialogue, acting styles, music, and other attributes of the text, television emphasizes some meanings and de-emphasizes others. When the Simpson family gathers around their dog, with smiles on their faces and upbeat music in the background, the text is obviously suggesting that family togetherness and sacrificing for pets are positive meanings. But although television is polysemic, not all meanings are equal. TV is not unstructured or infinitely meaningful. Or, as John Fiske writes, "[Television's] polysemic potential is neither boundless nor structureless: the text delineates the terrain within which meanings may be made or proffers some meanings more than others."⁴ The crucial work of television criticism is to analyze the medium's hierarchy of meanings. Which meanings does the text stress? How are they stressed? These are key questions for the television critic. To answer them requires an awareness of the cultural codes of class, gender, race, and such that predominate a society. As Stuart Hall has noted, "Any society/culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. This constitutes a *dominant cultural order*, though it is neither univocal nor uncontested."⁵ Television always has been a medium encoded with the meanings prevalent in the society to which it appeals. In contemporary U.S. society, many meanings circulate, but some are given greater weight than others by the dominant cultural order. Correspondingly, although television is polysemic, it must be stressed that it is a structured polysemy. There is a pattern or structure implicit in the meanings that are offered on television.

Axiom 3. Even though this book highlights textual devices and meanings, it would be naive to assume that the reading of the television text is insignificant in the determination of meaning. The third and final axiom will clarify the authors' view of the text-viewer relationship: The act of viewing television is one in which the discourses of the viewer encounter those of the text. A discourse, in this sense of the term, has been defined by Fiske as "a language or system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area. These meanings serve the interests of that section of society within which the discourse originates and which works ideologically to naturalize those meanings into common sense."⁶ We come to a TV text with belief structures—

discourses—shaped by our psyche and social position: schooling, religion, upbringing, class, gender. And the TV text, too, has meaning structures that are governed by ideology and television-specific conventions. When we read the text, our discourses overlay those of the text. Sometimes they fit well and sometimes they don't.

INTERRUPTION AND SEQUENCE

Up to now television has been depicted as a continuous flow of sounds and images and meanings, but it is equally important to recognize the discontinuous component of TV watching and of TV itself—the ebb to its flow.

On the Thursday-night grid in Fig. 1.1, we can move horizontally across the page and see, obviously, that an evening's schedule is interrupted every half-hour or hour with different programs. One program's progression is halted by the next program, which is halted by the next and the next. Within programs the flow is frequently interrupted by advertisements and announcements and the like. And on an even smaller level, within narrative programs' story lines there tend to be many interruptions. Soap operas, for example, often present scenes in which characters are interrupted just as they are about to commit murder, discover their true paternity, or consummate a romance that has been developing for years.

The point is that TV is constantly interrupting itself. Although the flow that gushes from our television sets is continuously television texts, it is not continuously the same type of texts. There are narrative texts and nonnarrative texts and texts of advertising and information and advice, and on and on it goes.

Not only does television programming schedule interruptions as a matter of course, but its transmission is prone to other forms of interruption. Trouble with a satellite can interfere with network transmissions; a thunderstorm can down cable television lines.

Furthermore, we as viewers often interrupt ourselves while watching television. We leave the viewing area to visit the kitchen or the bathroom. Our attention drifts as we talk on the phone or argue with friends and family. We doze. And the introduction of inexpensive remote-controlled TV sets has led to the most radical interruption of all: random channel switching. With a remote control, we choose the speed of interruption and move along the vertical axis of the grid, creating a mosaic of the texts that are broadcast concurrently. We blend together narrative and nonnarrative programs, movies, advertisements, announcements, and credit sequences into a cacophonous supertext—making for some occasionally bizarre juxtapositions (as we switch, say, from a religious sermon to a heavy metal video). The pace

can be dizzying, especially for other viewers in the room who are not themselves punching the buttons.

All of these forms of interruption—from television's self-interruptions to the interruptions we perform while watching—are not a perversion of the TV-viewing experience. Rather, they *define* that experience. This is not to suggest, however, that television does not try to combat the breaks in its flow. Clearly, advertisers and networks want viewers to overcome television's fragmentary nature and continue watching their particular commercials/programs. To this end, story lines, music, visual design, and dialogue must maintain our attention, to hold us through the commercial breaks, to quell the desire to check out another channel.

SEGMENTATION

Television's discontinuous nature has led to a particular way of packaging narrative, informational, and commercial material. As John Ellis explains, "Instead of the single, coherent text that is characteristic of entertainment cinema, broadcast TV offers relatively discrete segments: small sequential unities of images and sounds whose maximum duration seems to be about five minutes."⁷ The overall flow of television is segmented into small parcels, which often bear little logical connection to one another. A shampoo commercial might follow an *L.A. Law* scene and lead into a station identification. One segment of television does not necessarily link with the next, in a chain of cause and effect. In Fiske's view, "[Television] is composed of a rapid succession of compressed, vivid segments where the principle of logic and cause and effect is subordinated to that of association and consequence to sequence."⁸ That is, fairly random association and sequence—rather than cause and effect and consequence—govern TV's flow.

TV's segmental nature peaks in the 30-second (and shorter) advertisement, but it is evident in all types of programs. News programs are compartmentalized into news, weather, and sports segments, then further subdivided into individual 90-second (and shorter) stories. Game shows play rounds of a fixed, brief duration. MTV comprises mostly individual music videos that last no longer than five minutes. Narrative programs must structure their stories so that a segment can fit neatly within the commercial breaks. And even made-for-TV movies—the TV form that comes closest to films shown in theaters—are presented in narrative segments, mindful of exactly when the commercials are programmed. After all, to the television industry, programs are just filler, a necessary inconvenience interrupting the true function of television: broadcasting commercials.

The construction of these televisual segments and their relationship to each other are two major concerns of television's advertisers, producers, and programmers. For it is on this level that the battle for our *continuing* attention is won or lost. We should also be mindful of TV's segmental structure because it determines much of how stories are told, information presented, and commodities advertised on broadcast television. The following chapters will discuss television's structures, systems, and style, as well as how television maintains flow, overcomes interruption, and manages segmentation.

S U M M A R Y

Televisual flow—Raymond Williams's term for television's sequence of diverse fragments of narrative, information, and advertising—defines the medium's fundamental structure. This flow facilitates the multiplicity of meanings, or polysemy, that television broadcasts.

Our consideration of televisual flow grows from three rudimentary axioms:

1. Television texts (programs, commercials, entire blocks of television time) contain meanings.

2. Not all meanings are presented equally. Textual devices emphasize some meanings over others and thus offer a hierarchy of meanings to the viewer. TV's polysemy is structured, by the dominant cultural order, into discourses (systems of belief).

3. The experience of television watching brings the discourses of the viewer/reader into contact with the discourses of the text.

Television studies is a new enough discipline that even basic axioms such as these are not indisputable. Still, the authors have found them useful in coming to grips with television's sometimes overpowering production of meanings.

Further, televisual flow is riddled with interruptions. TV continually interrupts itself, shifting from one text to the next. And as often as the text interrupts itself, so too do we disrupt our consumption of television with trips out of the room or simple inattention. These constant interruptions lead television to adopt a segmented structure, constructing portions of TV in such a way as to encourage viewer concentration.

The aspiration of this book is to analyze television's production of meaning. We set aside the evaluation of television programs for the time being in order to focus on TV's structured polysemy and the systems that contribute to its creation: narrative and nonnarrative structures, *mise-en-scene*, camera style, editing, sound.

FURTHER READINGS

The basic principle of television flow stems from Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken, 1974). Since 1974 it has been used in many different essays. This short book is one of the fundamental building blocks of contemporary television criticism.

John Fiske in *Television Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987) and John Ellis in *Visible Fictions: Cinema:Television:Video* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982) both elaborate upon the notion of flow. Fiske is also concerned with articulating television's meanings and how they may be organized into discourses.

Further discussion of how meaning is produced in television texts may be found in the writings of British television scholars associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (University of Birmingham, England). This school of analysis is summarized in Fiske's *Television Culture* and in his "British Cultural Studies and Television," in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, ed. Robert C. Allen (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). Students interested in the seminal work in this area should read Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, Paul Willis (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

Charlotte Brunson poses the question, "Can we have a television aesthetic, and do we want one?" in "Television: Aesthetics and Audiences," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990). Her essay charts the difficulties in using terms such as *aesthetics* and *criticism* when talking about TV.

Finally, John Fiske and John Hartley, in *Reading Television* (New York: Methuen, 1978), describe television's global structure. The book's reliance upon the concept of "bardic television" is idiosyncratic and has not had much influence upon subsequent work.

NOTES

¹ The bulk of *TV Guide* comprises more detailed descriptions of programs than are provided in the grid, but these are also arranged in terms of time slots rather than stressing first the individual programs. In contrast to this generalization, however, the magazine does emphasize eight or nine programs in its daily "Guidelines" feature, but these form a small segment of the television day.

² Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken, 1974), 86.

³ Although *The Simpsons* and *The Cosby Show* spent two seasons opposed to one another in the same time slot, *Cosby* was shifted to the later time period during the end of its run (summer 1992).

⁴ John Fiske, *Television Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 16.

⁵ Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, Paul Willis (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 134.

⁶ Fiske, 14.

⁷ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema:Television:Video* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 112.

⁸ Fiske, 105.

Narrative Structure: Television Stories

When asked if he thought films should be a slice of life, director Alfred Hitchcock is reported to have said, no, they should be a slice of cake. We might well pose the same question about television: Is it a slice of life or a slice of cake? The images we see on the screen show us real people and objects, and the sounds we hear are taken from our real experience, with dialogue spoken in a language and idiom with which we are familiar. Often we suspend disbelief and imagine that television characters are real persons, with tangible pasts and a future toward which time is carrying them. We might muse, "I wonder what happened to Hawkeye Pierce after *M*A*S*H* was canceled." It seems as if we just happened to drop in on these TV people and witnessed a slice out of their lives.

But we should be aware that for all their seeming reality, the stories we watch are actually slices of televisual confections. As if making a cake, the screenwriters and directors follow storytelling "recipes" that suggest the proper ingredients and their proper amounts for creating a television program. They mix those ingredients in conventionally prescribed ways—adding a chase scene here and a romantic clinch there—to maximize viewer pleasure. Just like the frosting on the top of a birthday cake, a television narrative has been blended to satisfy our appetites.

To understand television narrative, then, we must look beyond the appearance of reality the medium promotes and understand the recipe that created that reality. We may ask of any program, "How is this story put together? What are its components, and how do they relate to one another?" As we begin to look at television's narratives, we will notice a

limited number of basic narrative structures, a finite set of recipes for mixing narrative ingredients. Historically, there have been four principal modes of telling stories on television:

1. The theatrical film (originally shown in theaters)
2. The made-for-TV film and miniseries
3. The series program
4. The serial program

This chapter charts these four structures and explores the differences and similarities among them.

THE THEATRICAL FILM

From Antagonism to Alliance

When television experienced its first growth spurt in the years after World War II, the U.S. motion picture studios and the television industry were mutually antagonistic. TV, an upstart medium, stole the cinema's customers and undermined the studio system that had dominated North America's narrative market. Indeed, the entire world depended on Hollywood for its stories. But the 1950s would be the last decade that U.S. viewers would rely so heavily upon the cinema for their entertainment. By 1960, television had replaced the cinema as America's primary form of entertainment, and many within the film industry were bitter about this loss of control. Just as film executives resented television's inclusion into their domain, so were their counterparts in the television industry hesitant to deal with the film studios. Television producers wanted to create their own material and not have to depend upon the whims of the film industry for their product.

What began as antagonism between the film studios and the television industry soon evolved into a wary alliance. Television was hungry for narrative product; the studios controlled thousands of movies. After their initial runs, these films were warehoused, seldom heard from again, and thus not a financial asset. RKO, Monogram, and Republic—three of the smaller studios—were the first to begin leasing their older movies to television. Soon the major studios were compelled to join in. It wasn't long before newer and newer films began making their way to television more and more quickly. The ratings success of NBC's *Saturday Night at the Movies* (1961–) led to all of the broadcast networks featuring “nights at the movies.” By the end of the decade there were recent theatrical films running on television just about every night of the week.

Since that time, the relationship between theatrical filmmaking and television has become more complex. Rather than disdaining tele-

vision, most of today's film studios also own and operate television production facilities, blurring the economic distinction between the two media. Bringing film and television even closer together is the videocassette recorder (VCR), which was introduced to the home market in the late 1970s and thrived during the 1980s. Indeed, in the late 1980s videocassette rental revenue bypassed theatrical box office receipts. Nowadays more viewers see a videocassette of a movie on their television sets than go to see a film projected in a theater.

Although the VCR and premium cable channels (HBO, Showtime, etc.) have radically changed the way we view/consume movies, and have virtually eliminated programs such as *Saturday Night at the Movies*, theatrical films continue to play a major role in television programming. Most local stations and many cable satellite stations such as WGN, WWOR, and WTBS continue to use theatrical films to fill much of their schedule. (Television mogul Ted Turner, for example, now owns—not leases—the MGM film library, and has based his TNT channel on those movies.) Moreover, the narrative structure of the theatrical film is still used as a standard by which other TV programs are judged. It is important, therefore, to consider how the theatrical film structures its stories and how those structures are modified when they appear on broadcast television.

The Classical Paradigm

The theatrical cinema was not always a powerful narrative machine. Around the turn of the century film stories were in a rather primitive state. Some early movies told no stories at all: a baby is fed, a train arrives at a station, a wall falls over. Viewers were so enthralled with the mere sight of movement on the screen that characters and plot were superfluous. However, cinema viewers soon developed an obsession with narrative, and the young film industry was more than willing to provide it. When D. W. Griffith's milestone, *The Birth of a Nation*, was released in 1915, the cinema had already established itself as an accomplished, mature art form, a specifically narrative art form. The popularization of sound a little over a decade later threw the industry into upheaval and forced the cinema to readjust its story-telling methods. But by 1934 American movies had settled upon a certain way of constructing stories as well as a conventional style of editing, visual composition, dialogue and music, and so on. This filmmaking method has come to be known as the classical Hollywood cinema, or, more simply, Hollywood classicism.¹ Classical narrative structure is the concern of the present chapter. Classical editing and sound are discussed later.

In order to avoid one possible point of confusion, it is important to note that "classical" film, in this sense, does not refer simply to well-

established and admired films that have maintained their appeal over the decades. Calling *Casablanca* (1942) or *Gone with the Wind* (1939) a "classic" is not using the term as we will be using it here. Rather, classical in our sense refers to a specific mode of filmmaking, and can be applied to almost all films made in Hollywood since the 1930s. *Casablanca* and *Gone with the Wind* are classical films, but so are *What! No Beer?* (1933), *Biography of a Bachelor Girl* (1935), *Ishtar* (1987), and *Basket Case* (1982), not to mention *Basket Case II* (1989). Moreover, of the theatrical films shown on television, only the very rare exception is not a classical film. These few, nonclassical films are generally shown on PBS or the Arts and Entertainment (A&E) cable channel, or are foreign "art" films. A recent series of French films on A&E, for example, included films that violated classicism's "rules."

What binds together the thousands of classical films that have been made over the decades? The seven basic components of classical narrative structure are listed below. As we outline these components we will illustrate them mostly with examples from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). *Raiders* was chosen because it is one of the most widely viewed films in the history of the cinema (as of 1993 it was still one of the ten highest-grossing films of all time) and because it exemplifies classical principles so clearly.

1. Single protagonist. The protagonist is the central character in a TV program, film, book, or other fictional mode. The story revolves around him or her. Classicism has usually limited a movie's protagonist to just one or, at most, two characters. Filmmakers reason that this facilitates viewer identification and streamlines the narrative action. Viewers can identify with one person more readily than with a dozen, and can comprehend a single character more quickly than several mixed together at the beginning of the film.

This seems commonsensical enough, but narratives do occasionally use more than a single protagonist. Soap operas usually feature a dozen protagonists at any particular point in the story. Russian silent filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein argued that an entire class of people could be the protagonist. In Eisenstein's *Strike* (1924) and *Potemkin* (1925) masses of people serve as the narrative focus. Of course, there are even classical films which break this "rule" of the single protagonist, but instead of splintering the story, these films often unite several characters with a single purpose so that they function as a united force within the narrative. The four "ghostbusters" in the film of the same name (1984), for example, work together to destroy the ghosts.

2. Exposition. The initial construction of the protagonist's character takes place during that portion of the story known as the exposition. The exposition introduces the viewer to two components of the story:

- A. The principal characters' personas, their "personalities"
- B. The space or environment the characters inhabit.

Every story must have an exposition, but not necessarily at the beginning of the film. Many movies, especially murder mysteries, start in the middle of the action and then later explain who the characters are and what their space entails. Stories that open in such a fashion are said to begin *in medias res*. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* begins in medias res; the hero, Indiana Jones (“Indy”) is nearly crushed by a huge rolling boulder, and is then chased by angry natives. All of this occurs before we know who he is, where he is, and why he is doing what he’s doing. Once Indy escapes from the jungle the film’s exposition begins. His profession and motivation are established when we see him lecturing about archeology; and the entire story (its characters and their locations) is mapped out by the government bureaucrats who then visit Indy and pique his interest in the Ark of the Covenant.

3. Motivation. In any classical story, something must catalyze events. The action must have motivation. Here the importance of the single protagonist is re-emphasized, for classical narrative is motivated by the desire of a single character. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* illustrates this unequivocally: Indy desires to acquire the Ark of the Covenant. The protagonist’s desire—his or her lack of something or someone or some emotion—catalyzes the story, provides a reason for events to happen, and establishes the narrative’s central enigma.

4. Narrative enigma. Early in any classical film a question is explicitly or implicitly asked. This question forms the central enigma of the classical story. In *Raiders* the question is, Will Indy find the Ark and prevent the Nazis from using it? There may be secondary enigmas (What is in the Ark? Will Indy get together with Marion?), but every other aspect of the story stems from the one central enigma. It is essential to classical narrative that the enigma must not be solved immediately. If it were, there would be no story. Imagine how short *Raiders of the Lost Ark* would be if Indy finds the Ark in the first ten minutes. Consequently, classical narrative relies upon a series of delays that forestall the solution of the enigma.

Chief among the delaying tactics of the classical cinema is the introduction of a character who blocks fulfillment of the protagonist’s desire—and, thus, blocks the resolution of the narrative enigma. This blocking character is known as the antagonist. The antagonist can be as simple as a solitary character with whom the protagonist battles or competes—for example, Belloq, Indy’s nemesis. Or, the antagonist may take the shape of the character’s environment: e.g., the Civil War in *Gone with the Wind*. Some classical films even pose the antagonizing force as being within the protagonist—as in *Rain Man* (1988), where Charlie Babbitt must come to terms with conflicting emotions regarding his autistic brother. These narrative conflicts are not mutually exclusive. A film may contain a combination of them, as when, in *Ordinary People* (1980), Conrad deals with his internal conflicts about his brother’s death at the same time he works through his antagonism with his mother.

In any case, the conflict created by the antagonist delays the resolution of the enigma until the end of the film. These delays form the basis of the chain of cause-effect actions that comprise the main body of the film.

5. Cause-effect chain. Once the exposition has established the characters and their space, and the protagonist's desire has sparked the forward movement of the story, the narrative begins a series or chain of events that are linked to one another and occur over time. Events do not occur randomly or in arbitrary order in classical films. One event causes the next, which causes the next, which causes the next, and so on (Fig. 2.1). *Raiders of the Lost Ark* illustrates this: The visit by the bureaucrats causes Indy to go looking for the Ark, which causes him to track down Marion to find a clue to the Ark's location, which causes him to become realigned with her and to travel to Cairo together, which causes them to battle the Nazis in the Cairo market, and so on. Link by link the narrative chain is built.

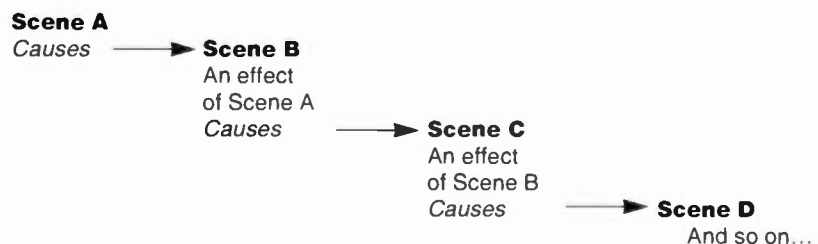
Each single narrative event is commonly called a scene or sequence. A scene is a specific chunk of narrative that coheres because the event takes place in a particular time at a particular place. The space of a scene is consistent, and time passes in a scene as it does in real life. Contemporary narrative theory has renamed the scene the syntagm. The order in which the scenes or syntagms transpire is the film's syntagmatic structure.

In a single scene time is continuous, as it is in life; but as we make the transition from one scene to another, the potential for manipulating time arises. Time in film does not match time in reality. If it did, it would take months to watch *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Story time—several months, in this case—is rarely equivalent to screen time—*Raiders of the Lost Ark's* 115 minutes. To maximize narrative impact, the duration and order of story time are manipulated as it is converted into screen time.

Most commonly, screen time's duration is shorter than that of story time. Very few films last as long as the actions they represent on the screen. Obviously, films must compress time in order to tell their

FIGURE 2.1

The Cause-Effect Narrative Chain



stories without taxing the viewer. Only occasional oddities such as *High Noon* ([1952], 82 minutes in the life of a sheriff, presented in 82 minutes) and *Rope* ([1948], presented as if it were one long, continuous shot) equate screen time with real time. Further, screen time is not always shorter than story time. This is less common than the reverse, but certainly not unheard of. In *Fantastic Voyage* (1966), a tiny submarine passes through a human heart in 57 seconds of story time, as we are told by the characters. But this 57 seconds of story time elapses over three minutes of screen time. Thus, the duration of time may be manipulated to maximize narrative effect.

The order of screen time may be similarly manipulated. In most classical films, the events shown in the second scene occur after those that appear in the first scene; those in the third scene occur after the second; and so on—i.e., the temporal structure is normally chronological. However, it is not uncommon for films to use flashbacks or, less often, flashforwards, to rearrange a story's temporal structure. In classical film these departures from chronological order are clearly marked with special effects so that we are certain when we are shifting into the past: the image goes wavy; the focus shifts; smoke appears before the lens; or the character's voice fades out. In nonclassical films, such as those by Alain Resnais and Luis Buñuel, the past is jumbled up with the present and the future in challenging and sometimes contradictory ways.

Also important to consider is the increasing intensity of events, the basic dynamic force of the narrative. As the enigma's resolution is delayed again and again, the narrative level escalates. As Indy comes closer to the Ark, his battles become more and more death-defying. Eventually, this results in the film's climax.

6. Climax. At a classical film's climax the narrative conflict culminates—necessitating a resolution. The film's central enigma, which has been delayed for 90 minutes or more, demands to be solved. At the climax of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the conflict between Indy and Belloq peaks as Indy and Marion are tied to a stake while Belloq and the Nazis open the Ark. The central enigma (Will Indy find the Ark and prevent the Nazis from using it?) and its subsidiary (What is in the Ark?) are solved in this scene: apparently the wrath of God is contained in the Ark and consequently the Nazis are destroyed when they open it.

Climaxes are the most concentrated moment of the narrative conflict, but typically they are not the very end of the film. Classical films normally incorporate a short resolution to answer any outstanding questions.

7. Resolution or denouement. Up to the point of the resolution, the enigmas have been consistently delayed and the narrative action has constantly risen. In the resolution, in contrast, the enigmas are solved and the narrative action (or conflict) declines. After the apocalyptic destruction of the Nazis, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* resolves by showing us the Ark being stored in an anonymous crate in a huge warehouse, and Indy and Marion getting together for a drink. The

questions about the Ark's contents and the Nazis' use of it are answered. Also answered is a subsidiary question about whether Indy and Marion will reunite. There is a strong sense of closure at the end of this and most classical films. The enigmas that had been opened at the start of the film are now closed off, secured. The narrative's questions are answered.

If a narrative concludes without answering its questions and the ending is ambiguous or open, this is an instance of narrative aperture. For the most part, narrative aperture exists only in nonclassical films. Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre sa Vie* (1962), for example, concludes with the protagonist being suddenly shot and killed, with no subsequent explanation. There are very few films that follow classical conventions up until the very end, and then tantalize us with an ambiguous finish. The horror genre contains most of these films. *Halloween* (1978), with the mysterious disappearance of the killer's body, is one example. There are, of course, economic reasons for the aperture of horror films. An open ending facilitates the return of the killer in sequels. But aperture also suits the horror film's *raison d'être*, which is to call into question the stability of rational life. An ambiguous ending undermines the narrative equilibrium that is the goal of most classical films. The horror film does not share that goal.

Theatrical Films on Television

The transition from theater to television can have significant effects on feature film narrative. The most drastic of these effects is the shortening of a film to fit it into a television time slot. Large parts of the narrative are excised in this process. A Chicago station once ran the 118-minute *From Here to Eternity* in a 90-minute time slot. Subtracting more time for commercials, station promotional materials, and other interruptions left about 75 minutes for the film itself. Obviously, cutting 43 minutes from any film is going to severely affect the coherence of its narrative chain. Characters appear and disappear unpredictably and entire subplots cease to exist. The cause-effect linkage of classical films is disrupted, sometimes to the point of incomprehensibility, when films are edited in this fashion.

Movies shown on broadcast television are also shortened for reasons other than time concerns. Typically, broadcast standards for television are stricter than U.S. obscenity laws for motion pictures. Images, language, and even entire scenes that television networks deem unfit for family viewing will be excised. *Slap Shot* (1977), *Raging Bull* (1980), and the originally X-rated *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) have all been ravaged when broadcast on commercial television.² Even when movies are shown on cable premium channels there is no guarantee they will not be edited. When Showtime—a pay service that boasted about running films “uncut and uninterrupted”—presented

Montenegro (1981), it removed a sexually suggestive scene involving a motorized toy tank.

Thus, various bits and pieces of theatrical films (classical and otherwise) are missing when they are presented on commercial television. Of course, the portions of the film that remain are not presented without interruption. U.S. television inherited from radio the convention of interposing commercials within the body of movies and programs. Commercials and their impact will be considered later; but we may note here that the appearance of TV commercials within classical films adds a distracting, narratively detrimental element that is absent from the film's presentation in the theater.³

The abbreviation and interruption of classical film narrative are not the only ways that film stories are modified on television. In somewhat uncommon circumstances, theatrical films are sometimes actually lengthened when presented on television. Network TV added 49 minutes to *Superman* (1978) and 19 minutes to *Superman III* (1983) when they were originally telecast.⁴ In one of the strangest of such incidents, a 1980s telecast of *Rear Window* (1958) extended its running time by presenting the credits in slow motion and inserting a dream sequence that had not existed in the original film! The narrative effect of such alterations varies from film to film, but it is seldom beneficial.

Hence, for a variety of reasons the movies seen on broadcast television and cable premium channels may substantively differ from the versions shown in theaters. Narrative can be a fragile component of the movies, and often is distorted beyond recognition in the transition from theater screen to television screen. However, theatrical films are not the only "movies" appearing on television. There are, of course, many films that were specifically designed for the electronic medium.

THE MADE-FOR-TELEVISION FILM

Until the mid-1960s, the only movies shown on television were ones that had originally been designed for theater audiences. The early-1960s success of "nights at the movies" made networks hungry for more, cheaper films—ones that might also serve as springboards for television series. Consequently, the made-for-TV movie was born. See *How They Run* inaugurated this new form in 1964. Since then, made-for-TV films have been mixed with theatrical ones on networks' film programs in increasing numbers. In the 1986–87 season, for example, the networks broadcast almost 300 made-for-TV films and fewer than 100 theatrical movies.⁵ Viewers seem to distinguish less and less between the two. Of the two highest-rated movies in the history of television, one is a theatrical film (*Gone with the Wind*), but the other is a made-for-television film (*The Day After* [1983]). Moreover, the made-

for-TV/theatrical dissimilarity is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain, because U.S. made-for-TV movies are often shown theatrically in Europe (e.g., the pilot for *Twin Peaks* [1990]) and films shot for European television are sometimes shown in U.S. theaters (e.g., *Berlin Alexanderplatz* [1980]).

Are there substantive differences in the narrative structure, then, between theatrical and made-for-television films? What is it about the latter that marks them as being produced specifically for television?

Narrative Structure

As we might anticipate, there are more similarities than differences between the narrative structure of the made-for-TV film and that of the theatrical movie. The similarities include:

1. Single protagonist
2. Exposition establishes characters and space
3. Protagonist's desire catalyzes story
4. Central enigma underpins story
5. Narrative progresses by antagonist delaying enigma resolution
6. Conflict peaks in a climax
7. Closure assured in the resolution

With so many similarities, what is it that distinguishes the two forms? The distinctions arise from the made-for-TV movie's recognition of interruption as a sustaining force on television. Made-for-TV movies are designed to be interrupted. Their narrative chain is segmented to take advantage of commercial breaks. Rather than a continuous chain of events in cause-effect relationship with one other, the made-for-TV movie often (though not always) halts the action and provides a small climax just before the commercials begin. This climax does not resolve the enigma, as does the final climax of a theatrical film. Instead, it heightens the enigma, posing questions that entice the viewer to stay with this channel through the commercials to find out what happens next.

Theatrical films have these small climaxes on occasion, too, but they are not coordinated with television's commercial breaks; they don't occur with regularity every 15 minutes or so. Made-for-TV narrative structure aligns itself with the rhythm of television, taking advantage of the pauses to heighten narrative suspense. Television's rhythm also determines the length of most made-for-TV movies. To fit into a two-hour time slot, they must run 100 minutes—with little room for variation. Theatrical films typically run 90 to 120 minutes, with the nature of the story determining the film's exact length. In contrast, the 100-minute precondition for made-for-TV movies strictly determines the length of the story, as it must be made to fit this time slot. Screen-

writers and directors working within the form of the made-for-TV movie must plot their films with this rigid time limit in mind, just as poets must confine themselves to the rhythmic pattern of the sonnet and painters must cope with the usually rectangular shape of a frame.

Many made-for-TV movies are used as pilots—programs that introduce new series. This function of some made-for-TV movies affects their narrative structure, distinguishing them from the classical model. Classical films end with a strong sense of closure. Questions are answered; enigmas are solved; couples are united. Those made-for-TV films that do double duty as pilots for projected television series cannot tolerate this narrative closure. Instead, they serve to open the narrative of the series to follow. Typically, a pilot will resolve some narrative issues, but, more important to its producers, it must establish ongoing enigmas that will underpin the program during its regular run. Thus, the two-hour pilot for *Miami Vice* (1984) establishes the characters of Rico Tubbs and Sonny Crockett and, through the death of Tubbs's brother, provides the motivation for Tubbs moving to Miami. But the pilot concludes without Tubbs apprehending/killing his brother's murderer—as would have been typical for a classical film. There is no closure to the pilot's central enigma: Will Tubbs capture the killer? We had to wait until several weeks into the season before the murderer was punished during the run of the series. The pilot, which is frequently presented as if it were a stand-alone movie, uses a certain degree of narrative aperture to engage us, drawing us in to the narrative structure of the regular run of a series.

In sum, the TV-movie shares many attributes with its theatrical namesake. The two are getting harder and harder to tell apart. And yet, the TV-movie's narrative structure does reveal the traits of having been "made for television." It recognizes television's interruptive form, and it has developed narrative strategies to cope with it. These strategies are even more evident in the television series, a format that is quite distinct from the movies, whether classical or made for television.

THE TELEVISION SERIES

Early television drew upon a variety of sources for its programming material: theatrical movies, sports events, vaudeville-style music and comedy skits, and such. In many regards the infant medium relied most heavily upon its broadcasting predecessor, radio, for programming strategies and narrative forms. Indeed, the influence of radio was so strong, and the television image in the 1940s so poor, that early television was little more than radio accompanied by fuzzy, indistinct, black-and-white pictures—with the emphasis on sound rather than image. Television has changed a good deal since then, but the basic

narrative form that TV inherited from radio endures to the present day: the series.

There are precedents for the television series in both literature and the cinema. Literary series have been published that center on figures such as Tarzan, the Hardy Boys, and Nancy Drew; and theatrical film series have featured a variety of characters: Tarzans (dozens since Elmo Lincoln first did the role in 1918), sophisticated detectives (the "thin man" films [1934–47]), homicidal maniacs (Freddy Krueger of *Nightmare on Elm Street*, beginning in 1984), sports heroes (Rocky, beginning in 1976), and so on. Even so, the series has never been as important to literature or film as it is to television. Indeed, during the 1992–93 television season, only two of the top-ten programs were not narrative series (*NFL Monday Night Football* and *60 Minutes*; see Table 7.1, page 175).⁶ What characterizes the narrative television series, and how is it particularly well-suited to the form of television? We can begin to answer these questions by examining the series' narrative structure.

Narrative Structure

The television series is a narrative form that presents weekly episodes with a defined set of recurring characters. For example, the five most popular series during the 1992–93 season were *Roseanne*, *Home Improvement*, *Murphy Brown*, *Murder, She Wrote*, and *Coach*.⁷ In series such as these, each episode's story is basically self-contained. The narrative does not continue from one week to the next, as stories do in the television serial. The narrative structure of the series is our concern here, but we will return to the serial below.

In some respects, the television series resembles the classical film. After all, series do present chains of events driven by enigmas. But the pressures of constant interruption and of repetition, of a weekly appearance before the viewer, forces the television series to rely on some distinctly different narrative strategies:

1. Multiple protagonists. Many series center on a single protagonist: Mary Richards (*The Mary Tyler Moore Show* [1970–77]), Jessica Fletcher (*Murder, She Wrote* [1984–]). But it is more common for a TV series to use a pair of protagonists or even an ensemble cast of five or six main characters. Christine Cagney and Mary Beth Lacey (*Cagney and Lacey* [1982–88]) held equal narrative importance, as did the central characters on *Cheers* (1982–93) and *M*A*S*H* (1972–83). The main function of these multiple protagonists is to permit a variety of plots within the same environment. One week Cagney was concerned about acquaintance rape; the next week Lacey was coping with breast cancer. Narrative emphasis shifts from one episode to the next, but the core characters remain the same.

2. Exposition. The constancy of the series' central figures means that each episode needs only a brief exposition. Most of the characters and their space are known to the viewer from previous episodes, and often they are reestablished in the program's theme song: e.g., "Come and listen to my story about a man named Jed, a poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed . . ." (*The Beverly Hillbillies* [1962–71]). Only the particulars of the current episode's characters and any new locations must be established. We rely upon the consistency of characters and space; it is part of what makes the show comfortable to watch. We know that every week—or every day in syndication—the characters of *Taxi* (1978–83) will congregate in their garage, and that Andy Taylor and Barney Fife will preside over their jail (*The Andy Griffith Show* [1960–68]). Only new characters and new locations need be established in the exposition. Obviously, this is different from a one-time presentation such as a TV-movie, which must acquaint the viewer with an unknown cast of characters and an unfamiliar setting.

Series characters have a personal history of which we are usually conscious and to which references are occasionally made. In episodes of *Cheers* in the late 1980s, for example, Sam Malone and Frasier Crane often referred to their mutual engagement to Diane Chambers, even though she was no longer on the program. On most series programs, however, these personal histories are rather vague and ill defined. The past is a murky region in series television. The present tense of a specific episode is usually all that matters. In the 1986–87 season of *Miami Vice*, detective Larry Zito was murdered—a narrative event important enough to warrant a two-episode story. Subsequent episodes of the program, however, seldom mentioned Zito. That segment of the program's past virtually ceased to exist, except in reruns. Thus, series characters do have an established past, and their characters do not need reestablishing each week; but they often misplace this past and, in any event, it is usually not necessary for our enjoyment of a specific episode for us to know the details of the characters' pasts.

3. Motivation. The constancy of a series' characters and setting establishes a narrative equilibrium. A state of balance or rest exists at the beginning of each episode. However, if this balance were to continue, there would be no story. Something needs to disturb the balance to set the story in motion, to catalyze it.

The most common narrative catalyst, as in the classical cinema, is the lack or desire of the protagonist. Since the series incorporates multiple protagonists, this permits it to shift the narrative catalyst function from one character to another. The desire of one protagonist may dominate one week; the desire of another may arise in the next episode. In one episode of *Cheers*, Rebecca desired to elicit a marriage proposal from Robin; in another, Sam wanted to start a new, Cheers-like bar. Each lack—of husband, of a self-owned bar—provided the motivation for a sequence of events. Each lack raised the question of whether the protagonist's desire would be satisfied. In short, each raised a narrative enigma.

4. Narrative problematic. Will Robin propose to Rebecca? Will Sam buy his own bar and leave Cheers? Enigmas such as these underpin the narrative of a series and capture our attention (if they are successful). But, of course, as in all narrative forms these enigmas must not be immediately resolved. There must be a counterforce that prevents their instantaneous resolution, or there would be no story to tell. In both of the *Cheers* examples, the counterforce is Robin, who functions as the antagonist for both Rebecca and Sam—evading her interest in marriage and cheating Sam out of the bar he wants to buy. As with the classical film, the counterforce need not be a single individual as it is in this case. It may also be the protagonist's environment or an internal, psychological element within the protagonist. The main point is that the protagonist's acquisition of his or her goal must be postponed, deferred, so that the narrative may progress.

Thus, the narrative focus shifts from one week to the next, but it is important to recognize that these individual desires and enigmas exist within a larger narrative problematic. Because fundamentally the series is a repeatable form, there must be some narrative kernel that recurs every week. In effect, the program must ask the same question again and again to maintain consistency and viewer interest. Of course, we wouldn't watch exactly the same material each week (although the number of times we watch a particular episode in syndication contradicts this), so there must be some variation within that consistency. But, still, every series must have some recurring problematic, some dilemma with which it deals in every episode.

For *Cheers* we might think of that dilemma as, Will the camaraderie and harmony of the bar be disrupted? Smaller questions within this larger problematic include: Will Rebecca marry Robin and leave the bar? Will Sam open a new place and break up the old gang? Will Norm Peterson find a job and have to give up his barstool? To take another example—this time from a dramatic series—the problematic of *Miami Vice* was, Will Crockett and/or Tubbs surrender to the temptations they are immersed in and become villains? Individual episodes counterposed various antagonists against Crockett and Tubbs, but overriding these specific concerns was the more general issue of their moral character.

Each episode, drawing on the multiplicity of protagonists in series TV, poses a slightly different narrative enigma. But, as John Ellis has noted, "The basic problematic of the series, with all its conflicts, is itself a stable state."⁸ Specific enigmas come and go—briefly igniting the viewer's interest—but the fundamental problematic remains firm, sustaining the viewer's ongoing attachment to the program.

5. Cause-effect chain. As in the classical film, events do not happen randomly in series television. One scene leads into the next, and the next, and the next. A cause-effect chain is erected scene by scene. However, this chain must be broken at least once during a half-hour program, and at least three times during an hour-long program, for the insertion of commercials. The TV chain is not continuous as it is in the cinema.

The series deals with this discontinuity by segmenting the narrative. That is, the story is broken into segments that fit between the commercial breaks. These between-commercial segments, sometimes called acts, consist of one or more scenes that hold together as strongly as classical scenes do. They end with their own small climax, which leads into the commercial break. The function of this precommercial climax is not to resolve narrative dilemmas, but instead to heighten them, to raise our interest in the narrative as we flow into the commercials. New, minor enigmas may even be posed just before the segment ends.

In one episode of *Newhart* (1982–90), for example, Joanna Loudon was invited to dinner by the idiosyncratic brothers Larry, Darryl, and Darryl, who had been known to eat raccoons, bugs, and other distasteful dishes. As the segment faded to black, the viewer was left with the enigmas: What will the brothers serve Joanna? Will it nauseate her? Following the commercials, these questions were answered and the narrative chain resumed.

In sum, the segmentation of the series narrative interrupts the rising curve of increasingly intensified action that we see in classical cinema and replaces it with portions of narrative equipped with their own miniature climax—in a sense, a series of upward curves. In this way, television narrative more closely resembles the play, with its division into separate acts; or the mystery novel that ends each chapter on a note of suspense. The chain is slightly ruptured, but not sundered by the so-called commercial breaks.

6. Climax. Series episodes do have a final climax, where the action finally peaks and asks for some form of resolution. Rebecca and Sam emotionally confronted Robin in the episodes from *Cheers* noted above. However, series programs' climaxes are undercut by one main factor: the repeatability of the program, its need to return the following week with the same problematic. The conflict reaches its peak, but there is no final resolution.

7. Resolution/denouement. Series episodes can have no final resolution, no narrative closure, because to do so would mean the end of the series itself. If there were no more threats to the camaraderie of *Cheers* or the moral character of Crockett and Tubbs, there would be no more conflict upon which to base *Cheers's* and *Miami Vice's* narratives. Consequently, the ending of each episode must leave us in doubt as to the ultimate resolution of the series' overarching conflict. There must be a sense of narrative openness, a limited aperture.

On rare occasions, television series will conclude the program's run by providing true narrative closure. *M*A*S*H* ended the fictional doctors'/nurses' conflict with the Korean War by presenting a two-and-a-half-hour episode (February 28, 1983) in which the war ended. With no more war to play antagonist to the medical protagonists, the narrative motor of the program ran out of fuel. Its repeatable problematic had finally been resolved—after eleven years and hundreds of episodes.

Most series, however, do not close in this fashion. One moment they are part of the weekly schedule and the next they are gone. Their abrupt departure sustains their narrative aperture, which is helpful if they are sold into stripped syndication, where their problematic is *re-presented* daily.⁹

THE TELEVISION SERIAL

The serial is another form of storytelling that successfully made the transition from radio to television. And even before radio made use of the serial, there were examples of it in literature and the cinema. Nineteenth-century novels, such as those authored by Charles Dickens, were often originally published chapter by chapter in magazines. Silent movie serials such as the hugely popular *Fantômas* (1913) in France and *The Perils of Pauline* (1914) in the U.S. entertained audiences during radio's infancy. Neither of these forms, however, would reach an audience as enormous as the TV serial's.

Unlike the *series*, the *serial* expects us to make specific and substantial narrative connections between one episode and the next. In the series, the link between each week's programs is rather vague. In the serial, the connection is fundamental to its narrative pleasures. The main difference between the series and the serial is the way that each handles the development of the narrative from episode to episode.

With the exceptions of *Dallas* (1978–91) and *Dynasty* (1981–89), the serial has seldom been as important as the series to the broadcast networks' prime-time schedules.¹⁰ In contrast, the narrative series has never been a significant factor in the networks' daytime schedules; there, the serial—in the form of the soap opera—reigns supreme. The television serial has long been the least respected narrative form. There is a creeping sexism in this attitude, for it assumes that soap opera is something that only “housewives” could find interesting. More recently, however, critics have begun to reevaluate the serial, with intriguing results; and producers/directors have reworked the form in quirky serials such as *St. Elsewhere* (1982–88) and *Twin Peaks* (1990–91).

How is it that serials tell their stories? What is their narrative structure, and how does it differ from both the classical cinema and the television series?

Narrative Structure

1. Multiple protagonists. In our discussion of series programs, we noted an increased tendency toward multiple protagonists. The serial—especially the daytime serial—uses an even larger number of

protagonists, each of whom is equally important to the narrative structure. Hour-long soap operas typically have fifteen to twenty central characters—many more than the classical film, and even more than multiple-protagonist series such as *Cheers* (whose main characters really number just four or five). Soap-opera casts are the largest of any program on television.

The multiplicity of protagonists permits a variety of simultaneous story lines within the narrative world of a serial. And, more important, the quantity of characters decreases the importance of any one character. Indeed, soap-opera characters lead a precarious existence. They come and go with a swiftness that is uncommon in other fictional forms. This is due partly to economics. Most soap-opera actors work under contracts that may be cancelled every thirteen weeks. If the producers feel that an actor is not generating enough viewer interest, he or she may suddenly disappear, along with his or her character (although the character is also frequently recast). However, economics is not the only reason for the large number of protagonists. Soap opera relies upon a multiplicity of characters to create a narrative web in which most characters are connected with one another.

2. Exposition. As does *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the television serial begins each episode in medias res. The story has already begun, the action joined in progress. This is especially remarkable for daytime serials whose story may have begun decades before. *Guiding Light* has been developing its story on radio and television for more than 50 years. *As the World Turns* has been constructing its narrative since April 2, 1956. If these were classical films they would have lasted thousands of hours and their exposition would have occurred years ago! Even the relatively recently premiered nighttime serials such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty* ran for ten or more years, providing a few hundred hours of narrative.

Few, if any, viewers have watched these serials since their inception. And the programs are always adding new viewers. So how do serials cope with viewers who have missed episodes or are new to the program? The answer is that serials, particularly the long-running soap operas, contain a large quotient of redundant narrative information. Character A has coffee with character B and they discuss how C has fathered a child with D. This narrative fact is now established. But in a later scene (the next day, perhaps) we will see character B at the nurses' station discussing the situation with two more characters. The information is redundant to the regular viewer, but serves as exposition for the viewer that has missed the previous scene. Through this redundancy the soap opera constantly reestablishes its characters and their situations.

Part of the redundant information that is regurgitated in the serial is the pasts of the characters. Serial characters carry a specific, significant past—much more so than do the series characters. In the series, as we discussed above, the past is obscure and indefinite; but in the serial, characters constantly refer to it. Previous love affairs and

marriages, murders and double-crossings, pregnancies and miscarriages, are layered on top of the current goings-on. For the regular viewer in particular this creates a remarkably dense, multilayered narrative. A casual remark between two characters can be loaded with repressed, unspoken associations. A kiss hello can signify years of ill will or unrequited lust. A complex weave of character relationships exists from the very first second of a day's episode of a daytime serial.

This is not to say that new characters are never introduced on serials. Obviously, they must be, to keep the narrative fresh and interesting. These characters all undergo a conventional exposition, as does a character entering a classical film. However, daytime soap operas often abbreviate this exposition by providing familial associations for the new character. Often, the new character will be someone's never-before-seen cousin or uncle, or even sister or mother. The use of familial relations quickly incorporates the new character into the story lines associated with that family. His or her character is established as being similar to, or different from, the rest of the family's overall character.

3. Motivation. Like the exposition, the original catalyst for long-running television serials took place years ago. In the episodes we watch day after day, or week after week, the many protagonists' desires and lacks are mostly already established. Only the occasional new desire/lack is introduced to maintain the narrative diversity. In both daytime and nighttime serials, these lacks/desires normally concentrate on heterosexual romance and familial relations (especially paternity). More recently, however, the serial has diversified, with *Dallas* leading the serial into themes of corporate greed, and *General Hospital* (1963-) introducing international intrigue and science fiction (the "ice princess") into the soap opera world.

4. Narrative enigmas. The serial is saturated with enigmas. It thrives on them. Will Luke reunite with Laura (*General Hospital*)? Will Tad conquer amnesia and marry Dixie (*All My Children*)? These are just two of the thousands of enigmas that have been posed on daytime serials. Indeed, the multiplicity of protagonists ensures that several—up to a dozen or so—enigmas will be running on any one program at any one time. Unlike the classical film or the TV series episode with their one central enigma, the serial nurtures multiple enigmas. They are its foundation. The multiplicity of enigmas ensures that serials will never lose their narrative momentum. If one enigma is solved, many others still remain to slowly pull the story forward.

5. Cause-effect chain. The narrative chain of daytime serial television is interrupted more frequently than that of series television. There are more commercial breaks per program minute in daytime soap operas than there are in nighttime series. (It is no coincidence that soap operas are the most consistently profitable programs on television.) In an hour-long episode, almost 20 minutes are taken up with commercials and other nonnarrative material. Indeed, barely nine or ten minutes of story material elapse between commercial interruptions.

Serials adapt to this constant interruption much the same way that series do. They segment the narrative. Each serial narrative segment ends with a small climax, which raises new enigmas rather than leading to resolutions. We enter, or “flow” into, a commercial break on the heels of a question mark. Will Betsy arrive home in time to see Craig walking around the house—him having forgotten that he’s faking paralysis to trap her in a loveless marriage? After we return from the world of commerce we’ll get our answer to this small enigma (no, she doesn’t), but the overarching enigma is sustained.

6. Climax. Eventually, individual story lines do climax on serials. If they didn’t, we would probably stop watching out of total frustration. So we do have fairy-tale weddings in which long-separated lovers are united, and climactic gun battles in which evil characters are dispatched. But these climaxes never result in narrative resolution.

7. (The lack of) Resolution. Almost by definition, serials cannot have total resolution. They cannot resolve *all* of the enigmas. If they did, there would be no reason to tune in the next day. Climaxes are used to generate new enigmas, rather than resolution. The fairy-tale wedding raises questions about whether the groom will realize that the bride is pregnant by the altar boy. The gun battle raises the question about whether the protagonist will be imprisoned for life. Even death is not a certainty—as was illustrated by Bobby Ewing’s return to *Dallas* after “dying” in front of Pam’s eyes. (Apparently it was just a dream of Pam’s—a dream that lasted an entire TV season!) Many serial characters have returned from (presumed) death two and three times. So even death is not a permanent resolution on the soap opera.

On the extremely rare occasions when a serial story line does achieve relative narrative closure—say, a couple marries and leaves the program—it is still of little consequence to the enigma structure of the program because of the abundance of other enigmas. With fifteen or twenty protagonists, someone is certain to be lacking or desiring someone or something at any point in time. The one imperative of the serial is that the story must continue.

S U M M A R Y

Narrative forms must share television time with all sorts of other material: news, commercials, game shows, public service announcements. And yet, stories are what principally draw us to television. Theatrical films, made-for-TV films, series programs, and serial programs lure us with the promise of entertaining stories. These television narratives share certain characteristics. They all present protagonists—established by an exposition—in a chain of events motivated by desire. There are always antagonists—individuals, environments, or internal—that prevent the attainment of that desire. The chain in each narrative mode is comprised of actions connected to one another by narrative enigmas that pull the story toward a climax. All of these as-

pects are necessary for conventional storytelling, though their order and emphasis may differ from mode to mode.

However, important distinctions separate the narrative modes. Series and serials rely upon a viewer foreknowledge of characters that is not possible in individual films, whether made for TV or not. The made-for-TV movie, the series, and the serial adapt themselves to television's constant interruptions through narrative segmentation, to which theatrical films are not accustomed. Each mode handles enigmas and resolutions somewhat differently—depending upon whether the mode must be continued the next week/day or not. On one end of the spectrum is the classical film, with its firm narrative closure; on the other is the soap opera, with its never-fully-closing narrative aperture.

We should resist the impulse to use the classical film as our yardstick to measure these individual narrative modes. Instead, we should understand them on their own terms as television narratives. Every narrative form on the medium must somehow conform to television's flow, interruption, and segmentation. The daytime serial—with its extreme segmentation, multiple protagonists, multiple enigmas, and lack of full resolution—owes the least to the classical film or the nineteenth century novel, and is perhaps the most televisual of the narrative modes. The theatrical film is, obviously, the least suited, and consequently suffers the most. The series and the made-for-TV movie each has its own way of accommodating the medium. And still, all are television stories.

FURTHER READINGS

The most cogent overview of television narrative, especially as it compares with the narrative of other related media, is John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema:Television:Video* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), although his references are becoming a bit dated. A more recent and more theoretical overview is provided by Sarah Kosloff's chapter, "Narrative Theory and Television," in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, ed. Robert C. Allen (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). Kosloff includes an annotated bibliography of narrative theory of literature, film, and television.

Analyses of the narrative structures of film and literature can often provide insights into those of television. Seymour Chatman in *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978) provides a summary of narrative analysis in those two media. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have written frequently on narrative systems in film. Their *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993) offers chapters that summarize their work elsewhere. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and*

Mode of Production to 1960 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) is a meticulous analysis of the evolution of classical film narrative form as a mode of production.

For discussions of the narrative structure of specific television genres, see Robert C. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) and Paul Attallah, "The Unworthy Discourse: Situation Comedy in Television," in *Interpreting Television: Current Research Perspectives*, ed. Willard D. Rowland, Jr., and Bruce Watkins (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984). Of course, television narratives do not exist in isolation from one another. Mimi White, in "Crossing Wavelengths: The Diegetic and Referential Imaginary of American Commercial Television," *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1986):51–64, explains just how narratives may bounce off one another in television.

NOTES

¹ The precise year that classicism was established is debatable, but 1934 is a handy reference point because it is the year that the film industry implemented the "production code," a set of rules that both regulated screen morals (what could not be said or done) and set certain narrative standards (e.g., evil must be punished). For an exhaustive consideration of classicism, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

² *Midnight Cowboy* is so butchered when it is shown on television that Leonard Maltin advises, "... please don't watch it on commercial TV: the most lenient prints run 104 m. [out of an original running time of 113 minutes] and are ludicrously dubbed to remove foul language." *TV Movies and Video Guide* (New York: Signet, 1990), 719.

³ Recently U.S. theaters have begun running commercials with films, a practice that had long been done in Europe. Still, theatrical movies are not interrupted by the commercials, as they are on television. Instead, the commercials are always shown before the feature begins.

⁴ Maltin, 1081–2.

⁵ Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows*, Fourth edition (New York: Ballantine, 1988), 533–4.

⁶ As reported in *TV Guide*, May 29, 1993, 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema:Television:Video* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 156.

⁹ Stripped syndication is the practice of programming syndicated shows Monday through Friday in the same time slot—usually during the day, or right before or after prime-time at night.

¹⁰ *Dallas* and *Dynasty* are the only serial programs to occupy the number-one rankings in the Nielsen season ratings, and they are virtually the only ones to rank in the Nielsen top ten.

Building Narrative: Character, Actor, Star

The previous chapter discusses television narrative as if the characters involved were pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, depersonalized components fitted into abstract patterns. This is misleading. While it is, of course, important to understand narrative structures, it is equally important to understand the characters that inhabit those structures. In a sense, these characters can exist even before the narrative action begins. The first time we see a shot of Thomas Sullivan Magnum (*Magnum P.I.* [1980–88]), we immediately begin to construct an idea of his character—even before the character does anything in the plot structure. Furthermore, characters exist beyond their stories. For instance, when we pick up a copy of *Soap Opera Digest* because we respond to a picture of the character Erica Kane, we are carrying her significance beyond the story lines of *All My Children*. Erica has begun to take on a “life” of her own. Additionally, such fan magazine coverage of television introduces us to the actors who embody the roles, and it nurtures the process of turning common actors into genuine stars. The *Soap Opera Digest* article is as much, or more, about actor Susan Lucci as it is about character Erica Kane.

To put it bluntly: Without characters there could be no television narrative and no television stars. Correspondingly, without actors there could be no characters. Characters, actors, stars: these three intertwining phenomena will be the focus of this chapter. We will begin by charting the mechanisms used to construct characters on television. Among these is the performance of the actor, which will be discussed in terms of contrasting acting strategies. The significance of the actor does not end with his or her performance within a televisual text, how-

ever. An actor, such as Lucci, may also appear in other media texts: magazines, movies, newspapers, public appearances at shopping malls. As the image multiplies, the actor evolves into a television star.

BUILDING CHARACTERS

Because characters typically assume human form, because they look like us, talk like us and, in some sense, behave like us, it is easy to mistake characters for real people, with real lives beyond the boundaries of their television programs. Most of us realize that J.R. Ewing is not a real person, that writers have designed his words and directors have chosen camera angles to present him. But still we willingly set that knowledge aside, suspending disbelief while watching *Dallas*. Or, more accurately, the program endeavors to hide the work that went into creating J.R., to render invisible the making of a character. If it succeeds, we accept J.R. as a plausible human being (even if his actions may seem exaggerated). If it fails, we respond with annoyance or amusement: "People don't talk like that!" or "They want us to believe that Pam dreamt Bobby's death? Get real!"

Annoyance at television's implausibility, its "fakery," is a first step toward viewing the medium critically. However, to systematically analyze TV, we must channel the occasional awareness of television's "fake," constructed nature into a critique of how those narrative constructions operate. In this case, we need to ask how a character is manufactured and how we come to understand the meanings associated with him or her.

Fabricating characters is the day-to-day work of writers, directors, producers, and other craftspersons. Indeed, it's the principal work of the entire televisual medium—creating signs of character that signify the character to us. We, in turn, interpret or read these signs according to a variety of factors:

1. Our understanding of the world, of television, of genre.
2. The context (i.e., program) in which the character appears.
3. The viewing situation itself (Did we have a large meal just before turning on the television? Is the room too brightly lit? How large is the television? And so on.).

All these variables can influence how we perceive a character. They make character construction an imprecise science. Still, we can better understand how characters are constructed if we identify the types of signs that signify character and investigate the code of character construction. This code comprises certain "rules" that govern what meanings a character signifies to us and how those meanings are created.

Both producers and consumers of television have learned this code. In fact, we learn it so well that we take it for granted. Television producers (and writers and directors) unthinkingly use this code to construct characters; and television consumers (we, the viewers) incorporate it into our commonsense understanding of the medium. Producers and consumers alike understand, for example, that a female character who wears glasses is supposed to be more “intellectual” than other female characters. This convention of costuming is part of a code that is so taken for granted as to become nearly invisible. It is the analyst’s task, then, to make it visible again. In so doing, it is important to remember that this so-called code is both *historical* and *cultural*. That is, it changes over time and is not fixed; and it differs from one culture to another and is not universal.

Although the historical and cultural nature of the code is true of all aspects of character construction, it is most obvious in the case of costuming. The skinny ties worn by Sergeant Friday in the 1950s and 1960s police drama *Dragnet* (1952–59, 1967–70) were part of a total costuming style that signified moral and political conservatism. When that same style of tie was worn by musicians such as Elvis Costello in music videos in the early 1980s, it had liberal and hip connotations—perhaps even reflecting the styles of thirty years prior. Time had changed the meaning of that visual signifier (the tie). As well as being bound to a certain time, such specifics of costuming are also culturally determined. The width of Sergeant Friday’s or Elvis Costello’s tie would not mean much to a traditionally attired African, for instance, whose code of dress does not normally include neckwear.

To provide a less frivolous example of the cultural significance of dress, consider that in the Western world black is recognized as the color of mourning. It has come to signify death. In contrast, in Asian countries mourners wear white. Hence we may see that no costuming convention is universal. The code changes from one culture to another.

As we begin to examine the conventionalized code of character construction, we will rely heavily on a typology of character signs articulated originally by Richard Dyer in his studies of cinema stars.¹ Most of Dyer’s comments on film characters may be imported into our consideration of television characters, but television is not the cinema, and the following typology alters Dyer’s scheme where appropriate.

A Typology of Character Signs

Viewer Foreknowledge Before watching a single episode of a television program, we are provided with signs that signify the characters to us. Advertising on television and in print describes and promotes the program in terms that capitalize on our familiarity with the program’s genre, its stars (if famous enough), and, in the case of programs

spun off other programs, its parent show. If a program is advertised as a new police drama, then we can expect certain genre character types: the foolish rookie, bitter veteran, helpless victims, and so on. If it features Andy Griffith—as when he appears in *Matlock* (1986–)—then we are prepared for a character articulated by Griffith's homespun star image. And if the program is a spinoff, such as *A Different World* (1987–), then we have already seen some of the characters (e.g., Denise Huxtable) in previous stories, although in a different context (*The Cosby Show*). Such aspects of genre, star, and parent program generate a narrative image of the program—an enticing representation of what the program's characters will be like—that functions to lure us to a new program.²

Of course, once the program has been on for a few weeks (or months, or years), viewer foreknowledge before each individual episode rises to the point where the characters become as familiar as figures from literary and cinematic series, such as Frankenstein's monster or Nancy Drew or Tarzan. An established program often plays upon our familiarity by using its credit sequence to rehearse character relationships. The credit sequence of *M*A*S*H*, for instance, presents us with each of the major characters and their milieu. Even though we are, most likely, already familiar with these characters, this short pre-narrative segment re-presents the program's dramatis personae and diminishes the need for a full exposition to establish the characters.

Character Name A character's name distinguishes him or her from the rest of the cast and, more important, signifies certain character traits to us. These traits may be as program-specific as the character's familial bonds: Alex Keaton is obviously related to Elyse and Steve Keaton on *Family Ties* (1982–90). (Familial relationships are particularly important to soap operas.) Names also carry significance within the general culture. The name Ricky Ricardo (*I Love Lucy* [1951–61]) carries Hispanic connotations. Miles Silverberg (*Murphy Brown*) conveys Jewish associations. Each of these names raises expectations that the character will either fit into ethnic/religious stereotypes, defeat those stereotypes, or perhaps select particular stereotypical connotations while rejecting others.

Character names connote meanings other than religion and ethnicity, too. On *Murphy Brown*, the title character's name is distinctive enough within U.S. culture (a family name, Murphy, used as a first name) to imply an extraordinary woman: unusual name = unusual character. And, on the same program, the name Corky Sherwood is used to diminish that character's seriousness by using the diminutive and, for a broadcast journalist, overly familiar, -y ending (cf. Buffy, Tippy, Candy). Further, when Corky married a man named Forrest

during the 1990–91 season she became Corky Sherwood Forrest—the pun on her married name creating humor at the character’s expense.

Appearance Appearance can be broken down further into three components: the *face* (and hairstyle), the *body* (build and posture), and *costuming*.

Television’s reliance upon the close-up favors the face as a signifier of character. Unfortunately for the purposes of analysis, the meanings of facial characteristics are ephemeral and difficult to pin down. Aside from clear-cut racial characteristics, it is hard to particularize the meanings of a face—although we unthinkingly make these interpretations a thousand times a day. What does Tom Selleck’s or Burt Reynolds’s moustache “mean”? What does David Letterman’s hair signify? These are questions that cannot be answered with any rigor. And yet, there are some facial characteristics that become significant because of their difference from facial norms: Farrah Fawcett’s copious amount of blond hair in her *Charlie’s Angels* days (1976–77) signified “blondness” and a specific type of “sex symbol” to many viewers (Fig. 3.1). Her blond hair linked her to other female sex symbols, and thus signified a certain sexual availability and vulnerability in the Marilyn Monroe tradition. It is the variation from the norm that not only makes a characteristic noticeable, but also creates meaning.

Corporeal (bodily) attributes carry clearer meanings than facial ones. Selleck’s robust physique conveys strength and masculinity. Roseanne Arnold’s physique, in contrast, associates her with the “mammy” stereotype—the overweight woman who is sexually neutral but an expert at caring for others (see Fig. 3.7, page 61). These actors’

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FIGURE 3.1



physiques and the way they carry them quickly signify aspects of their characters to the viewer.

Of course, on television, women are defined by their appearance more than men are. This has led authors to critique television in terms of how women are displayed for the pleasure of men—a topic we will return to in Chapter 12.

As we have mentioned already, costuming is a significant component of character construction. Within television there are two very active overlapping codes determining our understanding of costume: the code of dress predominant in a specific culture at a specific time, and the code of dress specific to television and television genres. Our earlier example of skinny ties in *Dragnet* and music videos is one instance of a fashion element that was part of the culture at large and was incorporated into television programs. Narrow ties would have existed with or without TV. Their significance existed both within and without television. Certain genres, however, develop a code of costume that is not shared by the contemporary culture. Westerns, private eye shows, and science fiction programs each have developed clothing items that hold specific meaning. The gambler's fancy vest in the Western, for example, has come to signify his greed and untrustworthiness. Costuming is closely related to, and often overlaps with, our next sign of character.

Objective Correlative An objective correlative is an object (or sometimes an animal) that is associated with a character and conveys something about him or her. Objective correlatives include the environment that is the home or work place of a character. The living room and neighboring junkyard of *Sanford and Son* (1972–1977) help establish Fred Sanford's social class and life-style. Sitcoms, in particular, rely heavily on a limited number of sets; and those settings come to be as familiar to the regular viewer as his or her own living room.

Even more distinctive than these sets are objective correlatives that are individual objects linked to characters: Lucas McCain's rifle in *The Rifleman* (1958–63), Ricky Ricardo's conga drum in *I Love Lucy*, Sonny Crockett's sports cars (*Miami Vice*), J.R. Ewing's hats, and so on. In each instance the object comes to signify something about the character.

Dialogue What a character says and what other characters say about him or her determine a good deal about our understanding of that character. These meanings range from the direct (character A saying that character B is a murderer) to the oblique (the inflections of Tim Allen's voice as he cracks a joke). In each case, meaning about the character is communicated to the viewer.

Lighting and Videography or Cinematography Some of the more technical aspects of filming or videotaping an actor also con-

tribute to our sense of character. These are discussed more fully in the chapters on visual style, but we may note here a few ways that television technique affects character.

Deviations from the standard of broad, even lighting have come to signify aspects of character. When an actor is lit from below, his or her character is thought to be sinister. When lit entirely from behind, the resulting silhouette conveys a sense of mystery. Other, more subtle lighting effects also serve to represent character.

Similarly, camera lenses and other technical devices (see Chapter 6) may influence character development. A close-up of someone taken with a wide-angle lens may distort the person's features, making her or him appear strange or goofy.

Most viewers are not actively aware of such technical manipulations. Nonetheless, they do affect our understanding of character, and it is the analyst's responsibility to remain sensitive to these uses of television style.

Action What a character does in a story—that is, her or his actions—determines in the final analysis what a character means. A character who does evil things comes to signify evil.

BUILDING PERFORMANCES

We have discussed the character as a fairly static object: a human being of a certain appearance, associated with certain objects, who is presented in a certain way, and fits into a narrative structure. What we have ignored thus far—and what is frequently overlooked in television studies in general—is the work of the actor in the creation of character. Acting or performance, as we will use the terms, refers to how a line of dialogue is spoken and how a gesture is made and how a smile is smiled. It is what the actor does that is distinguishable from the scriptwriter's lines or the director's positioning of the camera. Consequently, performance is often difficult to isolate from other aspects of character and is even tougher to describe.

Our approach here, first of all, scraps any attempt to evaluate or judge acting. The evaluation of acting is clouded by ever-changing codes of good and bad acting and the mercurial psychology of the individual viewer or critic. What is considered good acting at one time and place seems strange or exaggerated at another. Moreover, acting is not like the physical sciences; there is no such thing as progress in the art of acting. Acting does not get better and better. There are only different types of acting and different eras and different cultures that view certain types as better than others. For instance, there is a long-standing prejudice within U.S. culture that rates television acting below that

of the theatrical film, and both television and film acting below that of the live theater. (And acting in daytime television is rated below that of prime time.) While there may be minor distinctions among the performances in these media, the main determinant in these judgments is a cultural elitism underscored by economic class prejudice; only relatively wealthy persons can afford to see live theater today. Consequently, television and film have become the cultural upstarts who have undermined the theater's dominance of the acting arts.

Elitism aside, the judgment of acting is a subjective business—invariably anchored in deep-rooted drives and desires of which the viewer-critic is barely aware. In this book we will set aside the elitism and the subjectivity of judging acting in favor of trying to understand how we interpret acting and how performance conveys meaning. To this end, we will start with the raw material of acting—what Dyer calls the signs of performance—and then we will consider some of the strategies of performance that greatly determine how we interpret acting.³

A Typology of Performance Signs

When an actor constructs a performance, he or she has two raw materials to work with: voice and body. How these materials are used is what defines the performance. Further, in studying performance it is useful to divide these materials into four types of performance signs:

1. vocal
2. facial
3. gestural
4. corporeal⁴

It may appear that there is some overlap here between performance signs and the previously discussed character signs that depend on the actor's body. The difference between the two is that performance signs deal with how the raw material is used; the discussion of character signs focuses on what material is selected and how it appears, even before being animated through performance.

Before considering briefly some of the specific ways that performance signs function, we should note that actor performance, more than any one character sign, contains the principal signifiers of a character's presumed emotional state. The way an actor talks or moves or smiles signifies how the character feels. In television, unlike the novel, we seldom have direct access to a character's emotions. The novel may represent emotions simply by describing them verbally: say, "Christine felt sad the day she murdered Bob." But a television program—unless it uses voice-over narration or characters talking about their mental health—must signify these emotions principally through performance signs. It is worth reiterating, however, that characters are not real peo-

ple, that they do not feel emotions. Instead, emotions are represented through character and performance signs, which the viewer interprets as signifiers of emotion: a particular look in Christine's eye while she murders Bob = sadness. This difference between the emotions of characters and the emotions of real people is more than just semantics. It is a distinction we must keep in mind to distance ourselves far enough from character emotions that we can analyze how they function in the narrative structure, how they motivate the story.

Vocal Performance There are a number of vocal qualities that may be manipulated in the construction of a performance: principally, *volume*, *pitch*, and *timbre*. Just as in a musical performance, these qualities may be organized for specific affect.

The meanings of volume are varied. Loudness may signify strength, or it may signify shrillness or terror. Softness may signify meekness, or it may signify a control so total that speaking loudly is not necessary. As usual, context determines meaning.

Pitch in music is how high or low a note is. Vocal pitch within our culture tends to convey gender-oriented meanings. A higher pitch is associated with the feminine and a lower pitch with the masculine. Higher voices are also linked with childlike characters. The deep bass voice of William Conrad helped create the tough, masculine character of detective Frank Cannon (*Cannon* [1971–76]). Georgia Engel's high voice contributed to Georgette Baxter's femininity in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. The gender significance of pitch is rooted in obvious biological differences between men's and women's vocal chords, but gender is also culturally determined. Individual men's voices are not necessarily lower than individual women's, and vice versa. And since pitch significance is part of culture, not just nature, female actors may use lower pitch to signify masculine characteristics, while male actors may use higher pitch to signify feminine ones.

The final aspect of vocal quality that actors use in creating a performance is timbre, which is the most difficult to describe. Timbre is the tonal quality of a sound. Aside from being high or low, soft or loud, is a sound harsh or mellow or nasal or smooth? In short, what type of tone does it have? The harsh, nasal tone of Roseanne Arnold's voice augments the abrasiveness of her character. Sharon Gless's throaty delivery underlines the sexual potential beneath the police detective exterior of Chris Cagney (*Cagney and Lacey*). Different tonal qualities convey a myriad of connotations within our culture. To describe them all would be nearly impossible, but still, the analyst needs to remain alert to them.

In addition to vocal quality, the performance of dialogue is also affected by the rhythm of the speech. Bob Newhart's trademark of halting, interrupted speech signifies his characters' lack of confidence (in *The Bob Newhart Show* [1972–78], *Newhart* [1982–90], and *Bob*

[1992–]). Peter Falk's slow delivery of crime scene analysis in *Columbo* (1971–77) masked his quick and clever deductive skills. Lucille Ball's rapid-fire delivery of dialogue in *I Love Lucy* marked her wacky nerviness. In each case the rhythm of the vocal performance conveys meaning to the viewer.

Facial Performance Facial performance is the way that facial appearance is used. Facial appearance—e.g., Fawcett's hair—is a character sign. We may also think of it as a performance sign in terms of how Fawcett moves her hair. Fawcett's hair is not just larger than normal, it is also emphasized by the performer, which accentuates its significance. With each toss of Fawcett's head, the meaning of this sign (Fawcett's "blondness") is re-emphasized.

Most facial performance is not as large as Fawcett's, obviously. Minuscule movements of facial muscles can have significance. The viewer easily distinguishes the different meanings suggested by tiny variations in facial movement. A certain type of smile can mean amusement, while another can mean condescension or disbelief. Of all the performance signs, the facial presumably signifies the most about character emotions—which is why soap opera, the genre most concerned with emotion, contains the most intense examination, in close-up, of facial performance.

Gestural Performance The significance of human gestures to a performance has been discussed since at least the late nineteenth century, when a French teacher of elocution, François Delsarte (1811–71), codified gestures into the Delsarte System of performance. In the Delsarte System there is a strict vocabulary of gesture: a raised fist means "Determination or Anger" and an open hand tilted downward means "Apathy or Prostration."⁵ However, the meanings of gestural performance are not as clear-cut or universal as Delsarte maintained. Instead, gestures convey meanings in more ambiguous fashion and in a way that changes over time and from culture to culture. (Hand gestures, for instance, differ markedly from one country to another.) While Meg Ryan was on *As the World Turns*, her performances featured gestures that sometimes caught the camera operators by surprise. For example, in one shot she waves good-bye to a friend and does it so broadly that her arm extends beyond the frame of the image (Fig. 3.2). What meaning are we to assign to this arm movement? Perhaps we can say that this odd gesture contributes to the quirkiness of her character, but that is nowhere near as precise as Delsarte's strict code of gesture.

Corporeal Performance The stance and bearing of an actor's body communicate meaning to the viewer that, obviously, ties in with the actor's gestures. The rigidly erect posture of Bebe Neuwirth (Fig. 3.3)



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signifies the emotional stiffness of her character, the psychiatrist Lilith on *Cheers*, while Ted Danson's casual stance and fluid movement (Fig. 3.4) on the same program represent the moral laxity of Sam Malone. Neuwirth holds her body stiffly and gestures minimally; Danson leans and slouches and often gestures comfortably.

Strategies of Performance

Most of the time, we do not concern ourselves with the work that the actor used to create the performance. Indeed, the television program erases the marks of that work by emphasizing the character as a “real” human being rather than a constructed collection of character and

FIGURE 3.3**FIGURE 3.4**

performance signs. However, our understanding of performance signs is often affected by presumptions of how the actor came to create those attributes. And discussions of acting inevitably return to questions of performance strategies: principally, how did the actor create the performance? As this is also the main concern of acting schools, it seems appropriate to deal with this issue here. To best understand the different approaches to acting, it is necessary, however, to place acting strategies into a historical context—since one style often reacts against another. It also becomes necessary to stray into the related media of film and live theater to place performance history in context.

The danger in studying strategies of performance, however, is that it presumes that what is going on in the actor's mind is going to be evident in the way he or she performs. This, obviously, is a hazardous interpretive leap. An actor may be performing an emotionally charged scene and be thinking about what he or she will have for lunch that day. There is no way we can truly know an actor's mental processes. And yet, what we assume about those processes can be a key element in understanding how we interpret acting.

Fundamentally, there are two approaches to performance in fiction television: the naturalist and the antinaturalist. In naturalistic performance styles, actors struggle to create a performance that we will accept as a "plausible," "believable" character—as a human being, rather than an actor trying to look like someone he or she is not. Antinaturalist performance styles reject the notion of a believable character, but they do so for a broad variety of reasons which will be discussed in due course.

The Naturalists

There are, of course, many schools of thought regarding the production of a naturalistic performance. Limiting our scope to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries we will consider three types of naturalistic performance:

1. pantomime
2. repertory
3. Method

It must be noted at the outset, however, that these three strategies do not exist in pure form. Any performance is an impure mixture of approaches.

Pantomime Performance In pantomime, the actor assembles specific gestures that, by convention, have come to represent specific emotions or actions. The character is the sum total of the gestures selected by the actor (in conjunction with the director, of course). Such an ap-

proach emphasizes the craft of acting, the ability to effectively choose gestures. The actor does not “become” the character, but rather presents it.

The Delsarte System was the principal method for training actors to do pantomime performances. The System gathered the gestures of pantomime into a fairly rigid code of performance. According to Delsarte and other nineteenth-century acting teachers such as Edmund Shaftesbury, the actor need only collect the appropriate gestures to construct the character.⁶ This approach strongly influenced the training of U.S. theatrical performers circa 1870–95. The Delsarte System reached beyond the realm of the theater, however. It was also popular through the 1920s with nonactors who wished to become better public speakers. More important for our purposes, pantomime was also widely used in U.S. films during the silent era, especially in melodramas.

Pantomime as Delsarte conceived it does not exist much in contemporary television. There is no codebook of actor’s gestures for the 1990s. Still, there is an acting method that relies on the concept of assembling gestures (and speech dialects) and constructing a performance out of them. We may term this method repertory performance.

Repertory Performance In repertory theater, a set group of actors performs a series of different plays. One week the group might do *A Doll’s House* and the next week *Macbeth*. As a result, the actors are constantly assuming new roles. To facilitate this ongoing change of roles, a repertory-style performance sees acting as a process of selecting particular gestures and spoken dialects and constructing a performance from them, although it does not rely upon a code of gestures set out in an acting manual (as in pantomime). The work of the actor is to study human gesture and speech and borrow gestures and dialects from life in the construction of characters. The repertory actor is dispassionate in this assemblage of movements and accents. He or she doesn’t become emotional while acting, but instead uses the gestures/accents that signify emotion.

For example, when Larry Drake began the role of the mentally retarded Benny Stulwicz on *L.A. Law* (1986–) he observed mental patients to see how they moved and spoke. Armed with this information, he could signify mental retardation by reenacting the gestures and speech patterns of the mentally retarded. Some film actors—Laurence Olivier and Meryl Streep, for example—are also particularly well-known for this performance strategy.

Even though repertory acting today does not rely upon the Delsarte System, it would be inaccurate to say that repertory performances are not in a sense “coded.” True, there is no clearly delineated code such as Delsarte believed in, but repertory acting does draw upon the

rather flexible code of human gesture and dialect that operates in a society at a particular time. An actor's selection of gesture/dialect from life depends upon certain common sense presumptions about how people move and speak. Even when an actor such as Drake takes special pains to study a type of person, his perception is still filtered through assumptions of which gestures/dialects are significant and which are not. So-called body language follows certain conventions that shift over time and cultures.

Method Performance The style of performance most generally known in the U.S. is called simply "The Method." Method acting differs sharply from both pantomime and repertory. Rather than stressing the selection and assembling of gestures/dialects, Method acting encourages the actor to *become* the character, to fuse his or her personality with the role, to relive the character. Method teachers argue that once the actor becomes the role, then the gestures/dialects necessary for the performance will organically grow out of that union of actor and character. Pantomime and repertory performers are accused of mechanical acting by Method believers, because non-Method performance relies on a machinelike fitting together of techniques.

Three tactics that Method actors use to encourage the actor-character fusion are emotional memory, sense memory, and improvisation. Using emotional memory, the actor draws upon his or her memories of previous emotions that match the emotions of the character. To encourage those memories, the actor can use sense memory to remember the physical sensations of a particularly emotional event. Was it hot or cold? How did the chair he or she was sitting on feel? Thus, sense memory is used to generate emotional memory. Improvisation is mostly used during rehearsal in Method acting. The actor imagines his or her way into the "mind" of the character and then places that character into new situations, improvising new lines of dialogue based on this actor-character union.

According to Method advocates, if the actor successfully taps into deep-rooted emotions and "becomes" the character, then his or her performance will express a higher degree of "truth" because the actor is feeling what the character is feeling and behaving appropriately. For better or worse, this has become one of the principal criteria for judging acting: Does the actor appear to be fully submerged into the character? Does he or she feel what the character feels?

Judging performance in this fashion can be dangerous. It rests upon the ability to read the actor's mind during a performance—an impossible task. For this reason, the evaluation of acting based on Method acting criteria remains dubious.

Method acting initially came to the attention of the U.S. public at about the same time that television enjoyed its first growth spurt: the

late 1940s and early 1950s. At that time, director Elia Kazan brought Marlon Brando to the stage and then to the screen in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), which was followed by *On the Waterfront* (1954). Brando was the most visible of several distinctive new actors who were advocating the Method. Brando, James Dean, Montgomery Clift, Julie Harris, and others had been trained by Method teachers such as Lee Strasberg (at the Actor's Studio) and Stella Adler (Brando's principal teacher). However, the Method was being taught in the live theater long before this crop of actors made their impact on U.S. cinema. The technique originated in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century, when Constantin Stanislavski founded the Moscow Art Theater in 1897. Stanislavski disdained any acting other than that of the live theater. He barely tolerated film actors and died before television became a mass medium. Still, the impact of the Stanislavski system on television has been immeasurable.

The Method made a remarkably early incursion into television performance. The musical variety programs, Westerns, sitcoms, and soap operas—and, moreover, the bulk of 1950s television—had little to do with the Method. But 1950s television also hosted the so-called Golden Age of live television drama. Prestigious theatrical productions such as *The Miracle Worker* were imported into television to be broadcast live on programs such as *Playhouse 90* (1956–61). Inevitably, the stage-trained actors in these presentations brought with them the then fashionable Method style of performance.

In some respects, the 1950s live television dramas more closely resembled theatrical presentations than did the cinema of that time. In both theater and live multiple-camera television, each scene was played straight through, without the interruptions inevitable in the cinema's single-camera mode of production (see Chapter 7). And 1950s television drama was also shot on an indoor sound stage—equivalent to the theatrical stage—rather than the location work that was becoming popular in film at that time. In many respects, 1950s actors must have felt more comfortable in a television studio production than on a movie set. As suggested above, however, *Playhouse 90* and the like were not typical of programs on the infant medium, and Method acting was definitely the exception rather than the rule. Since that time, though, Method acting has found a home on television in dramatic programs such as *Hill Street Blues*, made-for-TV movies, and, in diluted form, many other programs.

In theory, emotional and sense memories may be used to access a broad range of emotions, both negative and positive. The history of Method performances in television and film, however, has been heavily weighted toward darker emotions, anxieties, and quirky neuroses. It is no small coincidence that the Method was popularized at roughly the same time as Freudian psychology—psychoanalysis—became part

of everyday language. Just as in Freud, the Method presumes that negative emotions are somehow more authentic than positive ones; that sorrow, depression, and doubt are more realistic than joy, elation, and self-confidence. This, however, is a dubious assumption, because positive emotions appear in reality also; they are thus no less real. Nonetheless, the Method's emphasis on emotional discord is a large part of the reason it has not been used much outside of television drama. These sorts of emotions find little expression in sitcoms and the like.

Aside from the emphasis on gloom and melancholy, Method performances historically also have been marked by a specific use of performance signs. In the 1950s, the vocal performance of Brando, Dean, Clift, et al., was often remarked upon. In comparison to contemporary acting norms, they used odd speech rhythms (offbeat, faltering); overlapped dialogue; and slurred or mumbled their lines. Their movements were similarly offbeat and quirky, when compared to the norm of the time.

Thus, Method acting was initially described as a technique that actors used to create a performance, but it has also developed its own conventions, its own code of performance. It has come to rely on the creation of negative emotions and has been marked by odd performance signs.

The Antinaturalists

Vaudeville Performance Vaudeville was a style of theatrical presentation that was built around song-and-dance numbers, comedy routines, and short dramatic skits and tableaux (the cast freezing in dramatic poses). Vaudeville was at its most popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but by the 1920s was eclipsed by the competing mass entertainment forms of radio and the movies. Even though vaudeville as a medium no longer exists, the style of performance it used survives in many television forms.

Significantly, vaudeville performance does not demand that we forget the presence of the actor within the guise of the character. That is, vaudeville performance frequently reminds us that we are watching a performance and that the characters before us are not real people. This is largely achieved through the *direct address* of the viewer. Vaudeville actors often look straight at the audience and make comments to them. This violates the theatrical concept of an invisible "fourth wall" that separates audience from characters. In conventional theatrical performances, we observe the action without being observed. In vaudeville, our presence is repeatedly acknowledged. And if we are acknowledged as viewers, then the entire illusion of the fiction is under-

mined. The naturalistic concept of the believable character becomes immaterial to the vaudevillian.

Much of early television bore the legacy of vaudeville. Musical variety programs—mixing vaudevillesque music, acrobatics, ventriloquism, and comic skits—dominated early television. *The Milton Berle Show* (1948–67), *The Ed Sullivan Show* (1948–71), and *The Jackie Gleason Show* (1952–70) are just three of the long-running variety programs that were popular during that time. In each, a host spoke directly to the viewer, introducing the short performances that constituted the weekly show. And the performances themselves were also directly presented to the viewer. Even the comic narrative pieces featured the performer looking directly at the camera (a taboo in dramatic television) and implicitly or explicitly addressing the viewer.

In the 1970s the musical variety program fell from favor with the U.S. audience, but vaudeville-style performance continues in programs such as *Saturday Night Live* (1975–) and in comic monologues such as those that begin late-night talk shows and litter the many stand-up comic programs on cable television.

Brechtian Performance German playwright and theorist Bertolt Brecht once posed rhetorically, What ought acting to be like? He then answered:

Witty. Ceremonious. Ritual. Spectator and actor ought not to approach one another but to move apart. Each ought to move away from himself. Otherwise the element of terror necessary to all recognition is lacking.⁷

Brecht's theories, as exemplified by his plays, abandon the naturalistic ideal of a believable character with whom we can identify. In his so-called epic theater (which has little to do with the traditional epic), we are alienated from the character rather than identifying with or "approaching" him or her. The actor does not relive the character as in the Method, but rather quotes the characters to the viewer, always retaining a sense of him or herself as actor, as separate from the character. In other words, the actor presents the character to the viewer without pretending to actually be the character. Viewer and actor alike are distanced from the character; hence the term Brechtian *distanciation*.

What is the purpose of this *distanciation*? Brecht argues that conventional dramatic theater narcotizes the spectator. We immerse ourselves in a story for two hours and then emerge from the theater as if waking from a drug-induced nap. Brecht felt instead that we should be confronted, alienated. His was a Marxist perspective that believed that the theater should be used to point out social ills and prompt spectators to take action about them. He advocated nothing less than a revolutionary theater.

Brechtian performance theory has found fertile soil in the cinema of filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, whose 1960s work aspired to transpose the epic theater to the cinema. But its significance to broadcast television is, admittedly, marginal. However, Brecht has influenced avant-garde video production of the past twenty years, including works done in that medium by Godard and video artists such as Nam June Paik.

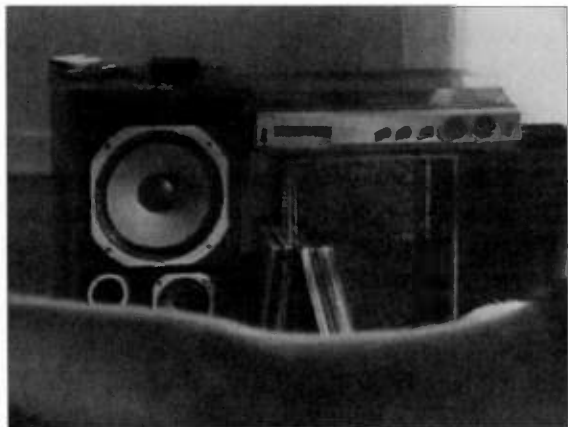
We can find small instances of Brecht skulking about the edges of commercial television, if we look hard enough. In the music video for the Replacements' *Left of the Dial*, for instance, all that is seen is a black-and-white shot of an audio speaker in a room. The video begins with a tight close-up of it (Fig. 3.5); then it starts to vibrate as the music begins. The camera pulls back to reveal a record player, a few albums, nothing spectacular. A person walks in front of the speaker and we see his arm while he smokes a cigarette, but his face is never in frame (Fig. 3.6). The video ends without the band ever appearing, as is the convention in, say, 80 percent of music videos. So, to start with, there's really no one to identify with. Beyond that, however, *Left of the Dial* breaks some of music video's other conventions by refusing to create a spectacle. Nothing really happens. We are left to amuse ourselves, to think about the video and the conventions it's breaking. There's nothing for us to identify with: no spectacle, no characters (i.e., band members). This, we would argue, could be considered Brechtian television.⁸

It is also possible to contend that the comic remarks made directly to the viewer by characters on *Moonlighting* (1985–89) and *It's Garry Shandling's Show* (1988–90) are a watered-down form of Brechtian

FIGURE 3.5



FIGURE 3.6



distanciation, although, in the final analysis, they're probably closer to the direct address of vaudeville and musical variety.

Thus, even though there is actually little Brechtian television to be found, we should be still aware that alternatives to naturalism do exist and, in film and theater, are actively investigated.

THE STAR SYSTEM?

Not everyone who appears on television is a television star. A star, as we will be using the term, is an actor or personality whose significance extends beyond the television program upon which he or she appears. If the stars' images do not range beyond their programs, then they are just actors trapped within the characters they've created—as are many soap opera actors, whose names are never known to viewers. A true star image, in contrast, circulates through the culture in a variety of media—magazines, newspapers, other television programs—and has culturally delimited meanings associated with it.

Of Texts and Intertextuality

Often it seems as if we know stars personally and intimately. We see them weekly (or daily) on our television screens, read about them in magazines, and hear them discuss themselves on talk shows. A large part of our conversation about television focuses on the personal lives of the stars. For example: "Do you think Roseanne Arnold's parents really abused her?" This illusion of intimacy is encouraged by television and other media, but it should not be confused with actual knowledge of someone's personality. We can never know a star's authentic nature because our knowledge of him or her is always filtered through the media. Magazine articles and the like often claim to present genuine knowledge about the star's inner self, but media-produced information about stars is like the layers of an onion. One article will discuss the "truth" about Loni Anderson's feelings regarding her break-up with Burt Reynolds and then, inevitably, another comes along and undercuts that particular "truth" and proposes its own "truth," which is then countered by another article with its version of Anderson's emotions. We viewers can never cut through all of the layers of the onion and have direct knowledge of the star's psyche. But, for our purposes, the "true personality" of a star is a moot point. What we are concerned with here is how a star's image is built and how it fits into television's narratives.

In this regard, it is helpful to think of a star as a "text," as a collection of signifiers that hold meaning for the viewer. Various meanings cluster around stars. Their polysemy (literally: "many meanings") is

generated by their appearance in several media texts: television programs, commercials, magazine articles, and the like. Roseanne Arnold, for example, appears in *Roseanne* each week, but she is also the subject of numerous articles in popular magazines (from *The National Enquirer* to *People Weekly* to *Time* and *Newsweek*), has starred in a feature film (*She-Devil* [1989]), has authored an autobiography, and has performed on HBO comedy specials and television programs other than *Roseanne*. Her star text, an image of how she lives and what she thinks, is constructed from the representation of her in all of these media texts. Thus, she has an intertextual presence in U.S. culture that creates a sense of her publicly available private life. Her intertextuality separates her from other actors and establishes her as a star. Indeed, for our purposes, intertextuality is the main component distinguishing a star from an everyday actor.

The different types of media texts in which stars appear may be clustered into four sometimes overlapping groups:

1. Promotion
2. Publicity
3. Television programs (and films)
4. Criticism of those programs/films⁹

By examining the stars' appearance in these media texts, we may better understand their intertextuality and how their polysemy evolves.

Promotion Promotional texts are generated by the star and his or her representatives: agents, public relations firms, studios, networks, and so on. Principal among promotional texts are press releases containing information in the star's best interests, print advertisements in television listings such as *TV Guide* (one of the highest circulation magazines in the world), promotional announcements on television (whether created by a network or a local station), and appearances on talk shows and news/informational programs (e.g., *Entertainment Tonight*). Promotional materials represent the deliberate attempt to shape our perception of a star.

The majority of promotional texts place the star in the context of his or her television character. Promotional announcements on television especially focus on the character and the program in which a star appears—sometimes excluding the star's name altogether. The strength of the star's influence determines whether star or character will be emphasized. Genie Francis, probably the biggest soap opera star of the late 1970s and 1980s, left her role of Laura on *General Hospital* and began appearing on other, competing soap operas. The new networks then promoted her character as "Genie Francis in . . .". This was extremely unusual for soap operas, and indicated just how major a star image Francis was. Prime-time programs' promotional material stresses

stars more than does daytime drama's, but the star's character always governs how the star will be presented.

Publicity We will here separate publicity from promotion, although the two are often indistinguishably intertwined. For our purposes, publicity will be used to designate information beyond the control of the star and his or her entourage: news reports about scandalous events in the star's life, unauthorized biographies, interviews in which the star is embarrassed or confronted with some unsavory aspect of his or her life, and so on.

There have been many instances in the history of celebrity where promotion posed as publicity. Indeed, the career of the very first film star, Florence Lawrence, was launched by her producer spreading a false rumor that she had been killed in a streetcar accident. He then took out an advertisement declaring, "We Nail a Lie," in which he vigorously denied the rumor.¹⁰ On a more mundane, day-to-day level, newspapers and magazines often publish verbatim the promotional press releases sent them by the networks. Thus, often what appears to be a news story (that is, "publicity") is actually the work of a star's publicist ("promotion").

The distinction between publicity and promotion is not always clear, but there are some instances when it is quite obvious. When a tabloid magazine learned that Roseanne Arnold had had a child before she was married, had put her up for adoption, and hadn't seen her in years, it published the story even before Arnold could speak directly with her daughter. The articles about this event in Arnold's publicly available private life constituted information beyond her influence. Publicity such as this raises interesting questions about the tensions and conflicts within a star's image—aspects of the star's image that contrast with the official narrative of his or her life. In the instance of Arnold's child, the publicity relates to her on-screen image as a mother. In her television program she's represented as a tough, but ultimately loving mother. In contrast, the publicity represented her as a woman who abandoned her child. The tension between these two representations of Arnold, and her bringing them together in a single person, illustrates how a star may reconcile a variety of sometimes conflicting meanings.

Television Programs As we have noted above, the characters a star plays in television programs determine much of how an actor is perceived. However, to qualify as a star within our definition, a star must first of all have an image beyond that of her or his character. Francis and Arnold are obviously stars. Their cultural currency extends beyond the texts of *General Hospital* and *Roseanne*. But an actor such as

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Renée Props—who plays Ellie on *As the World Turns*—is not, because she is not recognized outside of her role.

When a star plays a role, his or her polysemy may fit that character in a variety of ways.¹¹ Often, as in the case of typecasting, the star image perfectly fits the character. For example, Don Johnson's former abuse of alcohol and generally dissipated life, and the meanings associated with that, made for a perfect fit with his character Sonny Crockett's background of alcoholism and degradation (*Miami Vice*). Johnson's publicly available private life and Crockett's "past" greatly resembled one another. Critics of television often presume that this perfect fit is the only way that stars are used in television. However, such is not the case.

Often there is a problematic fit between a star's polysemy and the attributes of the character he or she is playing. When a character is cast against type, the star image contrasts with the character. When Farrah Fawcett, whose image centered around her physical attractiveness and implied a certain empty-headedness, was cast as the abused wife in the ambitious made-for-TV film *The Burning Bed* (1984), there was a problematic fit between her image and the character portrayed. Similarly, during the 1970s, soap opera star Susan Lucci was represented in the press as a loving, devoted mother at the same time that her character, Erica on *All My Children*, was a manipulative woman who secretly took birth control pills to prevent conception.

Perfect and problematic fits of star image to role are less common than the selective use of the star's polysemy in the character's attributes. Larry Hagman, for example, has been represented in the press as an unpredictable man with a strong interest in spirituality and Eastern religions. His character of J.R. in *Dallas* selects Hagman's unpredictability, but ignores or represses his spirituality. In this fashion, Hagman's star image is partially used in the construction of his character. This is probably the most frequent use of star image in characterization.

Criticism The final media text contributing to a star's image is the commentary on stars and their programs that appears in print and on television itself. Critics are presumed to operate independent of studios, networks, and other promotion-generating organizations. And, although many a review has been written out of a network's press kit, critics write about stars from a viewer's point of view, evaluating their image and its use in a television program. Thus, they often share in the dissemination of a star image or help to change it.

Although the start of each television season does see a host of reviews and previews of the new programs, TV criticism is not as important to television as film criticism is to the movies. Film criticism is an

institutionalized part of the promotional hoopla that leads to a film's release; it helps to create a narrative image of what the film will be like; and critics' comments are an essential part of the marketing of a film on videocassette as well. Television criticism, in contrast, is likely read or seen after the program has been broadcast. We may already have developed an opinion of the program before we read a review of it. Still, some programs (such as *Hill Street Blues* and *Twin Peaks*) have benefited greatly from critics championing their virtues.

Intertextuality and Polysemy: Roseanne Arnold

To illustrate how a polysemic star image (or text) develops through intertextuality, we will focus on Roseanne Arnold—one of the most striking and sometimes controversial television stars of the late 1980s and 1990s. Her image is particularly instructive because the connection between her publicly available private life and her on-screen character is so strong. After all, the program's main character shares Arnold's first name. And yet, there are still important divergences between Roseanne Conner and Roseanne Arnold.

Arnold's image has developed through three main sources: her stand-up comedy routine, *Roseanne* (the television program), and the scores of articles about her in the mainstream and tabloid press. Arnold began performing in clubs in Colorado in the early 1980s. Eventual success at Los Angeles's Comedy Store around 1985 led to appearances on *The Tonight Show*, at Caesar's Palace (Las Vegas), and on a Rodney Dangerfield HBO special. Her first solo television exposure was HBO's *The Roseanne Barr Show* (1987), which included narrative segments (among the stand-up comedy routines) of her as a disaffected housewife. The following year *Roseanne* premiered (October 1988) and quickly became a top-rated sitcom, as it has remained despite the controversies surrounding Arnold.

A history of the publicity surrounding Arnold would be much harder to trace, simply because there is so much of it. Early on, aspects of Arnold's publicly available private life were both reported and, occasionally, invented. Arnold's life violated many taboos, and the press was quick to pick up on all of the ways that Arnold deviated from the mainstream: her Jewish/Mormon religious training, her institutionalization in a mental hospital, the birth (while she was still single) of a daughter that she gave up for adoption, her sexually charged relationship with husband Tom Arnold and her championing of his career, her working-class roots, her problems with her own children (one of whom was treated for alcohol abuse), her charge that her parents sexually abused her, her off-key rendition of the National Anthem at a

baseball game, and the list goes on. Almost all of the publicity storm swirling around Arnold has centered on how she violates convention, does not fit in, and does not behave in a seemly manner. She is, as one critic put it, an “unruly woman.”¹² It might seem somewhat strange, therefore, that she has become such a major star.

What is the ideological function of a star? How do stars embody and cohere taken-for-granted assumptions about how the world works? We can begin to answer these questions as we examine Arnold's polysemy, the meanings that constellate around her image. It is arguable that three central themes run through Arnold's image: ordinariness, feminism, and body image (her weight).

Central to the appeal of *Roseanne* is its working-class milieu. The difference in economic status between the Conner family and that of the 1980s' premiere television family, the Huxtables (*The Cosby Show*), has frequently been commented on. Indeed, *Roseanne* breaks with a long tradition within the television domestic comedy of upper-middle-class families—as was evident in earlier sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best* (1954–63) and *The Donna Reed Show* (1958–66). Roseanne Conner's jobs as factory worker and waitress carry marks of “ordinariness.” They signify “middle America.” And Arnold's working-class origins are likewise stressed in the publicity attending her; her time spent living in a trailer while her first husband worked as a garbage truck driver and mail carrier. Thus, even though working-class characters are somewhat unusual for sitcoms (but see *Laverne and Shirley* [1976–83] and *The Honeymooners* [1955–56, 1971]), they still signify “normalcy.”

In Arnold's “feminism” we can see many of the tensions that her star image contains. On the one hand, she has been championed by feminists for humor that is critical of patriarchal assumptions about the woman's position within the home. Some of her wisecracks regarding housework include: “If the kids are still alive when my husband comes home, I've done my job” and “I will clean house when Sears comes out with a riding vacuum cleaner.” Her feminism is apparent in her anger about the treatment of women. In a *Ms.* magazine interview she said, “I think of my mother, I think of all the women in the nut-house, I think of all the women all the time. And I go, ‘Hey, I will not be insulted anymore. There is no way to beat me, because I am so pissed.’”¹³ On the other hand, there are aspects of Arnold's image that contradict feminist principles. Even though Roseanne the woman ridicules aspects of the conventional nuclear family, *Roseanne* the program relies upon an underlying belief in the validity of that family structure. The family is still the ultimate source of love and support, even amid all the sarcastic remarks.

Arnold's weight is the center of another ideological conflict. Her large size (Fig. 3.7) links her with the stereotype of the “mammy,” one



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of the greatest nurturing figures in U.S. culture. The mammy or Aunt Jemima figure is a middle-aged black woman, whose origins stem from the enslavement of African Americans. She nurtures her own children, her owner's children, and even the adult slave owners. Her large, shapeless form connotes her skill at cooking and also neutralizes her sexual attraction. The mammy is presumed to be fertile, a baby machine, but not sexually active or possessing her own desires. Rather, her desire is displaced into caring for others. Arnold is signified as a nurturer, as exceptionally fertile, but one of the most controversial aspects of her image has been her unwillingness to be sexually neutered. This is evident in Roseanne Conner's relationship with her husband, which often has sexual overtones. It is also evident in Arnold's extremely sexual relationship with Tom Arnold (before and after they were wed), which was widely reported both in the tabloid press and more mainstream magazines such as *People Weekly*. As an overweight woman with sexual appetites she disrupts many assumptions about overweight women. She also disrupts the mass-media convention that only slim people are sexually desirable or sexually active.

In sum, Arnold's polysemy is fissured with ambivalences: mother and antimother, sexually neutral and sexually active. She thus brings together conflicting meanings. This is often the function of stars within U.S. culture. They unite opposite elements within our ideology and, through their single images, manage an almost magic reconciliation of them. Roseanne Arnold is an unruly woman, a woman who has been roundly condemned as vulgar, blasphemous, antifamily and even unpatriotic. And yet, she is also the matriarch of one of the best-loved television families. Her power to unite all of these contradictions is part of what marks her as an important television star.

S U M M A R Y

Our relationship to the human figure on the television screen is a complicated and conflicted one, and we may never completely decipher its intricacies. However, it is possible to break down character, performance, and star images into their building blocks. Characters in narrative, actors acting, and star images lure us to the television set. The analyst must step back from that lure and ask how character, performance, and star image are constructed, how they function in narratives.

We have adopted a semiotic approach in this endeavor. Characters are made up of character signs—a variety of signifiers that communicates the character to the viewer. Acting is a matter of performance signs—facial, gestural, corporeal, and vocal signifiers that contribute to the development of character. And star images have been presented as texts fabricated through the media texts of promotion, publicity, television programs, and criticism. The existence of the star as a real person has been de-emphasized in favor of his or her signifying presence within U.S. culture, as is exemplified in the case of Roseanne Arnold.

F U R T H E R R E A D I N G S

The significance of characters to the television text is explained in John Fiske, "Cagney and Lacey: Reading Character Structurally and Politically," *Communication* 9 (1987): 399–426. Fiske continues and enlarges upon this discussion in *Television Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

The few substantive writings on television actors as stars have focused on female performers. Patricia Mellencamp, "Situation Comedy, Feminism and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy," in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986) applies Freudian psychology to Gracie Allen's and Lucille Ball's television performances. Denise Mann, "The Spectacularization of Everyday Life: Recycling Hollywood Stars and Fans in Early Television Variety Shows," *Camera Obscura*, no. 16 (January 1988): 49–77, explores the significance of performers like Martha Raye to television in the decade after World War II. Roseanne Arnold has been discussed in several essays, most notably Kathleen K. Rowe, "Roseanne: Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess," *Screen* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 408–19.

Discussion of women performers in music videos can be found in E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987); and Lisa A. Lewis, *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). Kaplan is most interested in Madonna as a figure who blends aspects of popular culture into a postmodern puree. Lewis examines Madonna, Pat Benatar, Cyndi Lauper, and Tina

Turner principally in terms of their fans and the relationships between the fans and the stars.

The student of television who is interested in the star phenomenon should also investigate the body of literature on cinema stars that has been developing since the late 1970s—especially since many television stars cross over into other media (e.g., Madonna, Tom Selleck, Roseanne Arnold, Tom Hanks). Some of the work done on the cinema may be transferred, with caution, to television studies. Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979), remains the best introduction to the study of stars and characters, even though it has not been updated since 1979. He has augmented that book with *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), which approaches Marilyn Monroe in terms of sexual discourses, Paul Robeson in terms of racial discourse, and Judy Garland in terms of her reception by gay viewers.

A variety of key essays on performance and star image may be found in two anthologies: Jeremy G. Butler, ed., *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991) and Christine Gledhill, *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

NOTES

- ¹ Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979), 120–32.
- ² John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema:Television:Video* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).
- ³ Dyer, 151.
- ⁴ Several authors have discussed performance signs. The terms here are Barry King's, as quoted in Andrew Higson, "Film Acting and Independent Cinema," *Screen* 27, nos. 3–4 (May–August 1986), 112.
- ⁵ Reproduced in Dyer, 157.
- ⁶ Shaftesbury wrote *The Art of Pantomime*.
- ⁷ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, edited and translated by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 26.
- ⁸ *Left of the Dial* is one of three similar music videos by the Replacements. The other two are *Bastards of Young* and *Hold My Life*, which slightly vary the basic premise. *Hold My Life* is in color and *Bastards of Young* ends with the person kicking the speaker.
- ⁹ Dyer, 68–72.
- ¹⁰ The ad that producer Carl Laemmle placed in *Motion Picture World* is reproduced in David Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (New York: Norton, 1990), 42.
- ¹¹ Dyer, 142–48.
- ¹² Kathleen K. Rowe, "Roseanne: Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess," *Screen* 31, no 4 (Winter 1990):408–19.
- ¹³ Susan Dworkin, "Roseanne Barr," *Ms.*, July–August 1987, 206.

Beyond and Beside Narrative Structure

Sometimes it seems as if everything on television tells a story. Commercials are filled with miniature narratives. Network prime-time programs are predominantly fictional—with the major exception of *60 Minutes* (1968–). And even *60 Minutes* and nightly newscasts, which purport to present “reality,” contain segments called “stories” which resemble narrative in the way they structure conflict and pose enigmas. It makes us wonder if there is anything “real” on TV, or if it is all one big fiction.

The simple response would be, no, there is nothing real on TV. The makers of television programs do not and cannot present a portion of reality (a car wreck, a football game, an earthquake) without first recasting it in the language of television and thereby modifying or “fictionalizing” it to some extent. They will necessarily present it from a certain camera angle and within a certain context of other shots. It will be accompanied by certain sound effects or music, and perhaps even narrated in a certain fashion (see Part Two for the specifics of television style). In their transition from reality to television, images and sounds are massaged, manipulated, and placed in new contexts. They are transformed into television material, cut to the measure of television.

But television’s relationship to reality—and what is meant by reality—is not this simple. Many programs would not exist if we did not believe they were presenting some form of reality. The quiz shows of the 1950s, for example, based their enormous success on the believable illusion that real contestants (i.e., ordinary people) were competing in an impartial, improvised contest, in real time, with an outcome that

was not predetermined by a scriptwriter. When it was revealed that the contests were rigged—staged to maximize dramatic impact—viewers were appalled and congressional investigations begun. Obviously, the illusion of reality was paramount to quiz shows then. It continues to be a fundamental component of the current crop of game shows, as well as news and sports programs and some commercials. Although all of these programs are fictional on some level, each is a “fiction (un)like any other”—as Bill Nichols has suggested, using a tricky bit of punctuation.¹ They may not be pure reality, as they sometimes purport, but they are still distinct from standard television fiction.

It begs the issue, therefore, to say that all television is fiction or that every program tells stories. What is crucial is an understanding of how TV constructs its illusions of reality, its representations of the real; in other words, how some of its fictions are unlike other fictions. This chapter treads that slippery slope, suggesting some of the ways that nonnarrative television (for lack of a more accurate term) represents reality. We discuss the aesthetic principles that undergird that representation, the economic choices that are made in the process, and the technological limitations to television showing reality “as it really is.” Moreover, we need to remain mindful of television’s basic structure of flow, interruption, and segmentation, and the restrictions it places upon representing the real.

To accomplish these goals, we begin this chapter with some global considerations of television, reality, and “reality television.” We then address the modes of nonnarrative television and some of its particular genres (news, sports, game shows, and nonnarrative commercials).

TELEVISION’S REALITY

Everyone has his or her own commonsensical understanding of “reality.” Most of us think of it as the world that all people exist in, where events—some caused by other events, some seemingly random—occur all the time everywhere. Reality has no inherent meaning; or perhaps its meanings are so varied that they are virtually limitless. Things just keep happening, regardless of human attention or inattention to them: a woman drives to work, moss grows on a tree, a political prisoner is killed in a jail, a cat naps, the Soviet Union disassembles, two men play checkers, a president is elected. The real is “polymorphous,” as John Fiske suggests.² It assumes many shapes and styles, and is open to many interpretations.

Most important for our study, reality does not itself suggest interpretations or emphasize one event over another. A musical crescendo did not accompany the dissolution of the Soviet Union. A spotlight did

not suddenly appear on the voting booth of the person who cast the deciding vote in the last presidential election. The meaning, the importance, the televisual and cultural significance of reality's events are determined by the makers of nonnarrative television—as well as historians, newspaper columnists, textbook writers, and other cultural workers. These persons re-present a global reality back to all of us living in one small portion of it. Since we cannot experience all of reality directly, we must rely on television, magazines, newspapers, books, and movies to re-present it to us. Thus, our knowledge of the reality beyond our own personal sphere is always filtered through the mass media. In a very substantial sense, the media determine what is real and what is not, emphasizing certain events and ignoring others.

The media process those events that they have chosen. Reality is mediated according to technological abilities (cameras cannot capture what occurs in darkness) and economic imperatives (footage of moss growing will not earn advertising dollars). Reality is also mediated according to ideological, institutionalized parameters such as journalistic codes (emphasizing timeliness and a certain form of “objectivity”). From where we sit it is often difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the actual events from their processed version. We are often unable to “separate reality from reality-as-described” because we have no direct knowledge of that reality.³ We are only exposed to its description. That is, the only alternatives to the media's description of reality are other descriptions generated by other media. For instance, most of our knowledge of the U.S. war with Iraq over the invasion of Kuwait was based on television news reports tightly controlled by the U.S. government. These reports initially presented one description of the events: a clean, honorable, practically bloodless rout of Iraqi forces by U.S. troops, aided by their technologically advanced weaponry. Alternative descriptions of a different reality eventually surfaced—reports that detailed the burying alive of Iraqi soldiers by U.S. Army bulldozers and the high percentage of U.S. soldiers who were killed or wounded by so-called friendly fire. The point is not that these later reports were more real than the early ones, but that *both* were descriptions of reality that emphasized some events and ignored others. We had to counterbalance one reality-as-described with another—as we must constantly do when watching nonfiction television. Short of traveling to Kuwait, personally examining the battlefields, interviewing Iraqi and U.S. soldiers, and perhaps shuffling through the memos of Saddam Hussein, George Bush, and their generals, we viewers will never be able to generate our own description of this war. We have no choice but to rely upon its varying representations in the media.

This chapter does not offer analytic methods that will allow the reader to glean reality (which is sometimes confused with the notion

of “truth”) from media representations of the real world. But it does articulate the structure of those representations, allowing the reader to better understand them as such rather than as reality itself.

Before we start, however, it may be helpful to adopt two of Bill Nichols's terms for discussing the reality depicted by television.

First, Nichols prefers the phrase *historical world* or *historical reality* over the term *reality*. This distinction helps him stress that nonfiction television and film are not able to represent an *unmediated* reality. Instead, nonfiction television is always signifying a processed, selected, ordered, interpreted reality. Just as historians fashion a narrative out of reality's jumble of events, so do nonfiction television texts denote a particular reading of reality. The terms *historical world* and *historical reality* do not refer solely to events of major significance, as when a sports reporter announces that the breaking of a record is a “historical event.” Rather, historical in our sense of the term refers globally to all the events that could be represented on television, to the entire narrativized world.

Second, Nichols introduces the term *social actor* into the debate on nonfiction television and film. As he explains, “This term stands for ‘individuals’ or ‘people.’ . . . I use ‘social actor’ to stress the degree to which individuals represent themselves to others; this can be construed as a performance. The term is also meant to remind us that social actors, people, retain the capacity to act within the historical arena where they perform.”⁴ When we see people in nonfiction television programs, we see them as social beings, as individuals functioning within a society of other individuals. Whether the individuals on TV are anonymous persons describing car accidents or Magic Johnson announcing his infection with the HIV virus, their appearance on television is warranted by their social significance, their significance to society. And, as Nichols implies, persons on television, or just out in public, act according to social codes of behavior to represent themselves to others. In a sense, we all perform according to certain conventions in public; we all act conventionalized social roles. When we go to a restaurant we wait to be seated; eat food in a certain prescribed order (salad, entree, dessert); and pay in response to the presentation of the bill. Each of these actions is part of a learned behavior, a role, that we perform in a particular social setting. Persons who deviate too greatly from these socially approved roles are removed from society and placed in prisons or psychiatric hospitals.

In sum, then, nonfiction television presents to the viewer the interaction of social actors in the historical world. In parallel fashion, fiction television presents the interaction of constructed characters, portrayed by professional actors, in a narrative world. It's easy to see how the two might become blurred—as was illustrated by the histori-

cal world presidency of professional actor Ronald Reagan. Moreover, television frequently encourages the confusion of social actors and professional actors, as in commercials where actors wear lab coats and imitate scientists. Despite television's common meshing of historical world and narrative world, much programming still depends upon distinguishing between the two. News and sports programs would be disdained and ignored if they lost contact with the historical world. Our goal is to better understand how that contact is depicted.

REALITY TELEVISION: FORMS AND MODES

The defining characteristic of nonfiction television is its apparent relationship to the historical world. Unfortunately, there is not much agreement among television (and film) theorists regarding this fundamental relationship. This causes much confusion, as you can imagine. For our purposes, it is best to rely upon a strategy devised by Nichols and elaborated upon by Julianne Burton.⁵ Using and modifying slightly their approach, we may distinguish nonfiction television's four principal modes of representation—the ways that it depicts historical reality and addresses itself to the viewer about that version of reality:

1. Expository (or rhetorical)
2. Interactive
3. Observational
4. Reflexive

As we consider each mode we will examine how the television text corresponds to the historical world it appears to represent. Individual nonfiction genres (news, sports, game shows, etc.) are not limited to one single mode, but instead draw upon each as needed. We will particularize some of these genres and their uses of these modes below.

Expository Mode The essential component of an expository television text is that it presents an argument about the historical world. It assertively or even aggressively selects and organizes the “facts” of that world and presents them to the viewer in a direct address. For example: A car commercial presents a shot of an automobile zipping down the highway, and the narrator announces the awards that the vehicle has won. The commercial is choosing evidence from the historical world to give credence to its argument. In this case, the evidence for the car's superiority is both visual (its image on the open road) and verbal (the narration)—and is emphasized through the conjunction of the two.

Note that even though this car commercial is manipulating material from the historical world, it is not relying upon narrative form to guide its manipulation. The logic, the guiding principle, of this commercial is rhetorical rather than narrative. There are many ways that rhetoric, arguments, may be structured. In this case, evidence (a series of images and words) is presented and then a conclusion is pro-pounded ("You should buy this car!"). In other expository texts the conclusion may come first, or a question will be rhetorically posed ("Should you buy this car?") so that the argument may answer it ("Yes, you should!"); or perhaps emotional appeals will be made rather than evidence cited. Even narrative may be put in the service of rhetoric. A commercial may tell a story to illustrate a point, for instance. But narrative is not absolutely necessary for expository texts; plenty of them argue a position without telling a story. Thus, even though this commercial is not an unvarnished, unmediated chunk of the historical world, it is still not narrative and not fiction, in the narrow sense of the words.

Note also that this commercial, as in many expository texts, addresses its argument directly to us. In effect, it is saying, "Hey *you!* Here is the proof for my argument. Now, *you* come buy this car!" This contrasts sharply with the address of narrative television, which speaks to us indirectly, obliquely. Most narrative television programs do not acknowledge the viewer (excepting shows such as *Moonlighting* and *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show* [1950–58]). Instead, the characters interact as if there were no one watching. This is a charade, of course. There are millions watching. But the point is that the characters do not speak directly to us, as they often do in expository texts. Characters in narrative TV address one another. They are sealed within their narrative worlds. Thus, we are not the direct target of the dialogue, as we are in many rhetorical texts.

There is little doubt that commercials are based on rhetoric, argument, and persuasion; but what of other nonfiction television such as network news? Nichols contends that network news also falls within the expository mode. His point is that reporters and anchorpersons make sense of the chaotic and semantically overloaded historical world. They select facts from that world and organize them into a coherent presentation. And while doing that, reporters are arguing implicitly for the validity of their specific selections and their organization; often they are even arguing explicitly for a specific interpretation of these facts. (We will discuss particular strategies for news structuring below.) The news anchor, for Nichols, is the ultimate structuring authority in the expository mode. Walter Cronkite, who anchored CBS's evening newscasts for nearly two decades (1962–81), proclaimed "And that's the way it is" at the end of each program. He

was certifying the truth value of CBS News's selection and arrangement of the material (its evidence) drawn from historical reality.

One other aspect that establishes the news as an expository text is its use of direct address. In television news, the anchors face the camera directly and present their argument to us—just as an advertisement presents its claims. Anchors also introduce us to field reporters, who then present their reports directly to us. At the beginning and end of a reporter's piece, he or she may speak to the anchor (and not to us), but the majority of the newscast is addressed directly to us. Thus, news does not use the form of address most common to TV narrative, but rather shares its mode of address with the commercial.

Interactive Mode The interactive text represents the mixing of the historical world with the realm of the video/film maker. This mingling occurs in one of two ways:

1. The social actor is brought into a television studio (e.g., talk shows, game shows); or

2. A representative of television goes out into the historical world to provoke a response from social actors (e.g., the investigative reports of *60 Minutes*).

Thus, the interaction between social actors and television may occur on television's turf or out in historical reality.

In either case, the interactive mode differs from the expository mode in terms of how it addresses the viewer. Like narrative television, the address of interactive texts is not directed toward the viewer. The social actors within the text speak with the television producers rather than to us. When Mike Wallace confronts a corrupt politician and the politician argues with Wallace, the two are addressing each other, not us. We may identify with Wallace (or with the politician, depending upon our sympathies) and thus feel that the politician's responses are indirectly aimed at us. But the politician is not speaking directly to us. He or she indirectly addresses us through our emissary, the TV reporter.

In other cases, the social actor can become our textual representative—as in game shows such as the long-running *The Price Is Right* (1956–65, 1972–), where participants are chosen from the audience. We presumably identify with the participant, who is like us a member of the historical world. Through the contestant we interact vicariously with the host, Bob Barker. Thus, when Barker addresses the participant and asks him or her to guess the price of a toaster, he is indirectly addressing us. Regardless of the side we take (social actor or television producer) in an interactive text, we are not placed in the same viewer position as in the expository text.

When a social actor enters the realm of television, he or she is a representative of “our” world, of historical reality, but it would be naive to suppose that social actors are not affected by their contact with television. Any social actor appearing on TV is subjected immediately to the medium’s rules and conventions. Contestants on game shows or “guests” appearing on interview programs (whether *The Oprah Winfrey Show* [1984–] or *Nightline* [1979–])⁶ are screened before the show; those unsuited for television’s needs (visual interest, verbal skill, suitability to a particular topic) are filtered out early. Once the cameras are on, these social actors are permitted to speak “in their own words.” However, the framing questions are Barker’s and Winfrey’s and Ted Koppel’s; the rhythm of the show is strictly controlled by the hosts; and the final edit belongs to the producer. Even more than talk shows, game shows rigidly limit improvisation by situating the social actor within a tightly structured competition.

Hypothetically, there are many ways that television people could interact with social actors. They could touch one another or write letters or gesture with their hands. But, of course, the principal form this interaction takes is speech, dialogue, conversation—in short, interviewing. And it is in the interview that we may locate the rudimentary logic of the interactive text. Where the expository text is governed by the logic of the argument and gathering evidence, the interactive text’s logic is largely shaped by how the interview is structured. Even game shows, which adhere to a logic of competition and the format of the specific game, also contain instances of interviewing between the host and the social actors—though obviously they are much less central than interviews in talk shows and the like.

We particularize two basic types of interviews. They are grounded in the degree to which the interviewer is present, visually and verbally, within the text:⁷

1. The dialogue
2. The pseudomonologue

In a dialogue, the voices of the interviewer and the interviewee are both heard, and both persons may be visible on camera—as in Barbara Walters’s interviews of celebrities. The participants exchange comments, speaking “freely” to one another. Of course, the interviewer is always in a position of relative power, since he or she determines which questions to ask and how to frame them. The interviewer, or his or her boss, also decides who shall be interviewed to begin with and thus who has the televisual clout to warrant an invitation. A television dialogue doesn’t begin unless the interviewer chooses to point the cameras in the direction of a particular social actor. Because of this unequal power relationship, the dialogue can never be truly free. It always fits within the constraints of television.

In a pseudomonologue, a similar interchange occurs between a social actor and a television representative, but it is presented differently. The interviewer and his or her questions are not evident in the text. Only the interviewee's answers are included. Thus, it makes it appear as if the social actor is speaking directly about his or her experiences or opinion, even though he or she has been prompted by the interviewer's questions. This approach is commonly used in news stories about disasters. We don't see or hear the reporters' questions about how the disaster affected the victims and witnesses, but we see and hear their responses to the questions. The reporter remains invisible and unheard, thus making it seem as if the social actor were speaking without prompting—in his or her own voice.

The pseudomonologue blurs the line between expository and interactive nonfiction. What is presented to us as a monologue of the interviewee's comments, an unmediated expression of his or her thoughts, is actually the result of an interactive dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. That is, the pseudomonologue often appears as if the social actor were speaking directly to the viewer, as in exposition; but most viewers know the pseudomonologue was originally addressed to the reporter constructing his or her story. The news reporter will tell us that the hurricane has wrought devastation. The story will then cut to a pseudomonologue of a hurricane victim describing his or her plight—seemingly to us directly. Hence, the pseudomonologue is often used as evidence in the ordering of "reality" into a comprehensible logic and the development of a television argument about the historical world. It is not surprising, therefore, that numerous commercials have used pseudomonologues as testimonials for their products' superiority.

Observational Mode Expository and interactive modes dominate nonnarrative television, but there are occasions when a television producer's presence becomes nearly invisible and where his or her manipulation of the historical world is relatively minimal. In observational mode the producer observes rather than argues about (exposition); or mixes with social actors (interaction). Of course, this is always something of a sham. The moment a camera begins to select one view, and consequently neglect another, manipulation and argument begin. And just by being in the same room with a social actor, a videographer will begin to interact with him or her, influencing behavior—even if they don't speak with each other. Still, there are nonfiction programs that invite us to suspend our distrust of television's "devious" ways. For their impact, these programs depend upon our belief in the television producer's nonintervention.

The most famous television experiment along these lines was *An American Family* (1973), a twelve-part PBS series that observed the family of Pat and Bill Loud. Cameras recorded over 300 hours of the day-to-day life of what was supposed to be a stable, average U.S. family. Direct interaction between the filmmakers and the family members was minimized. Over the course of the filming, however, the family fell apart—the parents decided to divorce, and one son announced that he was gay. Rather than organize this raw material into a treatise on the decay of the U.S. family, however, the producers presented it mostly without explicit commentary in the form of voice-overs or direct interviews with the family members. It was as close to pure observation as television ever gets.

More recently, other programs have toyed with this concept. They have been largely relegated to PBS, Fox, and cable networks. Fox's *Cops* (1989–) is presented as if we were riding the streets with patrolmen and women, observing their daily experiences. The show does include some pseudomonologues of the police officers explaining (to us) what is occurring. But the bulk of the program is videotape of them in action, interacting with lawbreakers rather than with the camera. And there is no narrator providing an overall continuity to the program. MTV is also experimenting with the observational mode in *The Real World* (1991–92), a series in which six strangers were originally housed in a New York City loft and their interaction was videotaped.⁸ The setup was contrived by MTV producers (who also contrived to send the female participants to Jamaica, where they visited a nude beach); but the videotaping was mostly done in observational mode: no narrator, few interviews (pseudomonologues), little interaction between the videographers and the “subjects.”

Furthermore, *The Real World* illustrates just how artificial the division between videographers and social actors can be. During the Jamaica segment, one producer and one of the women living in the loft crossed the line and became romantically involved. MTV handled it by removing the producer from the project—and videotaping him with the woman who was the loft member. He wasn't permitted to be both part of the television world (as a producer) and part of the historical world (as a member of the loft). One cannot observe and participate at the same time, according to the logic of the observational mode.

Reflexive Mode Certain nonnarrative programs invite the viewer to examine the techniques of television production and the conventions of nonnarrative programs themselves. These texts could be said to reflect back on their own devices. Hence, they may be called reflexive programs.

Reflexive texts differ from other modes of nonnarrative television in their relationship to the historical world and its representation. A

reflexive text does not just depict that world—making an argument about it or interacting with it or observing it, as most nonnarrative TV does. Rather, it draws our attention to the process of depiction itself, shifting the focus away from historical reality proper to the text-reality relationship. In Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), for example, some facts are presented about the murder conviction of Randall Adams, a social actor in the historical world. But the essence of the program is the different narratives surrounding the murder, which Morris presents to us in ambiguous, stylized recreations. Morris does not advocate a single truth as much as he critiques the idea of finding truth, and implicitly breaks down the mechanisms that are used to tell stories about historical reality. It is a film both about truth and about the tendency of TV to represent reality by transforming it into narrative.

Not surprisingly, *The Thin Blue Line*, which was shown on PBS after an initial theatrical run, belongs to a rare breed of documentary television. Not many programs are willing to call into question their basic assumptions, as *The Thin Blue Line* does. To do so often raises doubt about a program's truthfulness, which is dangerous to any documentary. So the reflexive mode remains on the edges of documentary television, the result of somewhat avant-garde experimentations with the medium.

Reflexivity is less menacing to the foundations of commercials and nonnarrative comedy programs, where it reveals itself in *parody* and *pastiche*. *Late Show with David Letterman* (1993–), for example, reflects back on the conventions and devices of talk shows for much of its humor. In typical reflexive fashion, it is both a talk show and a parody of one. The targets of Letterman's parodies extend from talk shows to the whole of television. The *Late Show's* debut featured old shots of Ed Sullivan (whose variety show broadcast from the same studio decades earlier) cut together so that it appeared he was introducing Letterman. Later in the same episode, a clip of Sullivan was also used in a comic bit with Paul Newman. A large part of the humor in these bits derived from their implicit reference to televisual figures, devices, and conventions. The same sort of reflexivity operates in other nonnarrative television comedy—such as the “Wayne's World” skit from *Saturday Night Live* (and subsequent film [1992]), which is obviously a parody of low-budget, public-access cable television programs.

Television comedy's self-parody and reflexivity are parts of a long-standing tradition, one which is essential to television's evolution. As a television device or convention ages, it is ridiculed through parody, and then replaced with a modification of it. Thus, while reflexivity is relatively rare in nonnarrative documentary works and can endanger

basic assumptions about truth and historical reality, it is quite common in nonnarrative comedy—refreshing the form and rejuvenating stale conventions.

REALITY TELEVISION: GENRES

These nonnarrative modes—expository, interactive, observational, reflexive—find expression in a broad variety of television programs. We may make some sense out of the chaos of nonnarrative programs by categorizing them into specific genres. Much as we might categorize narrative programs into such genres as the soap opera and the sitcom, so we will specify four types of nonnarrative material:

1. Newscasts
2. Sports programs
3. Game shows
4. Nonnarrative commercials

This is not a comprehensive list. There are other nonnarrative genres (e.g., talk shows and science programs such as *Nova* [1973–]), but these four will serve to illustrate the diversity among nonnarrative television.

The categories above are echoed by economically based divisions within the TV industry and its ancillaries. Completely separate staffs at the networks and the syndication studios are assigned to handle news, sports, and “entertainment” (as if news and sports weren’t entertaining). And the production of commercials is, of course, an industry unto its own. Beyond the industry’s view of itself, however, the viewer/critic can make important distinctions among these genres, based on the nonnarrative texts themselves and their relationship to the viewer.

Network and Local Newscasts

The newscasts produced on the ABC, CBS, and NBC networks and on local stations all share a common assumption about historical reality: An event is not significant, is not newsworthy, unless it disrupts the ordinary, day-to-day functioning of life on earth. Presumptions of newsworthiness immediately channel TV news away from the common incidents in reality and direct it toward the odd, the unusual, and the unsettling. Once an incident ceases to disrupt the norm, it stops being “news” and disappears from the television screen. We are not likely to see a newscast begin, “Gravity: It’s still holding things down!”

Typically, network news producers select the following types of events from the enormous miscellany of the historical world:

- Catastrophes: natural and otherwise
- International relations: political and armed conflicts
- National politics: legal and judicial activities, election campaigns, politicians' other enterprises
- Law and order: crime and the activities of criminals
- Economics: financial trends
- Celebrities: marriages, scandals, deaths

Local newscasts deal with many of the same subjects but on a smaller scale. The catastrophes are car accidents and house fires rather than earthquakes, and the politicians are governors and mayors rather than presidents, but the approach is modeled on the national newscasts. Local newscasts also incorporate sports and weather information.

Newscasts largely use an expository mode to present information collected from the historical world. That is, evidence is displayed to support a reporter's particular interpretation of events. Inevitably, this evidence is arranged, ordered, into some form of conflict: country versus country, individual versus institution, Democrat versus Republican, police versus serial killer. The point is that the basic logic of most news stories is an argument; that argument explains the historical world as a series of conflicts.

Further, most news stories find a way to reduce the conflict to the impact upon or the opinions of particular individuals—regardless of how abstract and general the topic may be. Complicated economic developments are illustrated by the inability of a specific person to find work. Airplane crashes are related in the words of the individual survivor—or dramatized in the fate of the specific victim.

Despite the development of cable news channels during the 1980s, the format of U.S. network and local newscasts has not changed much in the past ten or twelve years. At the center of this format is the news anchor (or anchors; many local newscasts use two now). The anchor serves several purposes. Principally, he or she maintains the television flow, introducing news segments (prepared by reporters) as well as weather and sports components, and guiding the viewer into commercial breaks with teasers (brief announcements of upcoming stories). Because the anchor frames every element of the newscast (setting them up beforehand and often commenting afterwards) he or she is also represented as authorizing the views of the historical world that the reporters and meteorologists deliver. This is regardless of whether the stories were actually chosen by the newscast's producers or someone other than the anchor. As the newscast's authority figure, the anchor offers to make ideological sense out of the day's random events, as Cronkite's "And that's the way it is" suggests. He or she serves as the central spokesperson for the newscast's exposition. Reporters out in

the field create expository stories about the historical world, and the anchor stamps them with his or her approval.

Television newscasts differ in form depending upon when they are telecast during the day, where they fit into television's flow. Morning newscasts emphasize the weather and the time of day; late-night newscasts summarize the day's events. The preeminent network newscast is broadcast in the evening at 5:30 or 6:30, depending upon the viewer's time zone. Local news usually follows, and often precedes, this newscast. These network and local newscasts share the basic organizing principle of an anchor providing continuity to a program, but their form differs in its structure because the local newscast is designed to complement the national newscast, to fill in regional information not pertaining to national interests. It's as if the network and local evening newscasts must be taken together to provide the "total" picture of the historical world. We may make some generalizations about how each evening newscast organizes the material it presents.

In day-to-day news production, it is the producer, not the anchor, who establishes the structure of a newscast by setting the order of the stories. (Some anchors, such as Dan Rather, also hold the title of executive producer.) This order is determined by journalistic principles, aesthetic factors, and economic determinants. The basic journalistic guidelines, which television shares with print journalism, are:

- Timeliness (How recently did the event occur?)
- Prominence (How famous are the participants?)
- Proximity (Did it occur close to the viewers?)
- Pertinence (Will it affect viewers' lives?)⁹

Other factors that also influence TV news priorities include:

- Visual impact (Are there strong, affective video images available?)
- Cost (E.g., was a video truck rented to do a live, remote broadcast?)
- Promotional value (Does the story boost the station's/network's prestige? E.g., is it an exclusive interview that illustrates the superior newsgathering ability of the station or network?)

If all of these factors are equal, network news programs tend to move from the general to the specific, from the international to the national to the regional—including editorial material toward the end of the newscast.

Also, network news tends to begin with hard news and move toward soft news at program's end. Although these terms are not very well defined, hard news is generally thought of as stories addressing the *social*—examining events that affect U.S. society as a whole (e.g., national and international relations). Soft news deals with the *personal*—gossip, scandal, murder, mayhem, and so-called human interest stories (which is something of a misnomer since all news stories interest some humans). Hard news, it is presumed, appeals to viewers'

intellect; soft news attracts the emotions. Soft news also includes weather and sports.

Significantly, soft news often does not fit the journalistic criteria of timeliness, prominence, proximity, or pertinence that is applied to “real,” hard news. A soft news story about a gourd the shape of Bruce Springsteen’s head, for instance, is neither timely, prominent (it doesn’t involve Springsteen directly), nearby, or pertinent to most viewers. Because soft news lacks these qualities, it often is placed at the newscast’s conclusion. It serves as filler and may be cut if other stories run long.

Television inherited this hard/soft notion from the print media, where we find hard news on the front page of *The New York Times* and (extremely) soft news in *The National Enquirer*. Hard news is the better respected of the two, which is indicative of journalism’s trivialization and neglect of the personal. There may also be some sexism lurking in this distinction, as women’s issues often exist within the realm of the personal.

The mixture of material in local newscasts and its categorization are different from the national newscasts. On a local level, the newscast is categorized into segments of news, sports, and weather. This division is somewhat artificial, however, for all three segments are, in a sense, “news.” Each represents aspects from the historical world to the viewer. Thus, “sports” is more accurately “news about sports events”; and “weather” is “news about weather events.” This arbitrary categorization of the news is not limited to television, of course. It can be traced back through radio to the newspaper (e.g., its separate sports section). Though it is not unique to television, it is particularly well suited to television’s need for segmentation.

Typically, a local newscast is segmented—interrupted—by four or five commercial breaks. The division of news into news, sports, and weather helps to justify those breaks. It provides a rationale for suspending the program flow at a particular point to begin the flow of commercials. And, since weather and sports are two popular elements of the newscast, their position late in the program may be used to “tease” us into continued viewing.

In many local newscasts, the structure of flow and interruption results in the following segmentation:

- News block
- Commercial break
- News block
- Commercial break
- Weather
- Commercial break
- Sports
- Commercial break
- News block

TABLE 4.1

*Understanding
Television's
Structures and
Systems*

A Local Newscast

6:00 P.M., Friday, September 4, 1992, WVTV
(NBC affiliate, Birmingham, Alabama)

LEN.*	CATEGORY	DETAILS
15	Opening	
120	News	Car accident (cheerleaders on a bus)
30	News	Murder suspect arrested
60	News	Wells Fargo truck attacked
90	News	Vice-presidential candidate Al Gore campaigns locally
10	News	President George Bush's son, Jeb Bush, campaigns locally
15	Teaser	
30	Commercial	Marks Fitzgerald furniture
30	Commercial	Starving Artist painting sale
10	Commercial	Mazer's department store
90	News	Background story on child abuse film
60	News	Complaint against a hospital
120	News	Sewage problem, environmental issue
15	Teaser	
30	Promo	
30	Commercial	Nissan
10	Promo	
30	Commercial	Food World
30	Commercial	Milk
10	Promo	
165	Weather	
15	Teaser	
30	Commercial	Marks Fitzgerald furniture
30	Commercial	Winn Dixie grocery stores
10	Promo	
30	Commercial	Alabama Power
30	Commercial	Edwards Chevrolet
230	Sports	
30	Commercial	Marshall Durbin chicken
10	Commercial	Midas muffler
30	Commercial	Delchamps grocery
10	Promo	
30	Commercial	Shoe City
30	Commercial	ServiStar hardware
50	News	Accident, child abuse updates
80	Closing	Credit over high school football footage

*Length in seconds.

This structure is typical of many local newscasts: news first, then weather and sports, followed by a final news update (or soft news feature)—all interspersed with commercials. We may see these elements in Table 4.1, an outline of an NBC affiliate's newscast (WVTM, channel 13 in Birmingham, Alabama) on a typical fall day. Also included in this table are other newscast components: the opening and closing, station promotional announcements ("promos"), and teasers.

Though we have labeled the commercials as interruptions, we could just as easily look at newscasts as a flow of commercials that are interrupted by news blocks. For, in many local newscasts, commercials and promos (which are just commercials for the station itself) occupy nearly as much time as the news proper. In the newscast in Table 4.1, 9 minutes and 35 seconds were devoted to credits and commercial and promotion time in this half-hour newscast. In comparison, just slightly more time (10 minutes, 30 seconds) was allocated to news—although about 17 minutes were spent on news, sports, and weather combined. (Table 4.2 ranks the time spent on each component of that newscast.) Thus, communicating information about the historical world—the presumable purpose of newscasts—is barely given more time than the advertising of that world's products.

From one perspective, the difference between the news and the commercial is blurry, more so than the difference between the narrative program and the commercial. Recall that both news report and commercial, in Nichols's terms, are expository forms. Both present evidence to the viewer that is designed to support an argument about the historical world. In this regard, then, commercials could be considered "news" about products and services. Television journalists would dispute this interpretation, asserting that anchors and reporters are not trying to sell the viewer anything. It could be argued, however, that to survive, a newscast must market its interpretation of the historical

TABLE 4.2*Local Newscast Timings*

COMPONENT	DURATION		PERCENTAGE
	MIN.	HR: MIN.	
News Stories	630	10:30	38.3%
Commercials	410	6:50	24.9
Sports	230	3:50	14.0
Weather	165	2:45	10.0
Opening/Closing	95	1:35	5.8
Promos	70	1:10	4.3
News Teasers	45	0:45	2.7
Totals	1645	27:25	100.0

world as accurate and true. A newscast's vision of the world is sold directly through its promotional spots ("Thirteen News: Alabama's news, from people who *care*.") and indirectly through the arguments about the world that it expresses in its news reports. In this regard, television news differs from fiction programming, whose structure is narrative rather than expository, and thus does not share this kinship with commercials.

Sports Programs

Sports events differ from the events shown on newscasts that we have discussed so far, even though both originate in the historical world. Sports activities, particularly those at the professional and college levels, are commodities designed for spectators—even before television enters the equation. People who "witness" a professional football game in person, for instance, have purchased that privilege. They are seated in a stadium designed for spectator comfort and the optimum display of the playing field. The game is organized according to rules that maximize its entertainment value for the spectator. Spectator sports such as U.S. professional football do not occur randomly, for free, in uncomfortable, inconvenient locations, with unsuspecting, disorganized participants—as do most other historical world events (earthquakes, traffic accidents, wars, etc.) that are deemed newsworthy.

Sports programs, thus, are presenting to the viewer a commercial event, a spectacle really, that has already been contrived to please spectators and marketed to attract an audience. This has obvious economic implications for television sports, but it also affects the form of the programs in less obvious ways.

First, economically speaking, the right to broadcast sports events must be purchased from sports leagues and team owners, unlike the right to broadcast the sort of historical world events we have been discussing. These rights do not come cheap. The National Football League recently signed a four-year, \$2.74-billion deal with ABC, CBS, and NBC. These expensive contracts mean, plainly enough, that networks and individual stations have a vested interest in promoting—in emphasizing the importance and entertainment value of—the sports events they've purchased. Moreover, some stations have more than just a passing financial interest in professional sports because many media corporations wholly own sports teams. The Atlanta Braves, for example, is owned by Ted Turner, who also owns WTBS (a "superstation" carried on cable systems throughout the United States); CNN; TNT (another cable station); and other media properties. WTBS, of course, carries all the Braves games.

As you might expect in such a financial climate, journalistic notions of objectivity become a little twisted. Network coverage of sports tries to maintain a distance between the commentators and the teams, but the former still need to emphasize the significance of the event and try to maintain our interest during the game. Local coverage need not even preserve that level of objectivity. Often the commentators will be employed by the team itself—common practice in professional baseball since radio days. These announcers do not just offer expert commentary; they also boost fan support for the sponsored team. When a commentator such as the Chicago Cubs's Harry Caray exclaims "Holy cow!" at a Cubs home run, he is supporting the team that pays his salary. It's hard to imagine Dan Rather making a similar remark at a news story.

Television producers and announcers have come to rely upon the ratings success of sports events; and professional and college sports associations have come to depend upon television money to survive as they are presently organized. TV and sports have thus become mutually dependent and have fashioned various financial liaisons. They have formed into what Sut Jhally calls a sports/media complex.¹⁰ His point is that spectator sports and the electronic media, especially television, have become so enmeshed that it's becoming impossible to separate the two. Only a small percentage of the viewers of professional football and baseball, for example, actually see games in arenas or stadiums. For the vast majority of sports fans, pro sports are always experienced through television. This has resulted in certain aesthetic adjustments to spectator sports.

The aesthetic structure of television sports is best seen as the blending of television form with the preexisting form of the particular sport. Most sports on television existed long before TV was invented and had already evolved rules to govern a game's fundamentals:

- Time (e.g., four 15-minute quarters in football);
- Space (e.g., the layout of a baseball diamond and players' movements around it); and
- Scoring/competition (i.e., how one wins).

These rules/structures presumed, of course, that the sport would be viewed in an arena or stadium.

When television began broadcasting sports events it soon adapted itself to shooting games in their natural settings. Multiple-camera shooting styles—using powerful telephoto lenses—quickly developed to "capture" a sport's essential action. But this adaptation process was not one-sided. If a sport was to successfully attract a large television audience, it too had to adapt. As a result, all of the major television sports in the United States, especially football, baseball, and basketball, have adjusted their rules to accommodate television's form. In particu-

lar, these sports have found ways to adjust to the medium's organization of time and space (its visual demands).

Let's take professional football as an example. During the 1970s, pro football turned into a major force on U.S. television. As of January 1991, the NFL Super Bowl programs accounted for five of the ten highest-rated programs in the entire history of the medium. The immense popularity of pro football on television is obviously due to many different factors, but what concerns us here is how football and television accommodate each other structurally.

The Organization of Time The rhythms of football are inherently well suited to televisual flow and interruption. The lull after each play while the teams huddle provides the opportunity for television to insert itself, "interrupt" the game, and present slow-motion "instant replays," accompanied by commentary. Football's many time-outs provide convenient stoppages in action for television to cut to commercials. These time-outs were not frequent or long enough for television's needs, however, and the NFL has accommodated TV by adding "television time-outs." Charged to neither team, they may be called by officials during the first and third quarters if there has been nine minutes of play without interruption.¹¹ In addition, all time-outs have been lengthened to ensure enough time for commercials. Other sports, such as soccer, suffer because their constant play minimizes the opportunity for replays and commercial breaks.

There are other ways that football time has been manipulated to serve the needs of television. The starting time of games depends nowadays on where they will fit into the television schedule. The most radical shifting of game time was when games were moved from the weekend to Monday evening solely for the benefit of ABC's prime-time schedule (with *NFL Monday Night Football* [1970-]). The introduction of sudden-death overtime to the NFL (1974) was also a concession to television time, providing a quicker ending to drawn-out games (cf. the tiebreaker in professional tennis). Time is a commodity on television; it's what is sold to advertisers. A sport must adjust to the restrictions of television time if it is to flourish on the medium.

This manipulation of time is modulated by the announcers. Most television sports use two types of announcers: color and play-by-play.

Color announcers such as John Madden and Terry Bradshaw are often former athletes and/or coaches, with firsthand expertise. Their analysis serves both expository and narrative functions.

First, in the expository mode, they are arguing for a specific interpretation of the action. A basketball team, it might be suggested, is losing a game because its passing has broken down. Announcers back up their arguments with evidence for their specific interpretation: replays, statistics, electronic "chalkboards" that allow them to draw Xs and Os

right on images of the players. Statistics are an interesting aspect of sports in this regard. They legitimize a particular event as part of the history of sport by comparing or contrasting a current game with games past, and they provide seemingly objective evidence of the game's significance, or lack thereof. Every year there seem to be more and more types of statistics to absorb. They can be commonplace, e.g., football's rushing yardage; or more and more specialized, e.g., the number of baseball games in a row that a batter has gotten a hit in after the regular season has ended.

Color announcers add quasinarative elements to a game, helping to convert athletes—social actors—into characters that television can better utilize. Announcers dispense details about the athletes that serve to “characterize” them, to turn them into recognizable sports character types; stereotypes, really. For example, baseball's Nolan Ryan (a record-setter for longevity) was characterized as the crafty, battle-scarred veteran at the end of his career. His experience was counterposed against more agile but inexperienced rookies—another familiar character type. Sometimes it seems as if each sport on television has only six or seven character types into which each athlete is fit. The game thus becomes, in one sense, a narrative of stock characters constructed by, among other things, the comments of the color announcer.

Play-by-play announcers function similarly to news anchors. They serve as the program's apparent authority figure and guiding force—even though a producer or director back in the satellite truck is really in control. Play-by-play announcers narrate the events of the game, prompt the comments of the color announcers, and reiterate (over and over and over) the score and the play-by-play passage of time. Compared to color announcers, play-by-play announcers are slightly distanced from the athletes. Color announcers were athletes and as such possess special experiential knowledge, born of their locker room camaraderie. They are in essence part of the sport or game that is being covered (often their past exploits will be referred to). In contrast, the play-by-play announcer is seldom a former player or coach. Instead, he or she is usually a professional broadcaster such as Chris Berman, Marv Albert, or Brent Musberger. Since they are not actually part of the athletes' world, they may operate as an intermediary between that world and ours. Like the news anchor, they place historical reality into context for the viewer and regulate reality's flow so that it matches the flow of television.

The Organization of Space The space of any sport is strictly delineated on its playing field or court. In sports such as football, basketball, and hockey, this space is premised on notions of territory, where one team invades the other's turf and attains a goal of some sort. Tele-

vision has had to find ways to represent this territorial dispute clearly and dynamically. To facilitate this, stadiums and arenas that have been built since the advent of television have made provisions for television cameras and announcers: special camera platforms at particular vantage points, announcers' booths, and the like.

The playing field or court itself is not often changed for television presentation.¹² But there have been television-provoked rule changes that affect the players' appearance and their movement around these fields or courts. Names on football uniforms, a recent addition to the NFL, do not make much impact on viewers in the stands. But they are significant in television coverage—making it easier for announcers to identify individual athletes as part of the process of turning them into character types. The NBA's rules permitting three-point shots and outlawing so-called zone defenses (which forces teams to play man-to-man) alter the way that the space of basketball is utilized. Man-to-man defense speeds the pace of the game (as does the 24-second clock)¹³ and highlights the confrontations between individual players, making it easier for TV to transform the game's team conflict into a conflict between individuals: e.g., Charles Barkley versus Michael Jordan. Viewing from a distance in arenas and stadiums emphasizes team play, downplaying the importance of the individual. Television coverage, in contrast, reduces sports to the conflict among individuals.¹⁴

Those individuals highlighted by television are not necessarily the ones who are athletically superior. As Jimmie Reeves has noted, "... personality, character, and color are as interesting to [television] audiences and as crucial to media stardom as run-of-the-mill competitive superiority."¹⁵ Television needs distinctive individuals, not just athletically capable ones. In the 1992 Olympics, for example, U.S. volleyball player Bob Samuelson became a major television figure not so much because of his athletic ability, but because he had overcome a childhood illness (which left him bald) and because of his feisty arguments with officials. When one such argument cost the team a game, every member of the U.S. volleyball squad shaved their heads in a show of support for Samuelson's actions. This group shearing brought the team even more television attention, and their distinctive appearance became as significant as their playing ability.

The Organization of the Scoring/Competition In football's sudden-death overtime and tennis's tiebreaker we can see instances in which the structure of a sport's scoring has been modified to suit television's structure. In more general terms, a sport's scoring, the structure of its competition, suits television best when it echoes the conflicts of narrative (individual protagonist vs. individual antagonist) and poses enigmas as television narratives do. The most important sports enigma is, naturally, Who will win? If a game becomes so lopsided that

this question disappears, then the game runs the risk of television death—either from our switching channels or the network turning to another concurrent game. (During the Sundays when several NFL football programs are broadcast simultaneously to different regions, NBC and CBS will often shift from game to game if the outcome of one becomes obvious.) Sports programs must maintain that quasi-narrative enigma if they are to succeed on television.

The conclusion of each game determines the winner for that day. But, like the soap opera, the closure is incomplete. Most professional sports on U.S. television are predicated on a season that leads to a championship: e.g., the Super Bowl, the World Series, or the NBA finals.¹⁶ The weekly games resolve the question of athletic superiority for a particular day, but they leave open the larger question of who will triumph over the course of the season. This season-long conflict is a significant part of what draws us back each week. It also contributes to the high ratings that championships such as the Super Bowl earn as they bring to a climax months of conflict. (The lack of a definite season and a final championship may contribute to the comparatively modest draw of sports such as tennis.) Thus TV sports shares a fundamental structural principle with other TV series: Each individual program offers a small amount of closure within the ongoing TV schedule. Full closure would mean the death of the series. Sports championships provide that closure, and effectively kill off the sport for that specific year—only to be regenerated the following year.

Game Shows

Game shows, like sports programs, are based on competition, on winning a contest. But from there they mostly part ways. College and professional sports, though heavily dependent upon TV money, do still have an existence outside of television. They preserve a presence in historical reality. Game shows do not. Furthermore, most televised sports existed before television came into being, and thus evolved their structure before being telecast. Television has had to adapt to their structure more than they have had to adapt to TV. Game shows, even though they draw on previous gaming traditions, do not possess this pretelevision history.¹⁷ *Wheel of Fortune* did not exist before it appeared on TV. It was designed for television and could not survive without it.

In sum, the game show does not re-present a preexisting historical reality to us. It does not originate in the historical world. Rather, it originates in television. It constructs a television reality and brings social actors, representatives from the historical world, into it. The television world clearly interacts with the historical one here, rather than constructing an argument about it (as in the expository mode) or observing it from a distance. The announcer on *The Price Is Right* urges

contestants to “Come on down!” And as they do, they travel from the historical world of the audience/viewers to the television world of the stage. Once on stage, their movement and speech are shaped by the rules of the game, which of course are administered by Bob Barker, a typical game show host. It is indicative of the game show’s control over social actors that they must come to a television sound stage, the space of a television reality, rather than television going into historical reality to interact with social actors.

The host is comparable in function to the news anchor and the sports play-by-play announcer. All three are authorized by TV to place some order on the chaos of historical reality. In this regard, the host is a much more powerful figure than either the anchor or the sports announcer. For the host can totally and directly control the behavior of social actors (stand here, answer this question, leave the stage), while anchors and sports announcers can only interpret and partially shape (through interviewing techniques, editing, etc.) that behavior in the historical world. The host, moreover, knows *all* of the answers to the questions he poses—whether it’s the price of a toaster oven or the fourteenth president of the United States.¹⁸ Even the most skillful news interviewer is not as all-knowing.

To use an odd-sounding adjective, it may be said that game shows are very televisual. Though they bring together components from reality with those of television, it is clear which is the dominant force.

Game shows borrow elements from other aspects of television to create their basic structure. As in television fiction, game shows rely upon a narrative-like enigma to provide the engine that drives the show forward. “Who will win this game?” is the central question, which obviously links game shows with sports programs. Even though the game show is something of a hybrid genre, drawing on narrative and sports conventions, it is important to seek the ways that it is unique, to distinguish its form from other television programs. This should become evident as we consider its address, textual organization (of time and space), and competition.

Semidirect Address There are parts of any game show where the host speaks and looks directly at us. Like a news anchor or sports play-by-play announcer, the game show host welcomes us at the start of the show, guides us in and out of commercial breaks, and bids us farewell at the end. The address of the game show becomes more complicated than that of the news program, however. During most of the game show, the host does not speak directly to us, but instead addresses directly the contestants—as when Alex Trebek poses an “answer” to contestants on *Jeopardy!* (1964–75, 1978–79, 1984–). At this point, the game show’s address resembles that of narrative, where we are gener-

ally unacknowledged, rather than news or sports. In game shows, host and contestants speak to one another without noticing us; in narrative programs, characters do the same thing. But contestants and narrative characters do not bear the same relationship to the viewer. Game show contestants are drawn from the ranks of the viewership. They are social actors. Characters are not.

This crucial distinction changes the address of the game show. In a somewhat schizophrenic manner, we are invited to see ourselves *as contestants*, but at the same time we are also invited to *compete with the contestant*. Most programs present the questions to the contestants and the television viewer in a fashion that encourages us to play the game at the same level as the contestant. Generally, the answers are not revealed to us ahead of time (excepting games such as *The \$10,000 Pyramid* [1975–1989, 1991–]).¹⁹ Viewers and contestants must compete at the same level of knowledge. So, while the contestant is positioned as an identification figure for the viewer, he or she is also presented as our antagonist, a competitor for prizes. In a sense, then, the host's questions are addressed toward us as much as toward the contestants. The address of game shows is thus direct (the host's greeting of the viewer), indirect (the host's conversation with the contestants), and a blurry mixture of the two (the host's posing questions to the contestants to which we may also respond).

The Organization of Time and Space Unlike sports and news, which must adapt historical world time and space to the demands of television, game shows create their own from scratch. Game shows are specially designed to suit television's structures of time and space.

Game shows manage the flow and interruption of television time by dividing the contest into increasingly intense segments. On *Jeopardy!*, for instance, the competition is split roughly into regular jeopardy, double jeopardy, and final jeopardy. Each segment is separated by commercial breaks. The competition escalates until the final moment, when the outcome is decided. Time is strictly regimented. Game shows, unlike sports programs, never run overtime.

Competition The main thing separating game shows from sports programs is the form of their competition. In sports it takes the form of physical prowess; in game shows it is different types of knowledge. Certainly, professional sports require a knowledge of the game and the ability to implement successful strategies, but these qualities would mean little if the players were not athletically superior. Game shows involve little physical ability. Instead, they rely upon their contestants' knowledge of the world and human nature.

According to John Fiske, the knowledge tested in game shows may be grouped by type:²⁰

- Factual knowledge
 - “Academic” knowledge
 - Mastermind*
 - The \$64,000 Question*
 - Sale of the Century*
 - Jeopardy!*
 - “Everyday” knowledge
 - The Price Is Right*
 - Wheel of Fortune*
- Human knowledge
 - Knowledge of people in general
 - Family Feud*
 - Play Your Cards Right*
 - Knowledge of specific individual
 - The Newlywed Game*
 - Mr. and Mrs.*
 - Perfect Match*

As Fiske proposes with his “factual knowledge” category, the type of knowledge that is most prized on game shows is a warehousing of facts, of individual bits of information. Even “intelligent” game shows such as *Jeopardy!* and *The \$64,000 Question* do not require contestants to synthesize, analyze, interpret or otherwise *process* information. What is required instead is a lightning-fast retrieval of data. These data may be obscure “academic” information taught in school, such as this *Jeopardy!* answer: “The first of these Roman waterways was the Aqua Appia, built about 312 B.C. by Appius Claudius.” (The question was, “What is an aqueduct?”) Or they may be more common, everyday data learned through interaction with other humans in social situations. Familiar phrases (as on *Wheel of Fortune*) and the prices of household appliances (as on *The Price Is Right*) are part of our everyday knowledge about the world.

Fiske’s “human knowledge” category pertains to less clear areas of human behavior. As Fiske comments, “This is a knowledge that resides in the human or social rather than in the factual. It has no absolute right and wrong answers and thus cannot be possessed or guarded by an elite [as teachers guard academic knowledge]. It depends instead upon the ability to understand or ‘see into’ people, either in general or as specific individuals.”²¹ In *Family Feud* (1977–85, 1988–), for example, contestants (grouped by families) answer questions hoping to match their responses with those of a surveyed audience. The family that best approximates the survey results—in other words, the contestants with the greatest knowledge of the average, the norm—are the winners. Other programs in the human knowledge category include

ones that demand detailed knowledge of one person: a spouse or a lover or even just a date. On *The Newlywed Game* (1966–74, 1977–80, 1984–90), husbands and wives compete through their knowledge of each other. In *Studs* (1991–) and other programs related to dating and romance, the contestants display their knowledge of each other's emotional-sexual experiences.

The competition on many game shows is not entirely based on knowledge. Much of the contestant's success in programs such as *Wheel of Fortune* depends upon luck or good fortune—the spin of the wheel. The element of chance is foregrounded in game shows. It serves to further complicate the show's progression. Each spin of the wheel raises new enigmas. Chance also serves as a leveling agent. Every contestant is equal when he or she grabs onto the wheel. Consequently, the most knowledgeable contestant is not necessarily the one who will march straight to victory. Basically, devices that bring chance into the game show function to delay the game's outcome and to keep it from becoming too obvious. As in sports and narrative programs, the conclusion must be kept in doubt as long as possible. Otherwise, the program ends prematurely.

In summary, the game show is a nonnarrative program supremely suited to the demands of television. Its rhythms are televisual rhythms. Its space is televisual space. And its form of address is uniquely designed to captivate the television viewer. It is a genre that interacts with the historical world, but does so on its own terms.

Nonnarrative Commercials

Although a large number of commercials use short, compact stories to sell a product, an equally large number bypass narrative altogether and present evidence of a product's value to the viewer.²² These nonnarrative commercials use direct address and the expository mode to sell products. They argue for a product's superiority, for a specific view of an object in historical reality. They aim that argument at the viewer without apology: "This toothpaste is good. Use it and use it now!" Unlike newscasts, which must maintain a patina of objectivity toward the historical world, commercials take an active position regarding an aspect of that world. As such, they are the peak of the expository mode.

However, there are still some similarities between commercials and news programs. Newscasts select a portion of historical reality and present information about it through a certain form. Television commercials operate in a comparable fashion. They select that portion of historical reality that has been commodified—turned into a commodity—and present information about it. But unlike newscasts, where the amount of information presented is relatively high, commercials present very little actual data about the historical world. Instead, commer-

cial attempt to associate products with certain desirable, culturally significant attributes:

1. Anxiety relief (e.g., Sure antiperspirant allows you to raise your arm without worrying about revealing a stain).
2. Pain and illness relief (e.g., the myriad medical products).
3. Sexual attractiveness (e.g., diet soft drinks, weight reduction plans, perfume and musk products).
4. National pride, patriotism (e.g., Chevrolet's "Heartbeat of America" campaign).
5. Social power or status (e.g., celebrity endorsements, luxury cars such as Lexus that use ads of wealthy individuals extolling their cars).
6. Consumerism (e.g., conspicuous consumption, economy/thrift, savings through sales).

The Functions of TV Commercials The purpose of a commercial's argument is to convince us that we will possess these qualities if we purchase a product. What is being sold is not just the product, but the image connected with it (its association with the values listed above). This image is an interpretation, in a sense, of a historical world object. It attaches cultural values to the product and places it in certain contexts. In other words, commercials are selling their interpretation of historical world commodities and their uses, much as the news is "selling" its interpretation of historical world events. A product such as Sure antiperspirant doesn't just keep your underarms dry, the commercial tells us, it also alleviates anxiety about social humiliation. We are urged to buy it not because it stops perspiration per se, but because it helps us avoid embarrassment. Thus, one major function of commercials is to imbue historical world objects with cultural significance, to attach ideologically positive meanings to these objects.

A second function of advertising is to differentiate similar products from one another, to create an illusion of difference among extremely similar products. The difference between one brand of aspirin and another, for example, is solely the color of the packaging. As one advertising executive put it, "Our problem is—a client comes into my office and throws down two newly minted half-dollars onto my desk and says, 'Mine is the one on the left. You prove it's better.'"²³ The challenge for advertising professionals is to develop what has been called the unique selling proposition for commercial products that are themselves never actually unique. These products nearly always bear some similarities to other products or may even be identical to them. For advertisers, this is a moot point. The client's product must somehow be represented as unique or at least *different* and, implicitly, *better* than the competition's. Since the objects are physically the same, the meanings attached to them must be different for the objects to be marketed

successfully.

A third function of television commercials is simply to circulate the product's name within popular culture. Name recognition is a major goal within the business world.

Commercials and Historical Reality The relationship between a commercial and historical reality is determined by the mode used to represent that reality. Many commercials adopt an expository mode. These commercials take a historical world object and market it to us by encoding it with ideologically alluring meanings—meanings that have significance within television in particular and popular culture in general. But not all commercials are so clearly expository. Some are interactive and others reflexive. This can change the commercial's seeming relationship to historical reality.

Recall that in the interactive mode either a representative of television ventures into historical reality (as in the news interview in the field) or a social actor is brought into a television studio (as in the game show). Commercials make use of both of these techniques, but they are particularly known for interviewing social actors and involving them in a discourse about a product. Often these interviews are edited into pseudomonologues. The social actor appears to speak directly to the viewer about his/her success with a product. His/her comments are based on an interviewer's question. The question is obviously designed to make the product look as good as possible, but we don't hear the question itself or see the interviewer. Instead, we have the social actor's seemingly undirected testimonial.

A reflexive commercial is televisual cannibalism. TV commercials frequently parody films, television programs, and even other commercials in their effort to market a product. Energizer batteries were featured in a series of advertisements where a plausible but fake commercial (usually a sly spoof of a familiar one) is interrupted by a battery-powered toy rabbit intruding into the frame. In one, a commercial for the nonexistent Halo breath freshener is suspended when the drum-beating bunny comes through. In essence, the Energizer rabbit spots are commercials bouncing off commercials. They are television material that refers first of all to other television material, rather than referring directly to historical reality. An extra layer of television has been added.

A close relation to parody is pastiche, the use of fragments of previous texts. Popular songs, for example, are regularly put to new uses by advertisers. Even the Beatles's "Revolution" has been used in a Nike shoe commercial (though it did result in a lawsuit against Nike). Pastiche in television commercials has reached new heights of technological sophistication since the advent of computerized (digital) special effects. One Diet Coke ad, for instance, has Paula Abdul dancing with

and talking to film actors/characters Gene Kelly, Cary Grant, and Groucho Marx (Figs. 4.1–4.3).²⁴

Parody and pastiche are two examples of TV's high degree of intertextuality, drawing it away from historical reality and reflecting it back on itself. One television text (a commercial) refers to another (a program or previous commercial), which may well refer to another and another. Commercials are an integral part of this network of meanings and allusions. They feed on them. This self-reference or reflexivity does not threaten the medium the way that *The Thin Blue Line's* reflexivity raises essential questions about the documentary's foundations. Instead, reflexivity nourishes the commercial. Familiar songs and images provide a shorthand for developing the argument, the pitch, for a

FIGURE 4.1



FIGURE 4.2



FIGURE 4.3



product. Why write a new jingle when an old tune is already inscribed on our minds? Why refer to historical reality when we are more comfortable with television reality? Commercials rely on intertextuality for their very survival.

S U M M A R Y

This chapter has sought to make sense out of television's perplexing and contradictory relationship to reality. To this end we have incorporated the terms *historical world* (or *historical reality*) and *social actor* to describe that reality more accurately. Nonnarrative television, in this terminology, draws upon the actions of social actors in the historical world. It depicts those actions through four principal modes of representation: expository (argumentation), interactive (interaction between the historical world and that of television), observational (TV watching historical reality and minimizing its intrusive effect), and reflexive (emphasizing self-reference and intertextuality).

To see these modes in action, we considered four types of nonnarrative material: newscasts, sports programs, game shows, and nonnarrative commercials. As we have dealt with each, we have considered four aspects:

1. The realm of historical reality it depicts: Since TV cannot present everything, it must select certain aspects of historical reality and neglect others. Which technological, economic, and aesthetic reasons explain why one incident is chosen and another is not?

2. The implied relationship between the television world and the historical world: Do they appear to interact? Do the TV producers appear to influence the social actors? Does the television world affect the historical world?

3. The implied relationship between the text and the viewer: Is the viewer addressed directly or through a representative in the text?

4. The textual organization (or logic): What principles dictate how the information will be presented? For example, is it organized according to the principles of argumentation?

Our consideration of nonnarrative genres is necessarily incomplete. A comprehensive study would need to be another full book, at least. However, the preceding discussion does lay the groundwork for analyzing nonnarrative television.

F U R T H E R R E A D I N G S

The most comprehensive attempt to theorize nonnarrative television, and the book that has guided our analysis here, is Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). This approach to documentary is also pursued in Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation*

in *the Cinema and Other Media* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981) and Julianne Burton, "Toward a History of Social Documentary in Latin America," in *The Social Documentary in Latin America*, edited by Julianne Burton (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990). The standard historical/critical study of the documentary is Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), which places the television documentary in the context of film documentaries made for theatrical distribution.

The television newscast is often studied separately from the fully developed documentary. Short summaries of the evolution and the structure of television news can be found in Raymond Carroll, "Television News," in *TV Genres: A Handbook and Reference Guide*, edited by Brian G. Rose (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985) and Stuart Kaminsky, *American Television Genres* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1985).

Television news is presumed by many to be a major purveyor of ideology. Not surprisingly, several authors analyze the ideological function of the news: Charlotte Brunson and David Morley, *Everyday Television: "Nationwide"* (London: British Film Institute, 1978); Andrew Goodwin, "TV News: Striking the Right Balance," in *Understanding Television*, edited by Andrew Goodwin and Garry Whannel (New York: Routledge, 1990); Patricia Holland, "When a Woman Reads the News," in *Boxed In: Women and Television*, edited by Helen Baehr and Gillian Dyer (New York: Pandora, 1987); Margaret Morse, "The Television News Personality and Credibility: Reflections on the News in Transition," in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, edited by Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); James Schwoch, Mimi White, and Susan Reilly, *Media Knowledge: Readings in Popular Culture, Pedagogy, and Critical Citizenship* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Gaye Tuchman, "Representation and the News Narrative: The Web of Facticity," in *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives*, edited by Donald Lazere (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

The significance of television sports is the topic of several essays in Lawrence A. Wenner, ed., *Media, Sports, and Society* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989). Steven Barnett, *Games and Sets: The Changing Face of Sport on Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1990) offers a mostly historical consideration of TV sports, focusing primarily on the U.K. Analyses of how television represents sports include John Hoberman, *Sport and Political Ideology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984); Margaret Morse, "Sport on Television: Replay and Display," in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches*, edited by E. Ann Kaplan (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1983); Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Television—Football—The World," *Screen* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1978–79):45–59; Jimmie L. Reeves, "TV's World of Sports:

Presenting and Playing the Game,” in *Television Studies: Textual Analysis*, edited by Gary Burns and Robert J. Thompson (New York: Praeger, 1989).

The critical analyses of the other nonnarrative genres discussed in this chapter (game shows and commercials) are not nearly as numerous as those of documentary/news and sports. There have, however, been a few attempts to deal with these issues. The game show of the 1950s is the subject of William Boddy, “The Seven Dwarfs and the Money Grubbers,” in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, edited by Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). The ideological analysis of nonnarrative commercials is begun in Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society* (New York: Routledge, 1987). And the discourses of commercials for children are examined in Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

NOTES

¹ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 105–98.

² John Fiske, *Television Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 283.

³ Dennis K. Mumby and Carole Spitzack, “Ideology and Television News: A Metaphoric Analysis of Political Stories,” in *Television Criticism: Approaches and Applications*, edited by Leah R. Vande Berg and Lawrence A. Wenner (New York: Longman, 1991), 316.

⁴ Nichols, 42.

⁵ These modes draw upon the “documentary modes of representation” developed in the work of Bill Nichols and Julianne Burton. See Nichols, *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981); Julianne Burton, “Toward a History of Social Documentary in Latin America,” in *The Social Documentary in Latin America*, edited by Julianne Burton (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), 3–6; and Nichols, *Representing Reality*.

⁶ The premiere dates for these two programs are for their original versions. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* began as a regional program (in Chicago) in 1984 and was nationally syndicated in 1986. *Nightline* started out as *The Iran Crisis: America Held Hostage* in 1979 and assumed its present format and name on March 24, 1980.

⁷ These categories derive from ones developed by Nichols (51–54), but they modify his concepts.

⁸ MTV reprised the series in 1993 with a new group of participants in Venice Beach, California.

⁹ Ray Eldon Hiebert, Donald F. Ungurait, and Thomas W. Bohn, *Mass Media IV: Introduction to Modern Communication* (New York: Longman, 1985), 498–99.

¹⁰ Sut Jhally, "Cultural Studies and the Sports/Media Complex," in *Media, Sports, and Society*, edited by Lawrence A. Wenner (Newbury, CA: Sage, 1989), 77.

¹¹ The television time-out was instituted on a trial basis in 1955 and adopted permanently in 1958. Steven Barnett, *Games and Sets: The Changing Face of Sport on Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 122.

¹² There have been exceptions to this. In 1969, for instance, the pitching mound in professional baseball was lowered to make it tougher for pitchers to strike out batters. The goal was fewer defensive battles, which are not visually interesting. Barnett, 124.

¹³ A team must make a shot at the basket within 24 seconds of receiving the ball. This rule was instituted in 1954.

¹⁴ As noted by Margaret Morse, "Sport on Television: Replay and Display," in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches—An Anthology*, edited by E. Ann Kaplan (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1983), 47–48.

¹⁵ Jimmie L. Reeves, "TV's World of Sports: Presenting and Playing the Game," in *Television Studies: Textual Analysis*, edited by Gary Burns and Robert J. Thompson (New York: Praeger, 1989), 214.

¹⁶ The same cannot be said for many college sports. These rely on complicated ranking systems, the occasional tournament (e.g., college basketball), and postseason bowl games that inconclusively determine a national champion. This weakens their televisual impact.

¹⁷ Some, however, did appear on radio before converting to television. The two broadcast media share many such programs.

¹⁸ The masculine pronoun ("he") is used purposefully. There are virtually no women game show hosts. The women who do appear—for instance, Vanna White—are silent, powerless models, used to display commodities and link them with sexual allure.

¹⁹ Since its premiere as *The \$10,000 Pyramid*, this program has increased its jackpot—and its name—from \$10,000 to \$100,000.

²⁰ Fiske, *Television Culture*, 269.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 268.

²² Increasingly, the product being sold is not an object, but a service. As America becomes more and more of a service economy (producing fewer goods and providing more services), this will become more common.

²³ Rosser Reeves, quoted by Daniel Pope in Jhally, 127.

²⁴ Earlier spots for various other products intercut current performers with other, older actors as if they were talking to one another, but the Diet Coke spot goes one step further by placing Abdul in the same frame as the older actors.

PART TWO

**TELEVISION'S
STYLE:
IMAGE
AND SOUND**



Style and Setting: Mise-en-Scene

In the theater, the director positions actors on a carefully designed set, organizing the on-stage space. This staging of the action was dubbed, in French, *mise-en-scene*. The *mise-en-scene* of a play, then, is all the physical objects on the stage (props, furniture, walls, actors) and the arrangement of those objects to present effectively the play's narrative and thematics. "Mise-en-scene," the phrase, was adapted by film studies in the 1960s and broadly used and sometimes misused. For some film critics the term carried almost mystical connotations, while for others it vaguely described any component of visual style. For our purposes, we will adopt a much narrower understanding of the term. *Mise-en-scene* will here refer to the staging of the action for the camera. *Mise-en-scene* thus includes all the objects in front of the camera and their arrangement by the director and his or her minions. In short, *mise-en-scene* is the organization of *setting, costuming, lighting, and actor movement*.

Mise-en-scene is a powerful component of the television apparatus. It forms the basic building block of narrative in fiction programs, influencing our perception of characters before the first line of dialogue is spoken. It directs and shapes our understanding of information in news, public affairs, and sports programs. And it forcefully channels our perception in advertisements and other persuasive TV material. To understand these narrative, informational, and commercial uses of *mise-en-scene*, we need to consider its basic materials.

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The walls of a room, the concrete and asphalt of a city street, the trees of a tropical rain forest, the stylized desk of a TV newsroom: all are elements of a setting that must be either built or selected by the set designer or scenic designer, subject to the approval of the director or producer.

One initial distinction that may be made in television set design is between studio sets (constructed) and location settings (selected). Newscasts, game shows, talk shows, sitcoms, and soap operas all rely upon sets erected on television sound stages. Indeed, practically all multiple-camera programs are shot in this fashion (see Chapter 7). In contrast, the single-camera mode of production permits a greater variety of settings. Single-camera programs, such as most prime-time dramas and made-for-TV movies, make extensive use of location shooting, in addition to indoor scenes shot on a studio set.

The decision to stage a program on a studio set or on location is in equal parts economic, technological, and aesthetic. Multiple-camera studio shooting is more economically efficient because the production resources are centralized. Equipment, actors, and technicians are all conveniently close at hand. For programs such as game shows and sitcoms that incorporate a studio audience, it would obviously be impractical to bus the entire group to a distant location. Technologically speaking, it is certainly not impossible to set up three or four cameras in a remote location (sports programs do it every day and soap operas do it on special occasions), but the equipment cannot be as easily controlled and manipulated when it is out of the studio. This leads to slower production time and increased costs. Aesthetic convention also encourages indoor, studio-based set design for some genres. Soap operas, for example, tend to tell "indoor" stories. Their aesthetic emphasis on tales of emotion necessitates indoor scenes: hospital rooms, restaurants, bedrooms, and so on. And even when soap opera narratives do go outdoors, such as swimming scenes at the Snyder pond in *As the World Turns*, they are still shot on studio sets (some more plausible than others).¹ In contrast, the aesthetics of crime dramas and other action genres demand exterior shooting to facilitate the fast-paced movement of people and cars around city streets. Moreover, location shooting adds a certain patina of "realism" to these programs, which is another aesthetic concern.

Studio Set Design

Studio sets fall into two broad categories: narrative and nonnarrative.

Narrative Studio Set Design The main function of narrative sets is, obviously enough, to house characters engaged in a story. But sets in

fiction television are not just neutral backgrounds to the action; they also signify narrative meaning to the viewer. The bar in *Cheers*, for instance, conveys meaning about the characters who socialize and work there, especially Sam Malone, the bar's owner. The type of bar that it is (lots of polished wood, sports mementos on the walls) helps characterize Malone as a very masculine character and suggests a male camaraderie associated with a neighborhood bar ("where everybody knows your name"). The primitive surgery room in *M*A*S*H*, in similar fashion, expresses the sort of medicine that is being practiced in the midst of the Korean War, and tells us something about these doctors. Thus, these sets and the props in them serve as objective correlatives of the characters who inhabit them (see Chapter 3). Or, to put it in different terms, these sets and props are narrative icons—objects that represent aspects of character. Remaining sensitive to the iconography of television programs can help the analyst understand just how characterizations are created.

Narrative significance is not the only thing governing the look of studio sets. Overriding economic, technological, and aesthetic considerations combine to determine how those sets will be designed.

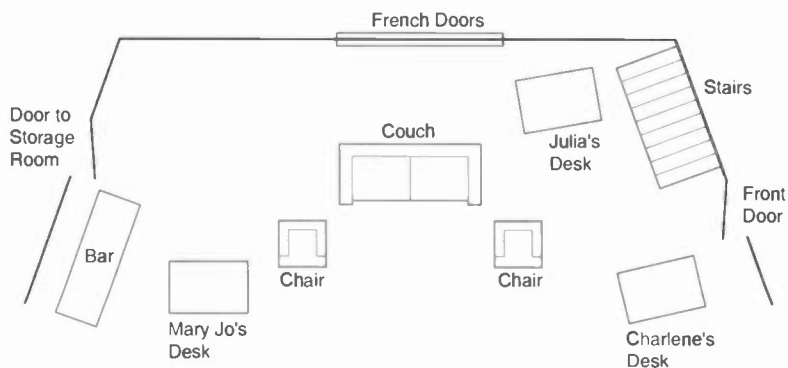
There are no ceilings on studio sets, for the simple technological/aesthetic reason that lighting is done from above (more on this later). The lights are hung on a grid where the ceiling would normally be. This lack of ceilings limits the shots that may be done with the camera down low, looking upward at the characters; such an angle might reveal the tops of the sets and the lights. It also means that ceilings cannot be used within the frame to enclose the characters, creating a slightly claustrophobic sensation (as was popular in 1940s films following the lead of *Citizen Kane* [1941]).

Studio sets are normally wider than they are deep, rectangular rather than square. Generally speaking, studio sets are shallow. And, of course, they are constructed of three walls rather than four, with the side walls occasionally splayed outward. The lack of a fourth wall, an aesthetic holdover from the theater, is further necessitated by the technological need to position two or three (or more) bulky video or film cameras in front of the actors (Fig. 5.1). The added width gives the camera operators room to maneuver sideways, allowing them to vary their camera positions, mostly along a line that, in a sense, forms the invisible fourth wall. In studio production the cameras do not move forward or backwards very much because the closer they get to the actors, the more likely they will be within range of another camera behind them. As with the cameras, the actors also tend to move side to side, rather than up and back because of the limited depth of the sets.

In Fig. 5.1, an overhead view of the main living room set used during the 1990–91 season of *Designing Women* (1986–93) and shown in Fig. 5.2, the lateral orientation of the set is evident. On this set, the Sugarbaker sisters (Julia and Suzanne) were positioned with their

FIGURE 5.1

Designing Women Set Design



coworkers, Charlene and Mary Jo. From right to left, in a fairly straight line, were the front door and Charlene's desk, the sofa where Suzanne normally sat, Mary Jo's desk, the bar where characters often ate, and the door to the storage room. The exception to this side-to-side array was Julia's desk, which was toward the back of the set. However, she spent very little time at that desk, coming forward into the central area of the set when she was narratively significant. Thus, the small zones within which the characters operated were laterally linked to one another.

Studio sets also tend to have doors located on the side walls (often both side walls) rather than the back wall—although this convention is not always adhered to. In Fig. 5.1 there are doors on both side walls and a door on the back wall, but this back wall door is not used very often.

FIGURE 5.2

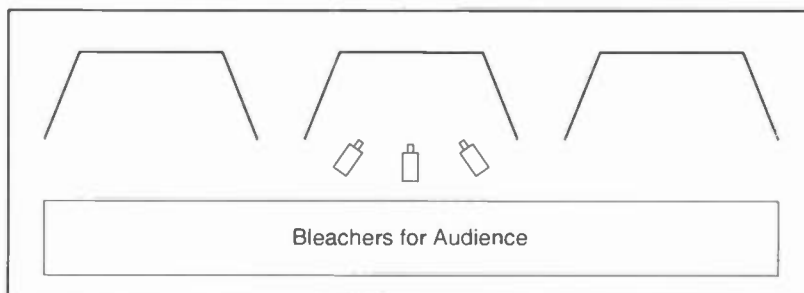
The positioning of doors on the sides facilitates actors entering and exiting the room without blocking or being blocked by other actors. Aesthetic convention also holds that doors not be located “behind” the cameras on the invisible fourth wall. On television, characters never exit toward the cameras or enter from behind them. This shows, once again, the aesthetic influence of the theater, where such an entrance or exit would mean walking into or out of the audience. Television maintains the sense of our being behind the cameras, and does not want to draw attention to us by having the characters walk directly toward us.

The quick and easy entering/exiting of characters is important to all narrative programs, but it is especially significant to ones in which the narrative is segmented and interruptible (see Chapter 2). Soap opera is the pinnacle of this trend. Soap opera characters are constantly coming, going, and being interrupted by other characters’ entrances and exits. This is necessitated by the genre’s frequently interrupted narrative structure. (Just when the two young lovers are about to consummate their romance, someone knocks on the door or the phone rings; more instances of coitus interruptus have appeared on soap opera than in any other genre in narrative history.) Thus, a small detail like the position of the doors in a set’s design fits into the overall narrative scheme of a genre. Set design follows narrative function.

These three-sided rectangular boxes are arrayed in specific fashion in television sound stages, depending on whether an audience is present at the filming or taping. This economic/technological concern influences the size and shape of the sets, as well as the number of settings an episode will have. Narrative programs with studio audiences typically have room for only three (or at most four) sets, which are arranged next to one another, facing the audience (Fig. 5.3). The program’s main location, such as the Sugarbakers’ living room in *Designing Women*, is usually placed in the center, so that most of the audience

FIGURE 5.3

Studio Setup for Programs with Studio Audiences

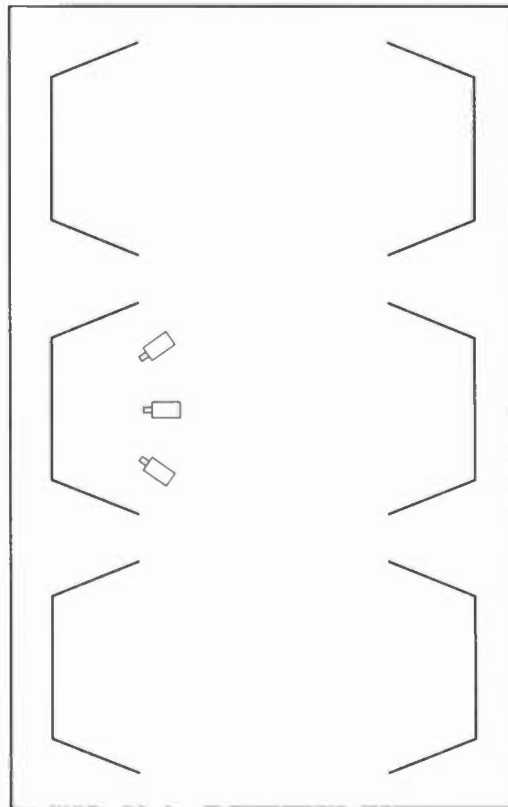


can see it well. In contrast, programs without audiences are produced on sets parallel to one another, leaving the middle space open for cameras and other equipment. In the CBS studios in New York, two separate studios are dedicated to videotaping *As the World Turns*. Six to ten sets are put together every single day, although some of the more elaborate sets are left standing from one day to the next. They are positioned against the walls (Fig. 5.4), with the videotape control room located right next door.

The economic reliance upon studio sets has the aesthetic repercussion of limiting the stories to a very few locations: just three or four in a weekly sitcom, and seven or eight in the more narratively complicated daily soap opera. In a sense, stories must be written for the sets. Characters must be brought together in locations that are as much economically required as they are aesthetically determined. (This is also why when someone dies or leaves a soap opera another character

FIGURE 5.4

Studio Setup for Live-on-Tape Programs Without an Audience



often moves into his or her house or apartment.) And a large part of what they may do and what themes are presented is determined by where they are. Hospital sets are used to deal with issues of life, death, paternity, and maternity. Courtrooms house questions of justice. Private homes are the sites of intense personal and interpersonal emotions. In television programs, setting often determines story and theme, rather than vice versa.

Nonnarrative Studio Sets Most nonnarrative genres (e.g., news, sports programs, and game shows) make a very different use of space than narrative programs do. This use of space aligns with a different way of addressing the viewer. Nonnarrative programs seldom create the illusion of an everyday room, preferring instead to construct a space that more resembles that of nonnarrative theater (that is, music and dance performances): a stylized presentational space that directly addresses the performance to us. Nonnarrative programs do not create the illusion that we do not exist, but instead acknowledge us by performing toward us. The direct address of nonnarrative television is evident in the way that the set design positions the spectacle for our entertainment. News desks face the cameras straight on. Game show hosts stand behind podiums that are aimed at the cameras. The furniture on talk show sets positions guest and host at 45-degree angles to one another so they face the camera as much as each other. In short, the set design of nonnarrative programs is emblematic of the form of address they use.

The studio sets we see on newscasts, game shows, talk shows, musical variety programs, and the like follow different conventions than those of narrative television. Within each nonnarrative genre the conventions of set design are often quite rigid. What follows is a sampling of the various nonnarrative set designs and is not meant to be exhaustive.

The sets of network and local news broadcasts invariably include some form of desk behind which the anchors sit. The desk implies that these are busy, working journalists, pausing briefly from tracking down leads to pass a few tidbits on to the viewer. Behind them, on many news sets, is a newsroom (actual or fabricated) that reemphasizes the earnestness of their journalistic mission (Fig. 5.5). These newsroom sets stress the up-to-the-minute nature of TV news, as if one of the worker drones in the background might hand the anchor a news flash at any moment. Adding to the illusion of immediacy are monitors into which reporters on location may insert remote segments at that moment.

The mise-en-scene of game shows is one of the few that regularly incorporate social actors, members of the audience, into it (see Chapter 4). Consequently, the sets of many game shows play up the audience's presence by incorporating the audience area into what still might be called the performance area. As the difference between spec-

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tator and performer blurs, so does the demarcation between audience space and performance space. This was particularly evident in *Let's Make a Deal* (1963–76, 1980, 1984–86), where host Monty Hall conducted most of the program from within the audience. These audience members function as our surrogates, pulling us into the action in a way that few other television genres can.

Other conventions of the game show set include some form of scoreboard, a position for contestants (often behind a stylized desk), and a podium for the host. Beyond that, each program must develop some distinctive contest, which may be represented in visual terms: contestants spin an oversized roulette wheel and a woman in evening wear reveals letters forming a phrase by turning blocks suspended on a frame (*Wheel of Fortune* [1975–]). Surrounding the game itself may be a broad assortment of bright colors and onstage lights—unlike most other genres where the studio lights are hidden from view. Obviously, this swirl of color signifies excitement and heightens competitive tension. It also reemphasizes the value of winning and the glamorous validity of competition.

Many talk show sets have inherited the desk from television news; NBC's venerable *The Tonight Show* has had a desk since 1954. In this instance the desk provides a boundary between guest and host. It also establishes the authority of the host over the guest, who does not get his or her own desk and must eventually share the couch with other guests. An additional, curtained area of the set establishes a separate, *theatrical* space for performances by musicians and comics. Thus, set design facilitates the talk show's two main functions: conversation and performance.

Most sports programs and news events (or actualities) are videotaped on location. The reason for this is obvious enough: sports and news activities occur out in historical reality, where the newscasters “capture” them for us. Not all parts of historical reality are equally significant, however. Some settings are invisible to television. Why? Either they are taken for granted and are not considered important enough for TV (e.g., the inside of a factory, unless there’s a strike or an industrial accident); or they are officially banned by the government (e.g., the battlefields of the Gulf War); or they are censored by television itself (e.g., a gay bar). Missing from television’s location settings are the ideologically safe (that which is so “normal” it has no meaning) and the ideologically dangerous (that which is so “abnormal” or threatening it must be contained and censored).

There are certain television sports and news settings, or types of settings, that recur over and over again and acquire meaning from this repetition. In sports, for example, center court stadium at Wimbledon carries specific connotations of British royalty, wealth, and class status, in addition to the tennis competition. The mud-and-crushed-cars setting of a monster truck competition carries a whole separate set of connotations.

Television news also makes pointed use of iconography. Fig. 5.6 is a shot of reporter Fran Curry of WVTM in Birmingham standing before some significant news scene. This denotes first that “she is really there,” and second that the information she is giving us must be true because she is at the scene and has witnessed something personally.

FIGURE 5.6

Thus, setting is typically used in TV news to validate the authenticity of the report. Further, when local newscasters present themselves standing on the site of a murder or car crash or the like, it is usually hours after the event has taken place. The event itself cannot be shown, so its setting is used to stand in for it, to certify that it really took place and that it really happened as the reporter is telling us it happened. Setting thus becomes a guarantor of television's verisimilitude—its illusion of truth and reality.

Sports and news programs are not the only television shows that shoot on location, however. Many narrative programs also use location settings. Although most multiple-camera programs do not usually film or tape on location, single-camera programs (e.g., *The A-Team* [1983–87]) and movies frequently shoot outside the studio walls. Mostly, this location shooting is used for outdoor, exterior scenes. Indoor, interior scenes are still shot on studio sets, except in rare circumstances. Location setting in narrative programs is used, as in news, to heighten television's sense of verisimilitude, of being "true to reality." Police and crime programs, for instance, are prone to location shooting to authenticate the realism of the show. *NYPD Blue* (1993–) would strike us as "phony" if the exterior scenes were shot on a studio lot. However, verisimilitude isn't the only motivating factor in the use of location settings in narrative programs. Narrative, like the news, makes extensive use of the preestablished iconography of the real world. *Miami Vice* was a particularly good example of this. The program's opening credits consisted of a collage of Miami sights (and sites) and thus played on our associations with the city: money, power, overheated sexuality, Hispanic culture, potential violence, and so on. *Ironsides* (1967–75); *Hawaii Five-O* (1968–80); *The Streets of San Francisco* (1972–77); and *Magnum, P.I.* are among the other police/detective programs that drew upon the iconography of a particular location. Thus, setting—whether constructed or selected—is not iconographically neutral. It always has the potential to contribute meaning to the narrative or the program's thematics.

COSTUME DESIGN

In narrative television, costume design is closely allied with set design. Just as props and backgrounds are designed to establish character, so are the clothes a character wears. Columbo's distinctive rumpled raincoat (*Columbo*), Alexis Carrington's gowns (*Dynasty*), and Mr. T's jewelry (*The A-Team*) help construct the characters who wear them. Costume is one of the first aspects of a character that we notice and

upon which we build expectations. It is a significant part of the program's narrative system.

Costume design is not limited to narrative television. News and sports have their own coded conventions of appropriate dress. Sports teams are the most regimented, with their uniforms identifying both which side of the conflict they are on and what their position within that conflict is (e.g., football players' uniforms are numbered according to the positions they play). The dress of sportscasters is practically as regimented as the players', with men wearing the inevitable blazer and women dressed in modified blazers or some variation on the businesswoman's suit. In news there is a sharp demarcation between the formal business dresses and suits of the anchorwomen and men, and the less formal dress of the reporters in the field. The studied "informality" of the field reporters (appearing in their suspenders or wearing fatigues while covering international incidents) signifies that they are the ones in the trenches, digging stories out by any means necessary.

Style and Setting:

Mise-en-Scene

LIGHTING DESIGN

In the early years of television, camera technology dictated that sets be broadly and brightly lit. Because the early TV cameras were not very sensitive to light, a huge amount of illumination was necessary to transmit the simplest image. Consequently, TV cameras could only broadcast images of outdoor scenes in direct sunlight or indoor scenes under powerful studio lights. Today, however, cameras are much more sensitive, which presents cinematographers and videographers with the ability to manipulate lighting for a variety of effects. No longer is it a matter of simply getting enough light on the set; now lighting may be used to develop mood or tone and contribute to characterization.

The Characteristics of Light

There are four basic properties of light in television: *direction*, *intensity*, *color*, and *diffusion* (or *dispersion*).

Lighting Direction and Intensity Probably the most significant lighting characteristic is the direction in which the light is shining. Lighting direction has long been used to imply aspects of a character. Underlighting (the light source below the subject) has suggested a rather sinister character in hundreds of horror films and television programs. In Fig. 5.7, from the "Lane Change" episode of *Amazing*

Stories (1985–87), the joy of a bridal couple is undermined by the eerie lighting. Backlighting may be used to mask a killer's identity or imply an angelic state. In the case of the music video for Low Pop Suicide's "Disengaged" (Fig. 5.8), it may heighten the enigmatic character of the lead singer. The variation of camera position derives much of its significance from its deviation from a conventional norm of lighting known as three-point lighting.

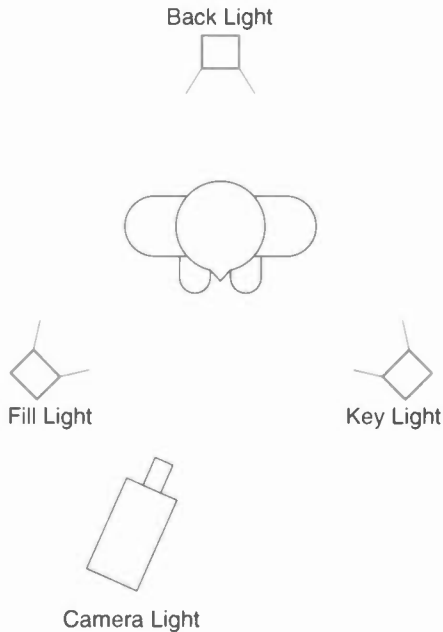
Three-point lighting is yet another part of the legacy that television inherited from the cinema. According to this aesthetic convention an actor (or object) should be lit from three points or sources of light of varying intensity: the key light, the fill light, and the back light (Fig. 5.9). The key light is the main source of illumination, the most intense light on the set. Normally, it is positioned at an oblique angle to the actor's face—not directly in front or directly to the side of him or her. And, as in all three points of light, it is above the actor's head and several feet in front of him or her. If this is the only light on the set—as in Fig. 5.10—there will be deep shadows beneath the actor's nose and chin; and these, in conventional television, are thought to be unsightly. Consequently, a second source of illumination is provided to fill the shadows. This fill light is directed obliquely toward the actor from the opposite side of the key light, at approximately the same height (or a little lower), and is roughly half as bright as the key light. The third point, the back light, is placed behind and above the actor. Its main function is to cast light on the actor's head and shoulders, creating an outline of light around him or her. This outline helps to distinguish the actor from the background, emphasizing his or her form. In Fig.

FIGURE 5.7**FIGURE 5.8**

Three-Point Lighting

Style and Setting:

Mise-en-Scene



5.11, for instance, fill and back lights have been added to a shot of the actor from Fig. 5.10.

On any particular studio set, three-point lighting is achieved with more than just three lights. But the basic principle of one main source of illumination, one source filling in shadows, and one source back-lighting the actors dominates all television production. Indeed, this lighting principle obtains in programs as diverse as prime-time dramas, daytime soap operas, and local news broadcasts. This norm is so accepted, so taken for granted, that any deviation from it—such as underlighting or sidelighting—seems odd and, more important, communicates meaning to us about the characters.

Two related lighting styles earn their names from the key light: high-key lighting and low-key lighting.

High-key lighting means that the set is very evenly lit, as in most scenes from 1960s sitcoms such as *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961–66). Even though Fig. 5.12 is from a shot that occurs at night, the lighting is still bright and even. In other words, the difference between the bright areas of the set and the dark areas is very little; there is a low contrast between bright and dark. High-key lighting is achieved by pumping up

the fill light(s) so that the key light is comparatively less strong. Most multiple-camera productions, such as game shows, soap operas, and sitcoms, use high-key lighting. Shooting with two or three cameras at once, usually an economic decision, leads to the technological necessity of high-key lighting. When several cameras are shooting simultaneously, the lighting needs to be fairly even so that different camera angles are fully illuminated. In addition, such programs as sports and game shows, which allow for unpredictable figure movements, need a broadly lit stage so that people do not disappear into the darkness.

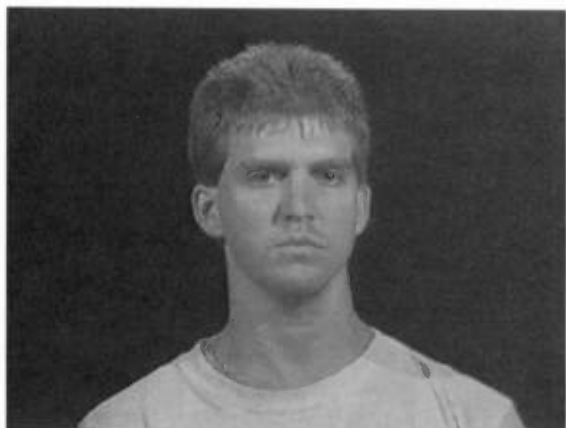
These economic and technological imperatives result in an aesthetics of high-key. As the norm, high-key lighting comes to signify normalcy, stasis, equilibrium. Variations on high-key lighting result in deviate meanings.

Low-key lighting means that there is a high contrast between bright and dark areas, that the bright areas are very bright and the dark areas are very dark (Fig. 5.13). To achieve low-key lighting, the key light must be comparatively stronger than the fill light, so that the bright areas are especially bright. This lighting style often has shafts of light cutting through dark backgrounds—a style that also goes by the name of *chiaroscuro* when applied to theatrical productions or the dark paintings of Rembrandt. If high-key lighting is associated with normalcy, then low-key represents oppositional values: deviance, disequilibrium, even social rupture. On TV, it is linked to criminal elements and is frequently used in detective and mystery programs, as was best represented by *Miami Vice*.

FIGURE 5.10



FIGURE 5.11





Style and Setting:
Mise-en-Scene

Lighting Color Light may be colored by placing a filter or gel (short for “gelatin”) in front of a light source. Colored light is used to convey different moods (say, blue light for sorrow) and times of day (orange tints for morning, blue for twilight) in narrative television, but principally it is used in stylized set designs for game shows and music videos. Otherwise, colored light is too great a deviation from the norm for use in conventional programs.

Lighting Diffusion On an overcast day, when the sun’s rays are diffused through the clouds, the shadows that are cast have indistinct, blurred outlines. In television, this form of illumination is called soft

FIGURE 5.13

light. It is often used to make actors look younger or more vulnerable. Hard light, in contrast, is illustrated by direct, undiffused sunlight and the harsh, distinct shadows it casts. In television, hard light is best exemplified by television news footage that is illuminated by a single light mounted on the camera (Fig. 5.14, from *Cops*, which is shot in that same style). Narrative TV finds uses for hard light to emphasize a character's toughness and invulnerability—turning his or her face into an impenetrable mask (Fig. 5.15; the lead singer from Manic Street Preachers).

ACTOR MOVEMENT

Chapter 3 discussed the basics of performance in television. Now let's add a few thoughts about how actors are incorporated as part of the *mise-en-scene*, how they are moved around the set by the director. In the theater this pattern of movement around a set is known as blocking.

In blocking a scene, the director must first take into consideration the position of the cameras and the layout of the set. How can the actors be moved around the set in such a fashion as to best reveal them to the camera(s) filming or taping them?

Since the sets are usually fairly shallow in multiple-camera studio production, the actors mostly move side to side, rather than up and back (see Fig. 5.1). The cameras are positioned where the fourth wall would be, pointed obliquely at the set. Consequently, actor movement tends to be at an angle to the cameras as he or she moves laterally in this shallow space.

FIGURE 5.14

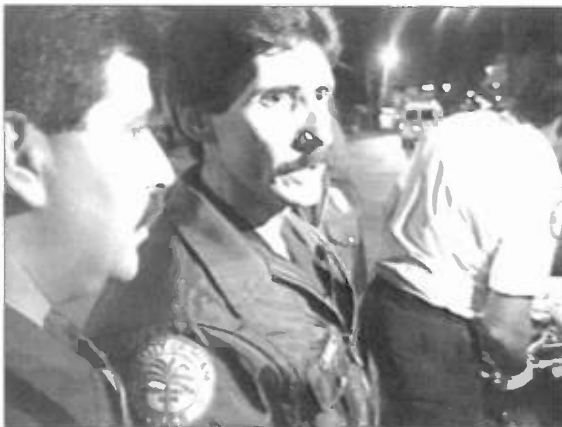


FIGURE 5.15





Style and Setting:

Mise-en-Scene

Single-camera production, especially outdoors on location, permits the occasional use of deep space blocking. This type of blocking underscores the depth of the set by positioning one actor near the camera and another far away. The two might move toward one another, or else participate in independent actions. In Fig. 5.16, from *Eerie, Indiana* (1991–92), a character talks on the phone in the foreground, assuring his parents that all is well. Meanwhile, in the distance behind him, his friend and a tornado-rider start to climb a telephone pole in their quest to hitch a ride on a tornado. Clearly, foreground and background counterpoint one another in this scene. Deep space blocking normally uses deep focus (see Chapter 6), where the entire image is in focus. Occasionally, however, deep space will be used without deep focus, and one of the actors will be out of focus. Thus, deep space and deep focus are independent of one another.

S U M M A R Y

Every television program has a mise-en-scene that communicates meaning to the viewer—meaning that may be understood before a single line of dialogue or news copy is spoken. Mise-en-scene contributes to the narrative system of fiction programs and the informational system of news and sports programs. It is shaped by the needs of these systems and by other economic, technological, and aesthetic concerns.

The frugality of studio shooting has led to a specific style of setting that caters to the technological demands of multiple-camera production. Three-walled, ceilingless studio sets form the backdrop for game shows, soap operas, news programs, sitcoms, and the like. In each of

these types of programs, the studio setting performs a slightly different function—heightening competition in game shows, signifying journalistic ethics in news programs, and helping construct characters in narrative programs. Location settings play the additional role of signifying verisimilitude—the illusion of reality—in both news and narrative programs.

Costuming is closely linked with set design. Both are aspects of the program's iconography—the objects that signify character and the-matics.

Most of television's settings (studio and location) and costumes are illuminated in high-key, three-point lighting. But there are important deviations from that style. Each of the main properties of light (its direction, intensity, color, and diffusion) can be manipulated in order to contribute to the narrative or the mood of a program. In low-key or chiaroscuro lighting, for instance, the relative intensities of the light sources are varied to create a high-contrast image of bright light and dark shadow.

Mise-en-scene was originally a theatrical term. Converting it for use in television studies, we must keep in mind that the mise-en-scene of TV is experienced only through the camera; hence it must be designed explicitly for that purpose. This technological parameter thus governs all aesthetic designs of setting, costuming, lighting, and actor movement, as we shall see in the following chapter.

FURTHER READINGS

The conventions of televisual style are described in many handbooks for television production. See Gerald Millerson, *The Technique of Television Production*, 12th ed. (Boston: Focal Press, 1990) and Herbert Zettl, *Television Production Handbook* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992). Dave Viera details lighting design in *Lighting for Film and Electronic Cinematography* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993). A more ambitious approach to style is taken in Gorham Kindem, *The Moving Image: Production Principles and Practices* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1987). Kindem endeavors not just to describe television's common practices, but also to articulate the aesthetic rationales of those practices.

The sole attempt to create an entire stylistics of television production is Herbert Zettl, *Sight Sound Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990). Zettl's ambitious undertaking is occasionally idiosyncratic and quirky—and also quite provocative.

The most thorough guide to interpreting audio-visual style is not a television book at all: David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993). Al-

though Bordwell and Thompson have nothing to offer on some crucial aspects of television (e.g., multiple-camera editing or the characteristics of videotape), they provide an extensive introduction to understanding single-camera production.

Style and Setting:

Mise-en-Scene

NOTES

¹ There are significant exceptions to this emphasis on indoor shooting. On rare occasions soap operas travel to exotic locales, but this is usually limited to sweeps weeks.

*Style and the
Camera: Videography
and Cinematography*

When we look at television, our gaze is controlled by the “look” of the camera. What the camera “saw” on the set or on location during a production, we now see on our television screens. The camera’s distance from the scene and the direction in which it is pointed, among other factors, determine what we will see in a television image. In essence, our look becomes the camera’s look and is confined by the frame around the image. To understand the camera’s look, it becomes necessary to understand the aesthetic, economic, and technological factors that underpin the camera’s perfunctory gaze.

The camera, although a mechanical reproducing device, does not neutrally reproduce images. The camera fundamentally changes the objects it reproduces: three dimensions become two; the colors of nature become the colors of videotape or film; the perimeter of the camera frame delimits the view. The reproduction process of film and video could more accurately be thought of as one of translation, where the three-dimensional historical world is translated into the two-dimensional “language” of televisual images. This camera language is a major part of the visual style of a television program. It works in conjunction with *mise-en-scene* (Chapter 5) and editing (Chapter 7) to create a program’s overall visual design.

Almost everything we see on television began its trip to our homes by being recorded by a camera. It would be wrong, however, to assume that this camera is always a video camera. Indeed, many television images were originally created by a film camera (although nearly everything on TV these days is edited on videotape). Soap operas, game shows, some sitcoms, musical variety programs and specials, news

programs, talk shows, and most locally produced commercials are shot on videotape or broadcast live using video cameras. In contrast, prime-time dramas, some other sitcoms, made-for-television films, music videos, and large-budget, nationally broadcast commercials are all shot originally on film (Table 6.1). The distinction is not merely technological. Even though these images all come to us through the television tube, there are still discrete visual differences between material that was originally filmed and that which was videotaped. Each technology affects the visual style of television in different ways. Each might be thought of as a separate dialect within the language of televisual style.

This chapter concerns the components of film and video camera style, the elements of cinematography and videography that record an image and affect our understanding of it. In simplest terms, cinematography refers to the characteristics of the film camera, while videography designates those of the video camera. The person overseeing the film camera is the cinematographer; the corresponding person in charge of the video camera is the videographer. Typically, in contemporary production, cinematographers and videographers leave the actual handling of the camera to the camera operator, who is not credited as a full-fledged cinematographer/videographer. For simplicity's sake, we will here use the term "camera operator" to refer to the combined work of cinematographers, videographers, and camera operators. In any event, all three operate under the guidance of the program's director. The director designs the program's overall style, with the camera operator working within the specific province of camera style.

On the most basic level, camera-style characteristics are shaped by technological considerations. For instance, one could not have produced videographic images in the 1890s, before videotape was in-

TABLE 6.1

Film versus Videotape

FILMED

L.A. Law
Murphy Brown
Designing Women
Cheers
Murder, She Wrote
Northern Exposure
Beverly Hills 90210
Picket Fences
Music videos (some of them)
National commercials

VIDEOTAPED

60 Minutes
Married . . . with Children
The Cosby Show
Home Improvement
The Price Is Right
Roseanne
The Young and the Restless
Network newscasts
MTV programs
Local commercials (e.g., for car dealerships)

vented. But we should be wary of overemphasizing the importance of technology to cinematography and videography. As we have seen in our discussion of *mise-en-scene* in the previous chapter, the ways that film and video technologies have been used are always shaped by aesthetic convention and economic determinants. The aesthetic conventions of composition in European oil painting, for example, greatly influence the composition of TV images. And economics principally determines whether a program will be shot in film or videotape—with less expensive (and less prestigious) programs being shot on videotape. Thus, technology, aesthetics, and economics merge together in determining camera style. To fully understand cinematography and videography we must remain alert to each of these three counterbalancing elements.

In many respects, film and video share basic camera principles. In U.S. television today the two formats have begun to resemble one another more and more—especially as high-definition video nears perfection (with digital image technology not far behind). It is with these shared principles that we begin our study of cinematography and videography. Even so, there do remain some important distinctions between film and video, and they will be considered toward the latter part of this chapter.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CAMERA STYLE: SHARED FILM AND VIDEO CHARACTERISTICS

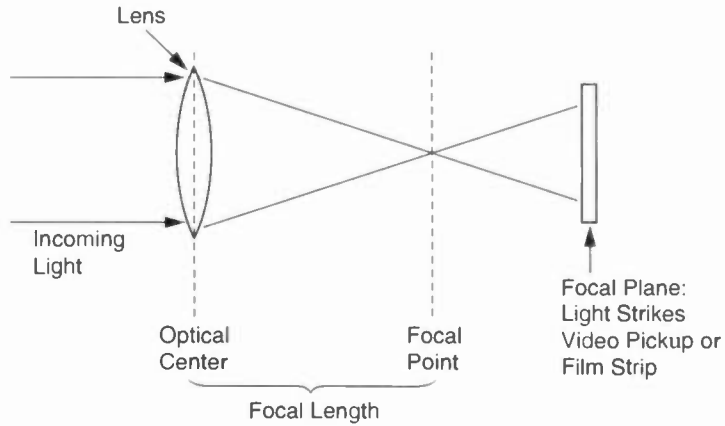
The Camera Lens

The earliest “camera,” the *camera obscura* of the eighteenth century, had no lens at all. It was merely a large, darkened room with a hole in one wall. Light entered through that hole and created an image of the outdoors on the wall opposite the hole. Very little could be done by way of manipulating that image. Today’s camera lens, the descendent of the *camera obscura*’s hole-in-a-wall, permits a variety of manipulations—a catalogue of optical controls that the camera operator may exercise.

Chief among these optical controls is focal length. One need not be a physicist to understand focal length, although sometimes it seems like it. The focal length of a lens (usually measured in millimeters) is the distance from the lens’s optical center to its focal point, which is that spot where the light rays bent by the lens converge before expanding again and striking the film or electronic pickup at the focal plane (Fig. 6.1). This definition, however, tells us very little about the images

FIGURE 6.1

The Physics of Focal Length



that result from lenses of different focal lengths. In more familiar terms, the three conventional types of focal length are:

1. Wide angle (or short)
2. "Normal" (or medium)
3. Telephoto (or long or narrow)

The reader may already know these terms, but it is important to recognize the different and sometimes subtle effects these focal lengths have on the image.

The wide angle lens gives the viewer a wide view of the scene, and it also heightens the illusion of depth in the image. All television images

FIGURE 6.2**FIGURE 6.3**



are two-dimensional, of course; there is no true depth to them. They have dimensions only along two axes: horizontal and vertical (left and right, up and down). Using principles of perspective developed in the Renaissance, however, the television image creates an illusion of depth (back and front). Because of this illusion, some objects seem to be in front of other objects; the space seems to recede into the image. A wide angle lens increases that illusion of depth. Objects filmed with a wide angle lens seem to be farther apart from one another than they do with normal or telephoto lenses. In Fig. 6.2, which was shot with a wide angle lens, the distance between the front and the rear of the piano is elongated, giving the image an illusion of great depth.

The telephoto lens gives a narrower view of the scene than a wide angle lens, but magnifies the scene (brings it closer). In Fig. 6.3 the same piano as in Fig. 6.2 has been shot with a telephoto lens. Compare how the distance between the front and the rear of the piano appears. Telephoto lenses are widely used in sports coverage, to get a “closer” view of the action (Fig. 6.4). Just as the wide angle lens heightens the illusion of depth, the telephoto lens diminishes it. Thus, the illusion of depth appears to be compressed in telephoto shots. The pitcher in Fig. 6.4 appears to be much closer to the batter than he would to someone sitting in the bleachers because of the compression of depth by the telephoto lens. The longer the lens, the more compressed the depth will appear.

The so-called normal focal length lens is medium-sized in comparison to both wide angle and telephoto. This is the lens that has come to be accepted as “natural.” However, the normal focal length does not actually approximate the human eye’s range of vision (it’s narrower) or illusion of depth (it’s shallower). Rather, it creates an image that, to the Western world, seems correct because it duplicates that style of perspective developed during the Renaissance of the 1500s.

Camera lenses that create images suggesting Renaissance perspective have come to be accepted as the norm, while wide angle and telephoto lenses are defined as deviations from that norm.

Film and video cameras may be supplied with individual lenses of different focal lengths. More commonly, today's cameras come equipped with a zoom lens, which in optical terms is a *variable focal length* lens. With a zoom, one can shift immediately and continuously from wide angle to telephoto without switching lenses. To zoom in is to vary the focal length from wide angle to telephoto, getting increasingly "closer" to the object and narrowing your angle of view (Figs. 6.5–6.6). To zoom out, in contrast, is to vary the focal length from telephoto to wide angle—thereby getting "farther" from the object as the angle of view widens. *Closer* and *farther* are misleading terms when referring to the zoom lens, however, because the camera does not get physically closer to or farther from the object it is filming or taping. Thus, to be accurate, the zoom really just magnifies and de-magnifies the object.

A characteristic of the camera lens even more fundamental than focal length is its focus. On television, the image is nearly always in focus. Only perhaps in sports events do we see occasional out-of-focus images as the camera operator struggles to follow a fast-moving athlete. However, in most televisual images there are areas of the image that are not in focus, parts that have been left out of focus to de-emphasize them. The camera operator can selectively focus parts of the image and unfocus other parts. In other words, he or she can use focus for specific effect.

The selective use of focus is facilitated by the photographic phenomenon of depth of field (Fig. 6.8). (Care should be taken not to confuse depth of field with the *illusion* of depth discussed above.) Depth of

FIGURE 6.5



FIGURE 6.6





field is the distance in front and behind the focus distance that is also in focus (the focus distance being the distance from the camera to the object being focused on). If a lens is focused at 10 feet, as in Fig. 6.8, some objects nearer to and farther from the camera will also be in focus. This range (say, 8–14 feet in this instance) is the depth of field. Typically, the range is approximately one third in front of the focus distance and two thirds behind it. The camera operator can manipulate depth of field to influence our perception of an image—decreasing the visual impact of parts of the frame by rendering them out of focus and indistinct. A small depth of field—so that just one plane (foreground, middle ground, or background) is sharply focused—is termed shallow focus. In Fig. 6.9, the director has chosen to emphasize the

FIGURE 6.8

Depth of Field

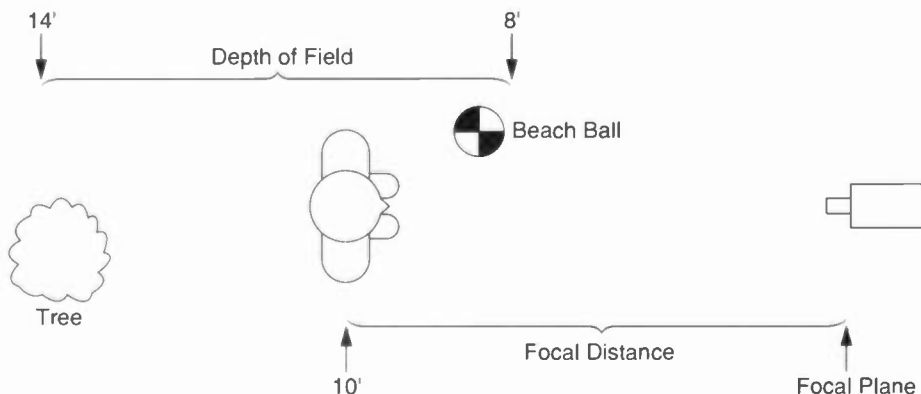
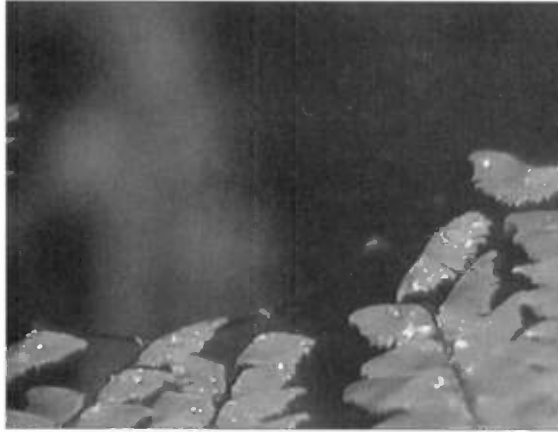


FIGURE 6.9

foreground leaves by blurring the background. The shallow focus of this shot is further manipulated by shifting the focus from foreground to background, which is known as racking or pulling focus (Figs. 6.9–6.10). Rack focus is frequently used in inexpensive television productions to add some visual interest to a shot without changing to a new camera position and revising the lighting setup.

Shallow focus sounds confusingly similar to soft focus. However, in a soft focus shot the entire image, not just a single plane within it, is slightly out of focus. Soft focus is often used in conjunction with special filters and lighting—and even Vaseline on the lens—to create an image that conventionally signifies romantic attraction, vulnerability, sweetness, or youthfulness (concealing wrinkles in an actor's face) in a

FIGURE 6.10**FIGURE 6.11**

character. In *Moonlighting*, for example, Cybill Shepherd was frequently shot in this fashion.

Focus does not have to be shallow or soft, however. In deep focus shots, all planes of the image are in focus—as in one shot from the television documentary, *Never Too Far from Home* (1991), where characters in the background are in focus as are the flowers in the foreground (Fig. 6.11). Deep focus is often used in conjunction with deep space blocking (see page 117), where background and foreground interact with one another. In the *Eerie, Indiana* shot (see Fig. 5.16), deep focus enables the viewer to see what is happening in the shot's background.¹

Deep focus has been heralded by film critic André Bazin as a major advance in the realism of the cinema. He argues that:

1. Deep focus is more like the human perception of reality (we mostly see the world in deep focus); and

2. Deep focus preserves the continuity of space by maintaining the visual connections between objects in their environments.

Bazinian realism could also be applied to television (although his theories have had minimal impact on television aesthetics), but with caution. The smaller size of the television screen is a major impediment to deep focus staging of action. The background actors/objects can become so small as to have negligible impact on the shot's meaning.

Camera Framing

The framing of a shot, at a most rudimentary level, determines what we can and cannot see. In the early years of television (the 1940s), camera operators tended to choose a distant view of the action, which showed the entire setting. This framing was based on an aesthetic assumption (inherited from the theater) that the “best seat in the house” would be in the center, about seven or eight rows back, where one could see all of the action at once. Also, early television cameras were large and cumbersome, which made it difficult to move them around a set to achieve a variety of camera positions. Soon, however, camera technology improved. Television directors discovered the impact of a variety of framing, and began incorporating the close-up in their television programs.

Since the “invention” of the close-up, television directors have developed conventions of framing. It is possible to chart television's conventional framing with the human body as a standard, since that is the most common object before the camera.² (The conventional abbreviation of each framing is included in parentheses.)

1. Extreme long shot (XLS). The human form is small, perhaps barely visible. The point of view is extremely distant, as in aerial shots or other distant views (Fig. 6.12).

2. Long shot (LS). The actor's entire body is visible, as is some of the surrounding space (Fig. 6.13).

3. Medium long shot (MLS). Most, if not all, of the actor's body is included, but less of the surrounding space is visible than in the LS (Fig. 6.14).

4. Medium shot (MS). The actor is framed from the thigh or waist up (Fig. 6.15).

5. Medium close-up (MCU). The lower chest of the actor is still visible (Fig. 6.16).

6. Close-up (CU). The actor is framed from his or her chest to just above his or her head (Fig. 6.17).

FIGURE 6.12



FIGURE 6.13



FIGURE 6.14



7. Extreme close-up (XCU). Any framing closer than a close-up is considered an XCU (Fig. 6.18).

In actual film and video production, these terms are imprecise. There is some variation between theatrical film shooting and shooting for television, with the latter tending toward closer framing to compensate for the smaller screen. What one director considers a medium close-up, another might term a close-up. Even so, the above terminology does provide some guidelines for discussing framing.

In fiction television, the long shot is—among other things—used for positioning the character within his or her environment, and can thereby construct aspects of that character. A long shot of a woman in a newspaper office, a prison cell, or a convent could establish her as a

FIGURE 6.15



FIGURE 6.16



FIGURE 6.17



*Television's Style:
Image and Sound*



journalist, a convict, or a nun, respectively. Environment feeds our understanding of character, and the long shot facilitates that understanding. A long shot that helps to establish character or setting is known as an establishing shot. It often inaugurates a scene.

The medium shot is frequently used for conversation scenes. The framing of two characters from about the knees up as they begin a dialogue is so often used that it has been designated with the term two-shot. (Similarly, a three-shot frames three characters.) The medium shot can establish relationships between characters by bringing them into fairly close proximity.

For some, the close-up provides the “window to the soul” of the actor/character, a gateway to his or her innermost emotions. Hyperbole such as this aside, the close-up functions both to emphasize details and to exclude surrounding actions, channeling viewer perception. It thus exercises the most extreme control over the viewer’s gaze.³

The aesthetics of framing follows certain conventions of function. The close-up is the dominant framing in television programs such as the soap opera, where the emotional states signified by the actors’ faces are stressed. Television soap opera’s reliance upon the close-up has coincided with the evolution of its acting style, which favors the human face over larger gestures. Television sports and action genres, in contrast, place more emphasis on medium and long shots—to facilitate the movement of automobiles, planes, and human bodies through space.

Camera Height and Angle

In most television shots the height of the camera matches that of the actors’ faces. This camera height is so ingrained in our understanding of camera style that eye level has become synonymous with “normal”

height. It becomes transparent to the viewer, taken for granted. Variations on this height consequently become important, apparently signifying something about the characters. The two principal variations on eye-level camera height are

1. Low angle—in which the camera is lower than the filmed object (Fig. 6.19)
2. High angle—in which the camera is higher than the filmed object (Fig. 6.20)

It has become a truism in television production manuals to observe that a low angle—where we look up at an actor—makes a character appear stronger and more powerful, while a high angle—looking down on an actor—weakens the character's impact. We can see the commonsensical basis for this assumption: when looking up at an object, it tends to appear large; and when looking down at it, small. But in actual television programs this use of low and high angles is much less systematic. In Fig. 6.21, from *thirtysomething* (1987–91), a character is shot from a low, supposedly empowering angle; yet she is crying and vulnerable at this point in the story. (In addition, the *mise-en-scène* traps her within the staircase.) Obviously, the low camera angle is not enough to make her a strong figure.

Stylistic elements such as camera angle do have meaning, but those meanings are always set within the context of the program and general aesthetic practice. Consequently, it's impossible to generalize about the “vocabulary” of television technique, where technique A = meaning B. Technique A does indeed have meanings, but only when considered within the entire textual system of a program.

FIGURE 6.19



FIGURE 6.20



*Television's Style:
Image and Sound*



Camera Movement

Film cameras had been around for twenty years or more before tripods and dollies and other mechanical devices were developed that permitted the movement of the camera. Early films initially had little or no camera movement because of this technological limitation and because the camera operator had to hand crank the cameras, thus making their turning or movement awkward. When cameras finally did begin to move, they were limited by the practical aesthetics of early directors. Little use was seen for camera movement beyond following character action and panoramic views. Filmmakers gradually expanded the use of camera movement, and by the time television arrived, film camera movement was smooth and relatively frequent. Early television cameras, because of their enormous bulk, were as stationary as the first film cameras. Also, initial studio-based television was constricted in its camera movement by lack of space. Before long, however, television developed its own uses for the moving camera.

Principal among the functions of the moving camera are

1. To establish a space, a particular area;
2. To establish a relationship between objects/actors in a certain space;
3. To follow action;
4. To emphasize/de-emphasize one portion of a space, or an object/actor within that portion.

To achieve these functions, a variety of camera movements have evolved.

1. Panning and tilting. The most rudimentary camera movement derives its name from the affection for broad, “panoramic” views in

early motion pictures. The pan is when the camera twists left and right, on an imaginary axis stuck vertically through the camera. The camera support—the legs of the tripod—does not move in a pan; only the tripod head turns. Similarly, in a tilt the camera twists up and down on an axis stuck horizontally through the camera. The camera height does not change; only its angle of vision.

Several other camera movements depend upon the movement of the *entire* camera support rather than just the tripod head: dolly-ing/tracking/trucking; craning/pedestaling; hand-held; and Steadicam. Camera technology provides the names for these movements, rather than the actual direction of the movement (as in “tilting”) or what is represented (as in “panning” over panoramic views). Thus, the conventionalized method for viewers to describe these movements is to refer to presumptions of the technology used to create them.

2. Dollying, tracking, and trucking. In film and television there are several terms used to describe the sideways and backward/forward movement of the camera. Principal among these are dollying, tracking, and trucking. Each of these differs from the pan in that the entire camera support moves, rather than just the tripod head. It’s like the difference between twisting one’s head left and right—the human equivalent of panning—and walking in one direction or the other—human dollying.

The dolly shot is named for the device that creates it, the camera dolly—a wheeled camera support that may be rolled left and right or forward and backward. Similarly, the tracking shot earns its name from small tracks that are laid over rough surfaces, along which the dolly then rolls. In practice, “tracking” is such a broadly applied term that it may be used to refer to any sideways or backward/forward movement, even if actual dolly tracks are not involved. In addition, in television studio production sideways movement is sometimes called trucking or crabbing, and a semicircular sideways movement is usually called arcing. Many of these terms are used interchangeably. Also, dollying need not be in straight lines that are either perpendicular or parallel to the action; dolly shots may move in curves, figure eights, and any other direction a dolly may be pushed or pulled.

To most viewers, dollying in or out is indistinguishable from zooming in or out. There are, however, important visual differences between the two techniques. Even though it takes a practiced eye to recognize them, the differences may generate disparate perceptions of the objects and humans that are presented.

When the camera operator zooms in or out, he or she changes the focal length of the camera and magnifies or demagnifies the object, but the position from which the object is viewed remains the same. The point of view of the camera is thus constant. In contrast, when the camera operator dollies forward or backward, the position from which

the object is viewed shifts. And because the point of view changes in the dolly shot, we see the object from a different angle. Parts of it are revealed that were previously concealed, and vice versa (see Fig. 6.7, taken from the ending of a dolly-in shot that begins at the same position as the zoom in of Fig. 6.5). In Fig. 6.7 we see the entire picture on the wall behind the pianist, where at the start of the dolly (Fig. 6.5) it is partially blocked. Contrast this with the zoom in on the same subject matter (Fig. 6.6). At the end of the zoom in, the picture is still obscured and the piano-top strut still crosses the actor's face. Even though the subject matter is enlarged, it is still seen from the same point of view; the camera is still in the same position as at the start of the zoom. Moreover, because we have changed the focal length, we also change the image's illusion of depth. Everything looks flatter, more compressed as we zoom in. In Fig. 6.6, the actor looks squeezed between the piano and the wall—especially when compared with Fig. 6.7.

Thus, although the zoom and the dolly share the quality of enlarging or reducing an object before our eyes, they differ in how they represent point of view and the illusion of depth. Consequently, they serve different functions on television. For example, camera movement—not zooming—is conventionally used when the viewer is supposed to be seeing through the eyes of a character as he or she moves through space—say, as a killer approaches his or her prey. Zoom shots do not conventionally serve this function, because they do not mimic human movement as convincingly as dollying does. Zooming, in turn, is more common in contemporary television production as a punctuation for extreme emotion. In soap operas, camera movement is fairly limited, and zooms-in function to underline character emotions. In this case economics blends with aesthetics. Zoom shots are less time-consuming to set up than dolly shots, and thus less expensive. Consequently, the modestly budgeted soap operas favor the zoom.

3. Craning and pedestaling. A camera crane or boom looks just like a crane on a construction site, except that there is a camera mounted on one end. A camera pedestal is the vertical post of the camera support. Cranes and pedestals are the technology that permits the upward/downward movement of the camera, and those movements—craning and pedestaling—take their names from that technology. Thus, in a crane shot, the camera is swept upward or downward. Additionally, since the crane is mounted on wheels, like a dolly, it can also be moved in all the directions a dolly can. A pedestal shot is one in which the camera is raised or lowered. The crane or pedestal movement is different from the tilt: in a tilt, the tripod head is twisted up or down—as if the camera were nodding—while in craning and pedestaling the entire camera body is moved higher or lower.

Crane shots serve a variety of functions. Typically, a crane down may be used first to establish a location with a wide angle shot from up

high, and then particularize one element of that location by craning down to it. And cranes up are often used to end sequences or programs. Craning up and back from the character at the end of a program, we are literally distanced from him or her at a point when we are about to leave the character's story.

4. Hand-held and Steadicam. A hand-held shot is one that was filmed just as the name implies: with the camera held in the operator's hands instead of being placed on a camera mount. As a consequence, the hand-held shot is noticeably unsteady—especially during quick movements when the camera operator is running. A large percentage of news and sports videotaping is done with hand-held cameras: shots from the field of play in sports shows (e.g., courtside shots at basketball games); documentary footage of automobile crashes; murder suspects leaving a courtroom; and so on.

We might think that hand-held shots would be avoided entirely in the more controlled camera style of fiction television. Even though the majority of camera movement in fictional programs are not hand-held, hand-held shots do serve several narrative functions. First, hand-held work is used to create a documentary feel, to signify "documentariness," within works of fiction. Each episode of *Hill Street Blues* begins with a briefing in the squad room that is entirely hand-held camerawork—signifying the program's "realism." Second, hand-held movement is often used when we are seeing through a character's eyes—as was mentioned above regarding dolly shots. Indeed, hand-held camera is more frequently used in this situation than dollying because hand-held is thought to more closely approximate human movement. After all, we all have legs like a camera operator, not wheels like a dolly.

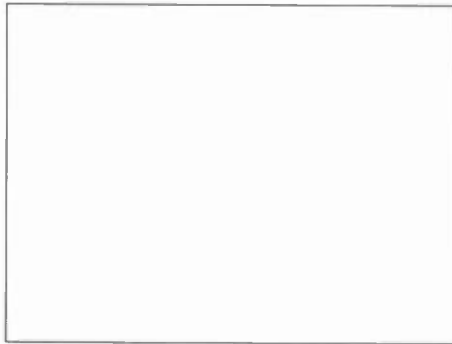
The Steadicam is a registered trademark for a piece of technology that has come to identify a style of camera movement that closely resembles hand-held. The Steadicam is a gyroscopically balanced device that straps to the operator's body.⁴ The resulting motion is as smooth as that produced with a dolly. It is conventionally used in situations where stability is desired but economic and technical practicalities dictate that dolly tracks cannot be laid.

DISTINGUISHING FILM AND VIDEO

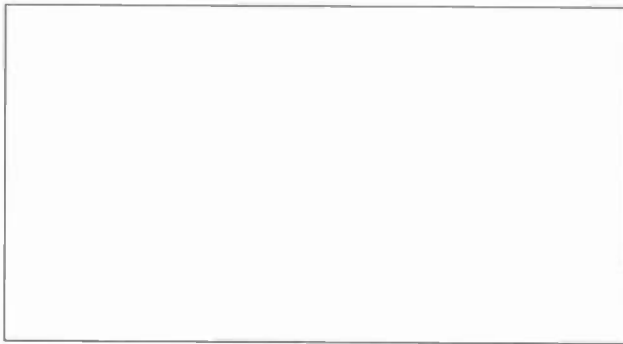
As we have seen, film and video utilize many similar techniques: photographic technology that originated in still photography (focal length, depth of field, etc.) and aesthetic presumptions about framing, height, and movement of the camera. Just as significant as these similarities, however, are the two media's distinguishing characteristics.

*Television's Style:
Image and Sound*

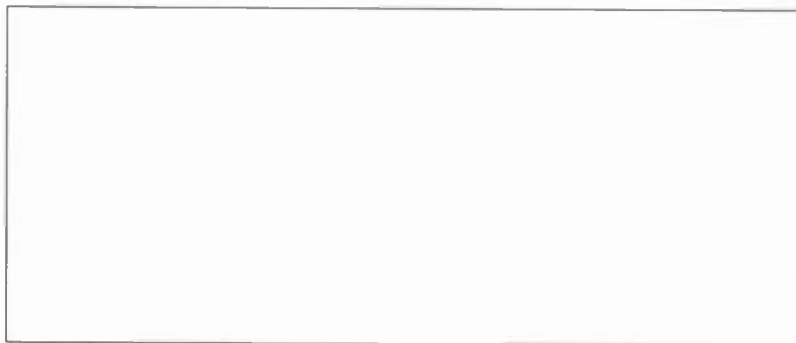
Aspect Ratio



1.33: TV and Pre-1952 Cinema



1.85: Masked Widescreen



2.35: Anamorphic Widescreen

Aspect Ratio

Style and
the Camera:
Videography and
Cinematography

In television, as in pre-1952 cinema, the frame is 4 units wide and 3 units high. A screen 4 feet wide would be 3 feet high; a screen 16 inches wide would be 12 inches high; a screen 40 feet wide would be 30 feet high; and so on. This aspect ratio is thus 4:3, which may be reduced to 1.33:1 or simply 1.33. To date, 1.33 remains the standard in television (although HDTV may change this), but since the mid-1950s the cinema has found a variety of methods to increase the screen's width: Cinerama, CinemaScope, Todd-A-O, VistaVision, Panavision, and so on (Fig. 6.22). Indeed, no theatrical films are currently presented in the old 1.33 ratio. As a result, when theatrical films are shown on television, the video frame cuts off portions of the cinematic image. In other words, when we watch a theatrical movie on television, we see only a part of the image that the viewer in the theater sees. Since theatrical films still form a significant portion of television programming, it is important to understand just how the video frame modifies the film frame.

The elongation of the film frame was originally realized as a response to the perceived threat of television in the decade after World War II. Film producers reasoned that theatrical films must provide viewers with something they cannot get from television. How else could they lure customers away from their television sets? Thus, in the 1950s film studios attempted a variety of technological lures: color, 3-D, stereo sound, and wider screens. Widescreen, its advocates maintained, presented the viewer with a larger and grander and more overwhelming image. (Its detractors claimed that it was only suitable for filming snakes and dachshunds.) These new, wider screens had aspect ratios of 2.35:1 and 2.55:1, almost twice as wide as the standard ratio of 1.33:1. At first, widescreen was used principally for travelogues such as *This Is Cinerama* (1952) and lavish productions on the order of *The Robe* (1953). But by the 1960s widescreen films had become quite commonplace.

The first commonly used widescreen process was based on an anamorphic lens and is best known by its trademark labels: CinemaScope and Panavision.⁵ During the shooting of the film, the anamorphic process uses a special lens that squeezes the image. If we were to look at a frame of the film itself, everyone and everything would appear skinny. When this film is projected the process is reversed; it is projected through an anamorphic lens, which unsqueezes the image and presents a broad, wide view. The 'Scope frame thus achieves an expanded aspect ratio—specifically, a 2.35:1 ratio.

The second, more common, widescreen process is created through masking and does not involve an anamorphic lens while shooting or projecting. Masked widescreen is created during the projection of the

film, not the actual filming. A regular 1.33 frame is used, but horizontal bands across the top and the bottom of the frame are “masked” (blackened). As is evident in Fig. 6.23, the frame within the frame is wider than the old 1.33 ratio. This widescreen frame-within-the-frame—with a ratio of 1.85:1—is enlarged to fill the screen. Thus, masked widescreen (1.85) is not as wide as anamorphic widescreen (2.35), but it is still wider than the pre-1952 film standard (1.33); more important, it is also wider than the current television standard (1.33), as illustrated in Fig. 6.22. Currently, masked widescreen is the predominant format for theatrical films. Approximately 90 percent of contemporary films are presented in the 1.85 aspect ratio.

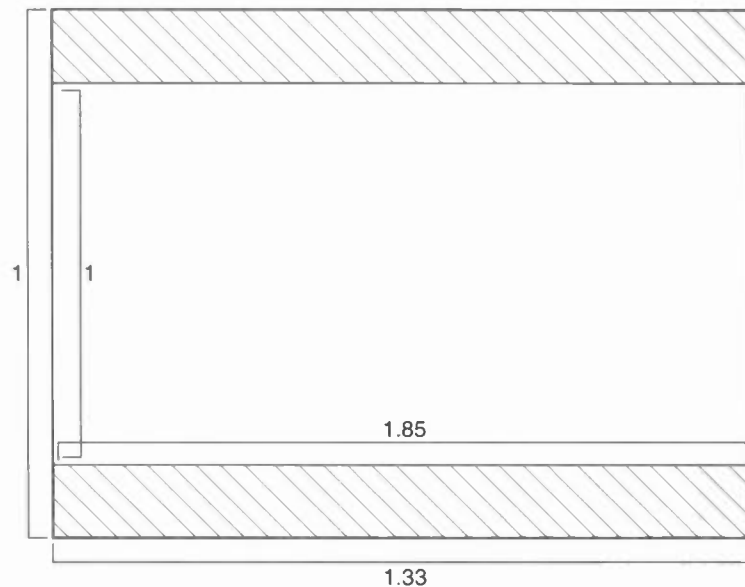
Television has adopted a variety of strategies to present widescreen theatrical movies with a minimum of viewer annoyance. The greatest widescreen challenge to TV's 1.33 ratio is the anamorphic frame's 2.35 width. In other words, television has had to find a way to fit an anamorphic film's extra-wide image into the skinnier television screen. Two processes have emerged to deal with the conversion from 2.35 to 1.33:

1. Letterbox
2. Pan-and-scan or scanning

Letterboxing, the less frequently applied option for converting anamorphic films to videotape, preserves most of the original image,

FIGURE 6.23

Masked Widescreen (1.85) versus Current TV Standard (1.33)



but shrinks it. This process closely resembles widescreen masking for the theater, in that the tops and bottoms of the video frame are blackened. In letterboxing, the anamorphic film frame is reduced and fit into the frame-within-the-television-frame. A small amount of the left and right sides of the anamorphic frame is sacrificed, but it is considerably more similar to the original framing than is a pan-and-scan version. In Figs. 6.24–6.25, from a letterboxed version of *He Said, She Said* (1991), the reader may see how the anamorphic frame from the original film has been shrunk and placed within the television frame. Most of the width of the original composition has been maintained. We can see both Kevin Bacon and Elizabeth Perkins on opposite sides of the frame as she bounces a coffee mug off his head.

FIGURE 6.24**FIGURE 6.25****FIGURE 6.26**

The pan-and-scan process, in contrast, reduces the 2.35 anamorphic frame to television's 1.33 by selecting the most "significant" part of the frame and eliminating the rest. Figs. 6.27 and 6.28 present a pan-and-scan version of the same *He Said, She Said* shot discussed above. Compare the panned-and-scanned Fig. 6.27 with the letterboxed Fig. 6.24. In the pan-and-scan version, Perkins fills most of the frame and Bacon cannot be seen at all—quite a difference from the original film!

In addition, pan-and-scan can affect both camera movement and editing. The pan-and-scan frame need not remain fixed on one portion of the original frame. It can slide or "scan" left or right across the original. For example, in the original *He Said, She Said* shot above, the camera stays still as the coffee mug sails across the frame (Figs. 6.24–6.25). In the pan-and-scan version, however, the pan-and-scan frame quickly scans across the image *with the mug* as it moves through the original frame, thus keeping the mug centered in the pan-and-scan frame. That is, the frame scans from Fig. 6.27 to Fig. 6.28, coming to rest on Bacon as the mug beans him. What was achieved with a stationary camera in the original is now presented through the "movement" of scanning.

Further, in terms of editing, the pan-and-scan version can alter the rhythms of the original edit by cutting between portions of a shot—even if there had been no cutting in the film version. Returning to *He Said, She Said*, we can see how the shot has been edited for the pan-and-scan release. In the letterbox rendering, the mug-tossing shot begins with Bacon talking on the left side of the frame, with Perkins visible on the right (as in Fig. 6.24). For pan-and-scan, the shot starts with Bacon large in the frame and Perkins completely cut out (Fig.

FIGURE 6.27



FIGURE 6.28



6.26). Then, the camera *cuts* to Perkins (Fig. 6.27) as she prepares to pitch the mug. What was one shot in the original has now become two. Thus, the rhythm of the original version's editing is completely altered.

In broadcast television, there is an overriding compulsion to fill the image, to leave nothing blank. The visual voids at the top and bottom of letterboxed films thus do not suit the medium, where almost all anamorphic films are panned-and-scanned. In this fashion, anamorphic films are made to conform to the norms of television. Their images are processed until they fully load the TV screen, regardless of the injury done to the original images.⁶

There have been a few, rare attempts by televisual texts to reshape the frame within the standard 1.33 rectangle. In an offbeat *ym* magazine commercial, for instance, the top and bottom of the frame have been blacked out (Fig. 6.29), as in a letterboxed version of a film. This effect, which can also be observed in some music videos (e.g., Hal Ketchum's *Mama Knows the Highway*; Fig. 6.30), alters the image's aspect ratio without actually changing the dimensions of the picture tube. (Wider picture tubes are, however, planned for high definition television.) Commercials and music videos can also be found that blacken the sides of the image (creating a tall, narrow rectangle), or darken all but a small rectangular or circular portion of the image. Each of these manipulations of the frame leaves blank areas in the image that would not be tolerated in conventional television. The result is an image that looks oddly distinct, that distinguishes itself from "normal" television and thereby captures our attention—which is precisely the effect needed in commercials and music videos.

FIGURE 6.29

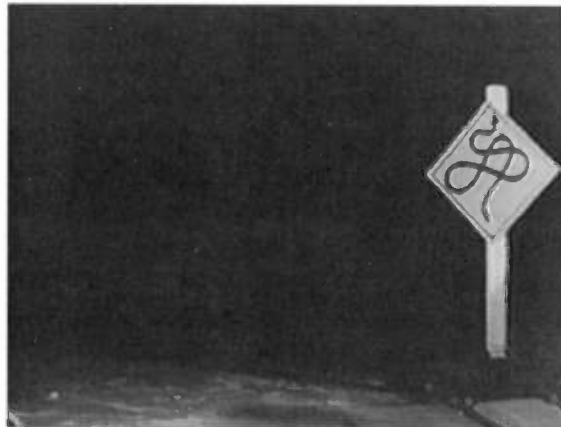


FIGURE 6.30



The differences between film and television aspect ratios are most apparent in anamorphic films, but they are also evident in the transfer of masked widescreen films to videotape. When masked widescreen films—with an aspect ratio of 1.85—make the transition to TV's aspect ratio of 1.33, they lose a little from the edges, but not much because of the technique used to create this form of widescreen. Recall that masked widescreen films use the entire 1.33 frame when shooting, but blacken the tops and bottoms when projected in a theater. On the actual frames of film, however, the areas to be masked are still visible. When transferred to videotape, the TV frame—which is a rounded rectangle—trims all four edges of the film frame. This maintains most of the width of a masked widescreen image and, coincidentally, it also reveals portions of the film image that are masked out in the theater. Normally this has no major effect, for today's cinematographers compose their images with television in mind. Indeed, marked in their cameras' viewfinders is the area that is "safe for television." But sometimes film directors are less cautious about the use of the areas to be masked, in which things such as boom microphones, lights, and the tops of sets may be visible. In *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* (1985), a car is driving past traffic signs at night—or so it appears in the widescreen theatrical film version. In the television version, the bottoms of the traffic signs—hidden in the masking of the original—are visible, and it is revealed that they are actually on wheels (Fig. 6.31). Pee-wee's car is not moving; the signs are rolling toward the camera.

As viewers, we need to be aware of film's and television's differing aspect ratios to understand anomalies such as the wheeled signposts in *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* and *He Said, She Said's* bizarre framing. These odd occurrences are becoming less and less common, however, as the

FIGURE 6.31

film and television industries become more and more intertwined. Many widescreen films—both anamorphic and masked—are now composed with television's aspect ratio in mind. For this reason, even widescreen films tend to position the actors in the center of the frame—for fear of losing them when the film is transferred to videotape. Thus, the technological and economic necessities of converting widescreen film images to television images generate aesthetic results in the way the image finally appears on TV.

Image Quality: Definition

The more clearly objects in an image appear or are defined, the higher that image's definition. Film and video have different levels of definition. To understand the differences between the two media, we must consider some of the technological bases of both film and video.

Definition in film is primarily determined by the size of the grain of the film stock, the specific type of film. The grains are the silver halide crystals that swim around in the chemical soup, or emulsion, that is attached to the celluloid backing, or base, of a piece of film. In fine-grain film stocks the grain is smaller, less noticeable, and the definition is higher. Just how noticeable a film stock's grain is depends principally upon two factors.

First, film stocks that are very sensitive to light and thus may be used in dark, low-light situations are grainier than those that are less sensitive to light. These kinds of film stocks are often used in documentary shooting, for example, where the light level cannot always be controlled.

Second, smaller format film stocks are grainier than larger format stocks. (Format here refers to film width and is measured in millimeters.) Thus, of the three most common film formats—super-8, 16mm and 35mm—the largest also has the finest grain, the highest definition. We might think therefore that 35mm's high definition would mean that it is the only film stock used in production for television. This has not been the case. Both economic and aesthetic factors have created specific niches for each of the formats. Inexpensive super-8 (and its immediate predecessor, "regular" 8mm) was the size of choice for home movie makers for over three decades, until the 1980s when low-cost videotape cameras virtually destroyed the super-8 market. 16mm film is used for documentary work and low-budget films. And 35mm film dominates filmmaking for theatrical movies, made-for-television movies, prime-time television programs, national commercials, and music videos. Super-8 and 16mm—with their noticeably higher grain levels—are still used within 35mm programs to achieve particular effects. For example, the fuzzy, high-grain images of a 1960s family that are used in the credit sequence for *The Wonder Years* (1988–93) denote

“home movies” and connote nostalgia for a bygone era. (Those scenes have been shot in super-8 or 16mm, while the rest of the program is shot in 35mm.) High grain images—particularly black and white images—are also used to connote “documentariness” in fiction programs and have appeared in many music videos and commercials.

Definition in video is not a factor of graininess, since video images are not composed of chemical crystals or grains. Moreover, although video image quality is defined somewhat by the material used to record that image—as do film stocks in the cinema—it is not exclusively so defined. This is because, unlike film, the video image can exist *without being recorded in any fashion*. Indeed, video images existed long before there was videotape to record them. Film’s existence, in contrast, depends upon an elaborate mechanical-chemical process that fabricates a piece of film which runs through a projector. It cannot exist without that recording medium. In contrast, all that television needs to create an image is a camera to produce an image and a television set to receive it. An immediate image may be instantaneously generated on a video screen, even if it is never recorded on videotape. What this means in terms of understanding image quality is that we may separate the quality of the video image from the quality of the video image *as it appears on videotape*. This distinction would be impossible to make in regards to the cinema because the medium does not exist separate from its presence on a physical strip of film.

At the most basic level, the video image is made up of phosphorescent dots—pixels or phosphors—that are arranged in horizontal lines on the TV screen. An electron gun (three electron guns, in most color TVs) in the rear of the picture tube, or cathode ray tube (CRT), fires an electron beam at these pixels, scanning line by line across the 525 lines of the TV image.⁷ When struck by the beam the pixels glow and thereby create the television image. The pixels in standard U.S. broadcast television are so large that the scan lines are visible to the naked eye—if one should care to sit so close to the TV. Because the video pixels in these scan lines are much larger than the grain in 35mm film stocks, the video image is less clear—has a lower definition—than the 35mm film image (although it is roughly equivalent to the 16mm film image). And, though it may seem somewhat strange, when film images are converted to video signals they still retain a higher degree of definition than images originally shot with a video camera. Thus, filmed images on television are clearer and more sharply defined than video images. What all of this boils down to is that filmed images can hold more visual information than video images.

The superior definition of 35mm film is soon to be challenged by new developments in video. By increasing the number of scan lines in the video image and decreasing the size of the pixels, the video image

may be made much clearer, more highly defined. This is the intent of so-called high-definition television (HDTV), which uses more than twice as many scan lines as the North American standard does—1125 and 525, respectively. Consequently, HDTV's image definition is roughly twice that of conventional broadcast television. The technology for HDTV has existed for several years now, but implementation has been held up mostly by its incompatibility with current systems. For U.S. broadcasters to use HDTV the entire television system would have to be replaced. Nevertheless, HDTV has already found uses in commercials and, on an experimental basis, theatrical movies—areas that would normally have opted for 35mm film. It seems clear that many of the visual differences between film and video are short-lived; but still, these differences do influence the style of television as it exists today.

When the recording of video signals is factored into the image-quality equation, we may see that the different videotape formats can have a marked impact on image definition. As in film, formats in videotape are largely determined by the width of the medium: 8mm, 1/2", 3/4", 1", and 2". Home videographers are most familiar with 1/2" VHS and 8mm videocassette formats. Broadcast news operations use videocassette cameras for location shooting (electronic news gathering [ENG]), but they have larger formats (e.g., 3/4") or different systems (e.g., Betacam) than home camcorders. Studio television programs, such as the ones listed in Table 6.1, are recorded on one- and two-inch formats, which do not use videocassettes at all. Instead, the tape is recorded on machines with reels of videotape.

There are many variables in videotape formats other than width that affect image quality. For this reason, it would be inaccurate to say that the wider the format, the better the image quality and the more expensive the video system. Still, it is obviously true that 2" videotape delivers images of much greater definition than 1/2" tape. The latter finds limited use in broadcast television. Like super-8 film, 1/2" VHS tape is sometimes used in videotaped narrative programs to denote home movie-style videotaping.⁸ And, parallel to 16mm film, the video formats used in television news are sometimes used in videotaped/filmed fiction programs to signify "news style."

Home videotaping formats also make occasional appearances on television news when "amateur" videotapes of news events (tornadoes, earthquakes, police brutality) or surveillance videotapes of crimes are broadcast. The poorer resolution of these tapes—their difference from broadcast-quality tapes—becomes significant in these instances. It marks the tapes as "authentic," as unposed and spontaneous and supposedly a pure piece of the historical world. Regardless of how that footage was obtained, it appears to be part of reality because we consciously or unconsciously link it with other amateur videotapes we

have seen. Thus, the technology (1/2" VHS videotape) creates a visual style (poor resolution images) that carries certain significations based on our association with other videotaped images.

Image Quality: Color and Black and White

There are a few basic color characteristics that are described the same in both video and film: hue, saturation, and brightness. Hue designates a specific color from within the visible spectrum of white light: e.g., red, green, blue. The level of saturation defines a color's purity—how much or little grayness is mixed with the color. Deep, rich, vibrant colors such as those in a brand-new U.S. flag are said to be heavily saturated. They become less saturated as the weatherbeaten flag's colors fade. Saturation is also termed chroma or chrominance in video color. Brightness or luminance in video indicates how bright or dark a color is.

Despite these similarities, video and film take different approaches to creating color images. Video constructs colors by adding them together (additive color). A single phosphor on the TV screen is colored red, green, or blue. The electron gun (or guns) ignite three nearby phosphors and combine their individual colors, thus generating a broad variety of colors. Film, in contrast, is a subtractive color process. As white light from a projector lamp passes through a piece of motion picture film, yellow, magenta (reddish), and cyan (bluish) colors are filtered out of the light. The colors that are not filtered out form the many colors of the spectrum.

Thus, both video and film rely upon three-color systems to generate color images. Different video systems and film stocks balance these three colors in different ways. Some are more sensitive to red, others to blue; some appear more naturalistic under sunlight, others under tungsten light (as in household light bulbs). No video system or film stock captures color exactly as it exists in nature, but this is not necessarily a drawback. Rather, it presents a wide range of color options to the camera operator. Color may be manipulated through the choice of video system and film stock, as well as through lens filters and colored gels on the lights.

In the 1980s, long after television had been a strictly color medium, black-and-white video and film began to be reintroduced. Although black-and-white images are uncommon in narrative programs, they have been used to indicate dream sequences or events that occurred in the past. In these cases, black-and-white's contrast from color has been used to communicate narrative information. It becomes diegetically significant—significant in the world the characters inhabit. Black-and-white is also used in nonnarrative television such as commercials and music videos. In these situations the color-less images cannot always be anchored in specific meanings. Yes, there have

been several commercials in which everything is black-and-white except for the product advertised (a rather obvious use of black-and-white); but there are also black-and-white music videos in which the significance of the lack of color is ephemeral or elusive. In any event, black-and-white video/film is still another option that the camera operator may use to affect the viewer.

Special Effects

Special effects are not, strictly speaking, part of the style of the camera. Very few special effects are achieved solely by using a camera. Rather, most are accomplished by other machines transforming the video or film images created by the camera. (Also, special effects are commonly used to generate transitions between shots, as we discuss in Chapter 7.) Still, a few comments on special effects seem in order at this point so that we do not innocently presume that the images we see on television could not have been somehow processed and manipulated.

Film and video take different approaches to special effects creation. For decades, television programs shot on film and movies originally shown in theaters have depended upon an optical printer to generate everything from simple fade outs to the illusion of spaceships attacking the Death Star (in the first *Star Wars* [1977]). The results are known as optical effects. Technicians fabricate optical effects by re-photographing pieces of film and manipulating them in a broad variety of ways, but this process is awkward and time-consuming.

Since the 1960s, however, increasingly sophisticated technology has been developed for producing special effects without an optical printer—using video technology, some of which is aided by computers. Today, even theatrical films use video to generate special effects—transferring the video image to film for the end product. Video dominates special effects in both film and television because, economically, video effects are much less expensive than optical effects; and, aesthetically, video effects appear equally plausible.

Among the first electronic effects to be developed for television was keying. In this process a portion of a video image is electronically cut out and another image is placed in that video “hole.” The simplest form of keying is the insertion of letters and numbers into an image, as can be seen in Figs. 5.5 and 5.6. The text in each case—“NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw” and “13 Fran Curry”—has been keyed into the image using a special effects generator. The process is instantaneous. (To achieve the same effect on film with an optical printer would take hours.)

Chroma Key is a special type of keying in which a particular color (blue or green, usually) is subtracted from an image and a new image is inserted in its place. Weather forecasters, for example, stand in front of

FIGURE 6.32

a blue screen, which is transformed into map or radar images. The forecaster in Fig. 6.32 is in a studio gesturing toward a blue screen. The map that appears behind him has been created by a computer and inserted into the image, taking the place of the blue screen.

Keying and similar electronic effects have been surpassed, technologically, by digital video effects (DVE), which are generated by computers. A computer is able to translate the pixels of a video image into a series of numbers (or digits, hence *digital* video effects). Once the image has been digitized it becomes completely malleable. The image can be shrunk, stretched, duplicated, colored, twisted, rotated, and turned on its head. Bits and pieces of older images may be seamlessly patched together, as was done in the Paula Abdul ad for Diet Coke (see Figs.

FIGURE 6.33**FIGURE 6.34**



4.1–4.3). Moreover, one object or person can even be effortlessly transformed into another—as in the so-called morphing process used in Michael Jackson’s *Black or White* video, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), a Miller beer commercial (Figs. 6.33–6.35), and numerous other commercials. The options open to the DVE technician seem virtually limitless.

S U M M A R Y

This chapter has been filled with more technological information—mechanical, electronic, and chemical—than the other chapters. This is because camera style is inevitably described in technological terms—words borrowing from technological roots for their meanings: *dolly shot*, *anamorphic framing*, *telephoto shot*. To discuss television style, then, it becomes necessary to understand television technology. Technology does not exist in a vacuum, however. The use of specific technological inventions—videotape, camera dollies, etc.—depends upon the TV program’s budget and the aesthetic conventions of the time. Moreover, many elements of camera style are not at all determined by technology. Framing and camera height decisions, for example, do not depend upon specific technological devices. Instead, they result from shifting aesthetic conventions.

Technology, economics, and aesthetic convention blend together in the videographer’s, cinematographer’s, and/or director’s manipulation of camera style. The persons responsible for visual style choose initially between video and film, and thereby determine much about the definition and color of the final product. But—regardless of the choice of video or film—focal lengths, depths of field, framings, camera heights, and movements will be selected to maximize narrative, informational,

or commercial effect. Each of these camera-style aspects serves many functions on television, affecting our understanding of a program. As critical viewers, we need to remain alert to the significance of camera-style techniques. We can then understand their function within television and their impact on television's construction of meaning.

FURTHER READINGS

Video and film camera style is discussed in many of the readings suggested at the end of Chapter 5.

Readers interested in the specifics of film camera technology should consult J. Kris Malkiewicz, *Cinematography: A Guide for Film Makers and Film Teachers*, 2nd ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989).

NOTES

¹ In the cinema, deep focus was not used much until the 1940s, when directors such as Orson Welles and cinematographers such as Gregg Toland began incorporating it. In *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), Welles uses deep focus to coordinate simultaneous action on several planes: for example, in *Citizen Kane*, while a young boy's mother and father discuss the boy's future, he (the boy) is visible through a window, playing in the snow in the far background.

² Although some refer to framing solely in terms of camera-to-object distance, it is inaccurate to do so because framing is the result of camera-to-object distance in conjunction with focal length. Focal length determines framing as much as the distance of the camera from the object.

³ To film critic André Bazin, this aspect of the close-up made it the framing least like our perception of reality, where we can pick and choose where and at what we look.

⁴ It can accommodate both film and video cameras; but if film is used, the operator still views the image on a video monitor rather than looking through a viewfinder.

⁵ CinemaScope originated the first popular anamorphic process in the U.S., but today they have been superseded by Panavision.

⁶ Letterboxing is more popular in laserdisc versions of theatrical films than in their videocassette versions.

⁷ The number of scan lines varies in different countries which use different broadcasting systems. Two European formats, for example, use 100 (PAL) and 307 (SECAM) more scan lines than the North American standard does. The U.S. standard was set by the NTSC (National Television Standards Committee) back in 1941.

⁸ More typically, however, filmed programs use videotape in this fashion. The contrast between the filmed image and the videotaped image is more striking than that between 2" videotape and 1/2" tape.

Style and Editing

Editing is at once the most frequently overlooked and the most powerful component of televisual style. We are seldom conscious of a program's arrangement of shots, and yet it is through editing that television producers most directly control our sense of space and time, the medium's building blocks. For many theorists of television, editing is the engine that powers the medium.

At its most basic, editing is deceptively simple. Shot 1 ends. Cut. Shot 2 begins. But in that instantaneous shot-to-shot transition, we make a rather radical shift. We go from looking at one piece of space from one point of view to another piece of space from a different perspective. Perspective and the representation of space suddenly become totally malleable. Time, too, can be equally malleable. Shot 2 need not be from a time following shot 1; it could be from hours or years before. The potential for creative manipulation is obvious.

Within broadcast television, however, editing is not completely free of conventions—far from it. Most television editing is done according to the “rules” of two predominant modes of production: single-camera and multiple-camera. By mode of production we mean an aesthetic style of shooting that often relies upon a particular technology and is governed by certain economic systems. As we have seen before, television forever blends aesthetics, technology, and economics.

Single-camera productions are filmed with just one camera operating at a time. (As noted in Chapter 6, most single-camera work is done in film, not videotape, although the film is often transferred to tape to be edited.) The shots are not taken in the order in which they will appear in the final film, but instead are shot in the sequence that is

most efficient in order to get the production done on time and under budget. Consider, for example, a scene between two characters named Eugene and Lydia, in which shots 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 are of Eugene and shots 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 are of Lydia. The single-camera approach to this scene would be to set up the lighting on Eugene, get the camera positioned, and then shoot the odd-numbered shots one after another. Then Lydia's lighting would be set up and the camera would shoot all the even-numbered shots of her. Later, the shots would be edited into their proper order.

Multiple-camera productions have two or more cameras trained on the set while the scene is acted out. In our hypothetical ten-shot scene, one camera would be pointed at Eugene while the other would simultaneously be pointed at Lydia. The scene could be edited while it transpires or it could be cut later, depending on time constraints. Sequences in daily soap operas and game shows tend to be edited while they are shot, but weekly sitcoms are generally edited after shooting.

These modes of production are more than just a matter of how many cameras the cinematographer/videographer brings to the set. They define two distinct approaches, whose differences cut through

- Pre-production—the written planning for the shoot
- Production—the shoot itself
- Post-production—everything afterward

And yet, both modes rely upon similar principles of editing.

Historically, the single-camera mode of production came first. It developed initially in the cinema and has remained the preeminent way of making theatrical motion pictures. On television, it is the main mode used to create prime-time dramas, made-for-television movies, music videos, and nationally telecast commercials. As it is also the site for the development of most editing principles, we will begin our discussion of editing there. Subsequently we will consider the multiple-camera mode of production, which is virtually unique to television and is only rarely used in theatrical films. Sitcoms, soap operas, game shows, sports programs, and newscasts are shot using several cameras at once. Although multiple-camera shooting has developed its own conventions, its underlying premises are still rooted in certain single-camera conceptualizations of how space and time should be represented on television.

SINGLE-CAMERA MODE OF PRODUCTION

Initially it might seem that single-camera production is a cumbersome, lengthy, and expensive way to create television images, and that television producers would shy away from it for those reasons. But

television is not a machine driven solely by the profit motive. Just as we must be cautious of technological determinism (i.e., that television producers will use new technology as it becomes available), we must also be wary of slipping into an economic determinism. That is, we must avoid the mistaken belief that television producers' aesthetic decisions and technological choices will *always* be determined by economic imperatives. In a study of how and why the Hollywood film industry adopted the single-camera mode of production, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson contend that technological change has three basic explanations:

1. Production efficiency—does this innovation allow films to be made more quickly or more cheaply?

2. Product differentiation—does this innovation help distinguish this film from other, similar films, and thus make it more attractive to the consumer?

3. Standards of quality—does this innovation fit a conventionalized aesthetic sense of how the medium should “evolve”? Does it adhere to a specific sense of “progress” or improvement?¹

Although single-camera production is less efficient than multiple-camera, it compensates for its inefficiency by providing greater product differentiation and adhering to conventionalized aesthetic standards. Because single-camera mode offers more control over the image and the editing, it allows directors to maximize the impact of every single image. Consequently, it is the mode of choice for short televisual pieces such as commercials and music videos, which rely upon their visuals to communicate as powerfully as possible. Commercials in particular need a distinctive style to distinguish them from surrounding messages that compete for our attention.

Stages of Production

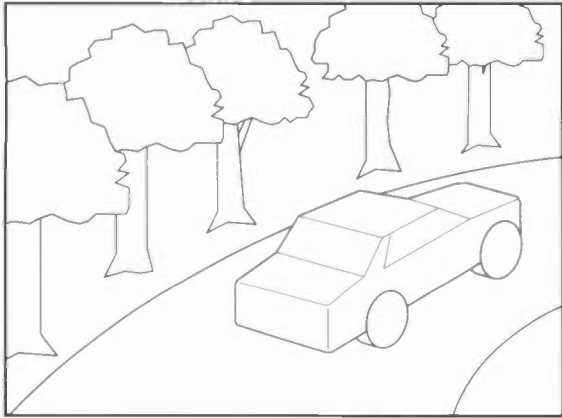
Pre-production To make single-camera production economically feasible, there must be extensive pre-production planning. Chance events and improvisation are expensive distractions in a single-camera production. The planning of any production—whether a made-for-TV movie or a Pepsi commercial—begins with a script. Actually, there are several increasingly detailed stages of scripting:

- Treatment—a basic outline
- Screenplay—a scene-by-scene description of the action, including dialogue
- Shooting script—a *shot-by-shot* description of each scene
- Storyboard—small drawings of individual shots (Fig. 7.1)

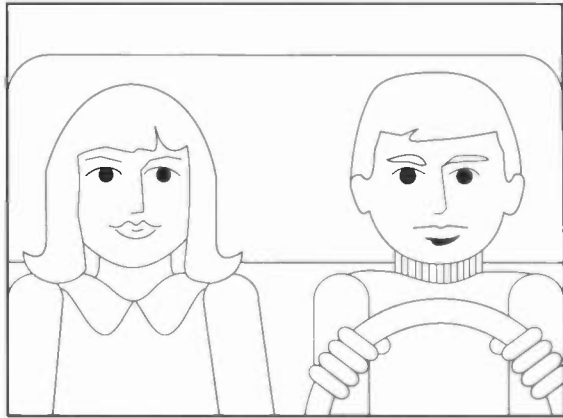
For our purposes it is not important to go into the differences among these written planning stages, but it may be helpful to consider the story-

FIGURE 7.1

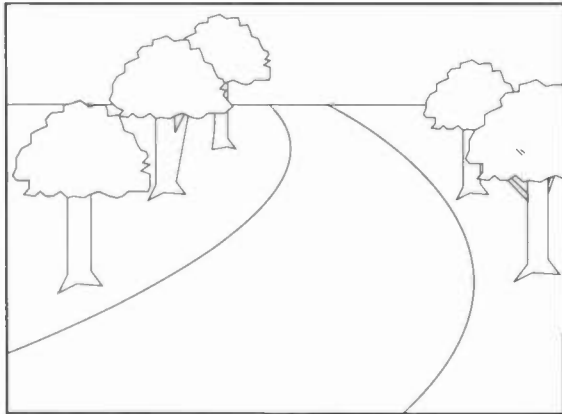
A Storyboard for a Hypothetical Scene



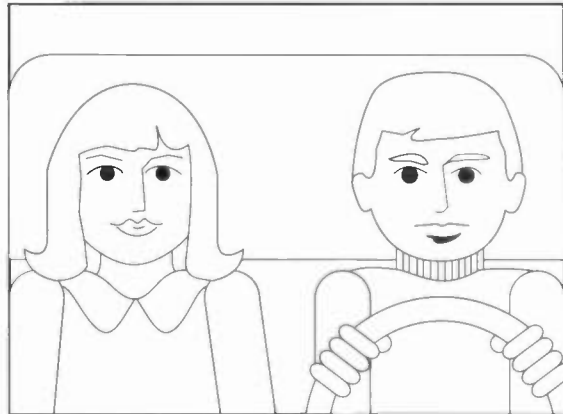
1. Car speeds recklessly down a tree-lined road.



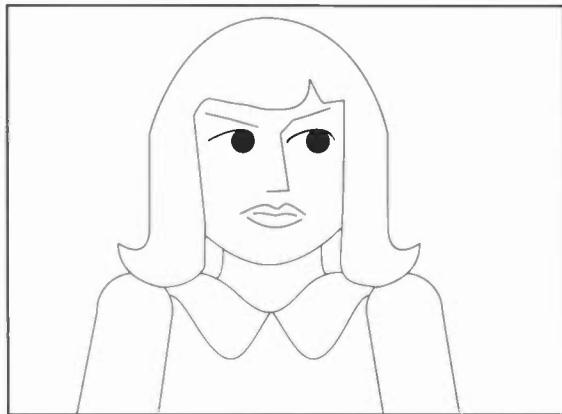
2. Woman and man in front seat. He drives.



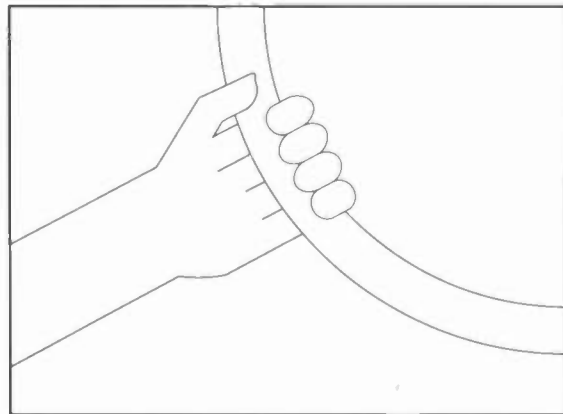
3. The road; his point-of-view.



4. Front seat, same scene as in #2.



5. Woman looks toward man.



6. Her hand reaches for wheel.

board, which consists of drawings of images for each shot (with more than one image for complicated shots). Storyboards indicate the precision with which some directors conceptualize their visual design ahead of time. Alfred Hitchcock, for example, was well known for devising elaborate storyboards. For him, the filmmaking process itself was simply a matter of creating those images on film. Commercials and music videos are also heavily storyboarded. Each frame is carefully plotted into a particular aesthetic, informational, or commercial system.

Production A single film camera is used on the set and the shots are done out of order. (Most narrative single-camera productions, as well as many music videos and most nationally broadcast commercials, are shot with *film*, not video, cameras; see Chapter 6.) Actors typically rehearse their scenes in entirety, but the filming is disjointed and filled with stops and starts. Because the final product is assembled from all these fragments, a continuity person must keep track of all the details from one shot to the next—e.g., in which hand the actor was holding a cigarette and how far down the cigarette had burned. Nonetheless, small errors do sneak through, illustrating just how disjointed the whole process is. For instance, in Fig. 7.5, a frame enlargement from a *Northern Exposure* (1990–) scene that is analyzed below, a dishrag is on actor Janine Turner’s shoulder. At the very beginning of the next shot, Fig. 7.8, the dishrag has disappeared.

The “production” stage of making television is under the immediate control of the director. He or she chooses the camera positions, coaches the actors, and approves the *mise-en-scene*. Most television directors do not write the scripts they direct (which is done in pre-production), and most do not have control over the editing (post-production). However, the actual filming/videotaping process is their direct responsibility.

Post-production The task of the technicians in post-production is to form the disjointed fragments into a unified whole. (The exposed film may be cut together on film editing equipment, or, as is becoming more and more common, the film may be transferred to videotape for editing.) Ideally the parts will fit together so well that we will not even notice the seams joining them. At this point in narrative television production, the sound editor and musical director are called upon to further smooth over the cuts between shots with music, dubbed-in dialogue, and sound effects (see Chapter 8). Of course, in music videos and many commercials the music provides the piece’s main unifying force and is developed well before the visuals. Indeed, the music determines the visuals, not vice versa, and becomes part of the pre-production planning.

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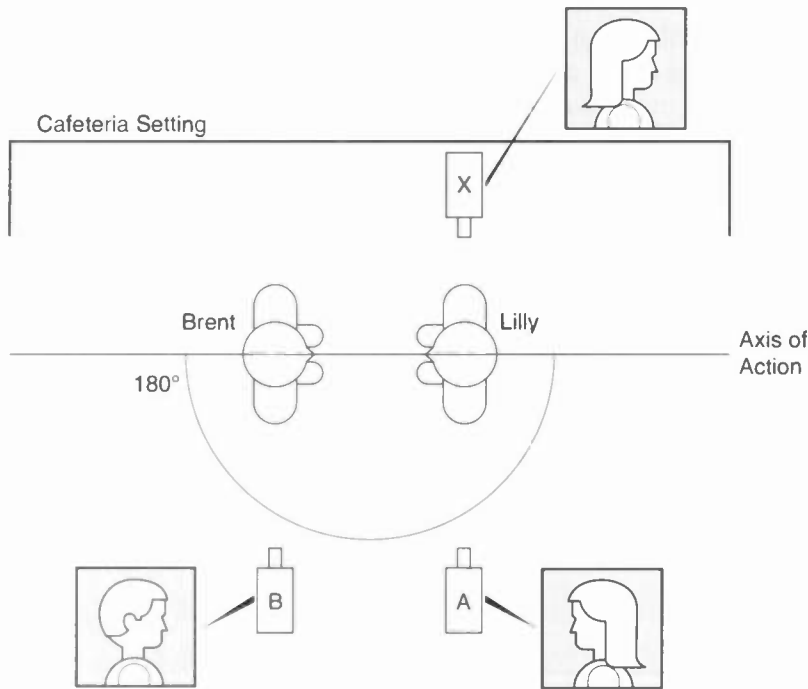
In Chapter 2 we discussed Hollywood classicism as the major narrative system in theatrical film. Accompanying this narrative structure is a particular approach to editing that has come to be known as continuity editing. It operates to create a continuity of space and time out of the fragments of scenes that are contained in individual shots. It is also known as invisible editing because it does not call attention to itself. Cuts are not noticeable because the shots are arranged in an order that effectively supports the progression of the story. If the editing functions correctly, we concentrate on the story and don't notice the technique that is used to construct it. Thus, the editing is done according to the logic of the narrative.

There are many ways to edit a story, but Hollywood classicism evolved a set of conventions that constitute the continuity system. The continuity editing system matches classicism's narrative coherence (discussed in Chapter 2) with continuities of space and time. Shots are arranged so that the spectator always has a clear sense of where the characters are and when the shot is happening—excepting narratives that begin ambiguously and clarify the “where” and “when” later (e.g., murder mysteries). This spatial and temporal coherence is particularly crucial in individual scenes of a movie.

A scene is the smallest piece of the narrative action. Usually it takes place in one location (continuous space), at one particular time (continuous time). When the location and/or time frame change, the scene is customarily over and a new one begins. To best understand the continuity system, we will examine how it constructs spatial and temporal continuity within individual scenes. How these scenes then fit together with one another in a narrative structure is discussed in Chapter 2.

Spatial Continuity In the classical scene the space is oriented around an axis of action. Fig. 7.2 is an overhead view of a rudimentary two-character scene. Let's say that the action of this scene is Brent and Lilly talking to one another in a cafeteria. The axis or line of action, then, runs through the two of them. The continuity system dictates that cameras remain on one side of that axis. Note the arc in Fig. 7.2 that defines the area in which the camera may be placed. If you recall your high school geometry, you'll recognize that this arc describes 180°. Since the cameras may be positioned only within the 180° arc, this editing principle has come to be known as the *180° rule*.

The 180° rule helps preserve spatial continuity because it ensures that there will be a similar background behind the actors while cutting from one to the other. The cafeteria setting that is behind Brent and Lilly recurs from shot to shot and helps confirm our sense of the space



of the room. A shot from the other side of the axis (position X) would reveal a portion of the cafeteria that had not been seen before, and thus might contain spatial surprises or cause disorientation.

More important than similar backgrounds, however, is the way in which the 180° rule maintains screen direction. In the classical system, the conventional wisdom is that if a character is looking or moving to the right of the screen in shot 1, then he or she should be looking or moving in the same direction in shot 2. To cut from camera A to camera X (see Fig. 7.2) would break the 180° rule and violate screen direction. In a shot from camera A, Lilly is looking screen left. If the director had cut to a shot of her from position X, Lilly would suddenly be looking screen *right*. Even though the actor herself had not changed position, the change in camera angle would make her *seem* to have changed direction. This is further illustrated by camera position B. A cut from Brent (camera B) to Lilly from the hypothetical X position would make it appear as if they were both looking to the right, instead of toward one another. Breaking the 180° rule would confuse the spatial relationship between these two characters.

Maintaining screen direction is also important to action scenes filmed outdoors. If the director is not careful about screen direction, he or she will wind up with car chases where the vehicles appear to be moving *toward* each other rather than following. And antagonists in confrontational scenes might appear to be running in the same direction rather than challenging one another.

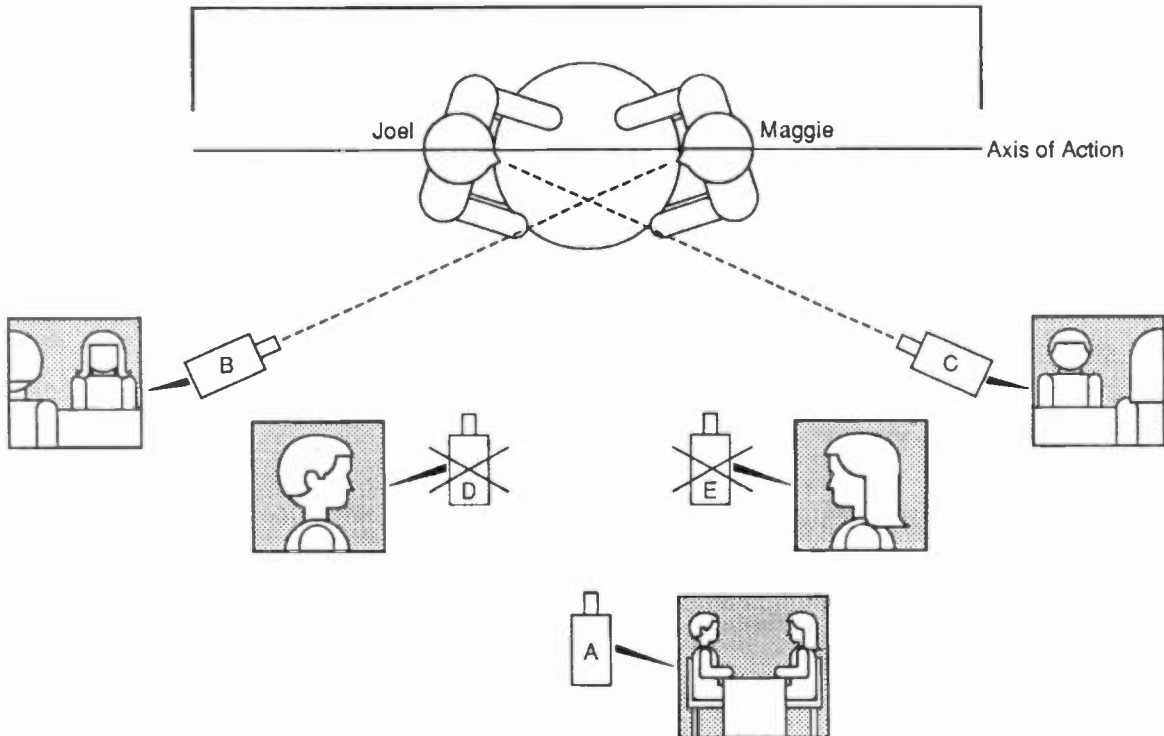
There are, of course, ways of bending or getting around the 180° rule, but the basic principle of preserving screen direction remains fundamental to the classical construction of space. For this reason, the continuity system is also known as the 180° system.

Built upon the 180° rule are a set of conventions governing the editing of a scene. Although these conventions were more strictly adhered to in theatrical film during the 1930s and 1940s than they are on television today, there are several that still persist. Some of the most prevalent include:

- The establishing shot
- The shot-counter shot editing pattern

FIGURE 7.3

Shot-Counter Shot



- The re-establishing shot
- The match cut—including the match-on-action and the eyeline match
- The prohibition against the jump cut

This may best be illustrated by breaking down a simple scene into individual shots. In Fig. 7.3, the basic camera positions of a *Northern Exposure* scene are diagrammed.

The first shot of a classical scene is typically a long shot that shows the entire area and the characters in it, as in the long shot of Maggie and Joel in Fig. 7.5 (camera position A), preceded by an exterior shot of her cabin (Fig. 7.4). This establishing shot introduces the space and the narrative components of the scene: Maggie, Joel, her cabin, a dinner cooked by her. In a sense, the establishing shot repeats the exposition of the narrative, presenting specific characters to us once again. If the establishing shot is from a very great distance, it may be followed by another establishing shot that shows the characters clearly in a medium shot or medium long shot.

From there the scene typically develops some sort of alternating pattern, especially if it is a conversation scene between two persons. Thus, shots of Maggie are alternated with shots of Joel, depending on who is speaking or what their narrative importance is at a particular point (camera positions B and C, Figs. 7.8–7.24). Note that once again the 180° rule is adhered to, as the cameras remain on one side of the axis of action. Note also that the angles of positions B and C crisscross each other, rather than being aimed at Joel and Maggie from positions D or E. These latter two positions do not violate the 180° rule, but positions B and C are preferred in the continuity system for two reasons. First, these angles show more of the characters' faces, giving us a

FIGURE 7.4



FIGURE 7.5



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FIGURE 7.6



FIGURE 7.7



FIGURE 7.8



FIGURE 7.9



three-quarter view rather than a profile. We look into their faces without looking directly into their eyes and breaking the taboo against actors looking into the camera lens and at the viewer. Second, since we see Joel's shoulder in Maggie's shot (Fig. 7.8) and vice versa (Fig. 7.9), the space that the two share is reconfirmed. We know where Maggie is in relationship to Joel and where he is in relationship to her.

Since shots such as C in Fig. 7.3 are said to be the counter or reverse angle of shots such as B, this editing convention goes by the name *shot-counter shot* or *shot-reverse shot*.

Once *shot-counter shot* has been used to detail the action of a scene, there is often a cut back to a longer view of the space. This *re-establishing shot* shows us once again which characters are involved and where they are located. It may also be used as a transitional device, showing us a broader area so that the characters may move into it or another character may join them. Often it is immediately followed by another series of *shots-reverse shots*.

The *Northern Exposure* scene does not contain this type of *re-establishing shot*, but provides a variation of it. After a series of fifteen shots in fairly tight close-up (framed as in Figs. 7.10 and 7.11), the camera cuts back to a *medium* close-up (Fig. 7.14) as the tone of Joel and Maggie's conversation shifts. The scene is then played at medium close-up for seven shots (Figs. 7.14–7.20), as Joel and Maggie drift apart emotionally. Just when Maggie is most disenchanted with Joel (Fig. 7.21), he compliments her and their intimacy is regained. This is marked in the framing with a tighter shot of Joel (Fig. 7.22), as he raises his glass to toast her. She reciprocates his intimacy and is also framed tighter (Fig. 7.23). After one more close-up of Joel (Fig. 7.24), the camera cuts to the original medium shot of the two of them (Fig.

FIGURE 7.10**FIGURE 7.11**

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FIGURE 7.12



FIGURE 7.13



FIGURE 7.14



FIGURE 7.15



7.25, cf. Fig. 7.5), which tracks back and out the window (Fig. 7.26). Thus the framing has gone from medium shot to medium close-up to close-up, coming closer to the characters as the scene intensifies. But it does not remain at close-up. The camera cuts back to medium close-up and then returns to close-up before ending the scene with a track backward from a medium shot. The key to any classically edited scene is variation, closer and farther as the narrative logic dictates.

Two other editing devices are among those used to maintain space in the continuity system: the match cut and the point-of-view or subjective shot.

In a match cut, the space and time of one shot fits that of the preceding shot. One shot “matches” the next and thereby makes the editing less noticeable. A jump cut, in contrast, results in a disruptive gap in space and/or time, so that something seems to be missing. Jump cuts were regarded as mistakes in classical editing, but they were made fashionable in the 1960s films of Jean-Luc Godard and other European directors. Today, jump cuts similar to this are quite common in music videos and commercials, and even find their way into more mainstream narrative productions. *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993–) is peppered with them (Figs. 7.29 and 7.30, which are taken from two shots that were edited together). But then, *Homicide* is not a conventionally edited show. In most narrative television programs, match cuts remain the norm and jump cuts are generally prohibited.

Matching may be achieved in several ways. Two of the most common are the match on action and the eyeline match.

In a match-on-action cut, an activity is continued from one shot to the next. At the end of shot 2 in the *Northern Exposure* scene, Maggie begins to sit down (Fig. 7.6); at the start of the next shot she contin-

FIGURE 7.16



FIGURE 7.17



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FIGURE 7.18



FIGURE 7.19



FIGURE 7.20



FIGURE 7.21



ues that movement (Fig. 7.7). The editor matches the action from one shot to the next, placing the cut in the midst of it. This, in effect, conceals the cut because we are drawn from one shot to the next by the action. We concentrate on Maggie's movement, and the cut becomes "invisible."

An eyeline match begins with a character looking in a direction that is motivated by the narrative. For instance, in *L.A. Law* the boardroom scenes are edited based on the looks of the characters. Jonathan looks in a specific direction (Fig. 7.31) and the editor uses that look as a signal to cut to Leland (Fig. 7.32), toward whom Jonathan had glanced. Jonathan's *eyeline* provides the motivation for the cut and impels the viewer toward the new space. In an eyeline match such as this, the second shot is *not* from the perspective of the person who is looking, but rather merely shows the area of the room in the eyeline's general direction. The shot of Leland is from a camera position in the middle of the table, not from the chair where Jonathan was sitting, even though his glance cued the shot of Leland.

A shot made when the camera "looks" from a character's perspective is known as a point-of-view shot. A point-of-view shot is a type of framing in which the camera is positioned physically close to a character's perspective. The shots of Joel and Maggie in Figs. 7.14–7.20, for example, are all point-of-view shots. In each, we see from Joel's or Maggie's point of view. If the camera is positioned as if it were inside the character's head, looking out his or her eyes, then it is known as a subjective shot.² Frequently, point-of-view and subjective shots are incorporated in a simple editing pattern: in shot 1 someone looks and in shot 2 we see what he or she is looking at from his or her perspective. In Fig. 7.33, from another *Northern Exposure* scene, Maggie draws

FIGURE 7.22



FIGURE 7.23



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FIGURE 7.24



FIGURE 7.25



FIGURE 7.26



FIGURE 7.27





Joel's attention to his brother, Jules. Joel turns and looks in the first shot. The camera cuts to a close-up of the brother in shot 2 that is taken from Joel's perspective (Fig. 7.34). Subjective shots such as this are very similar to eyeline matches, but the eyeline cut does not go to a shot that is the character's perspective.

Sample Decoupage The best way to understand editing is to take a scene and work backward toward the shooting script, thereby deconstructing the scene. The process of breaking down a scene into its constituent parts is known as decoupage, the French word for cutting things apart.

FIGURE 7.29**FIGURE 7.30**

In our discussion of *Northern Exposure* we have created a sample decoupage. You may want to perform a similar exercise with a videotape of a short scene of your own choosing. Watch the tape several times with the sound turned off. Try to diagram the set and each of the camera positions from a bird's-eye view. Draw a shot-by-shot storyboard of the scene. Ask yourself these questions:

1. How is the scene's space, the area in which the action takes place, introduced to the viewer? Does an establishing shot occur at the start of the scene (or later in it)?

2. What is the narrative purpose or function of each shot? What does each shot communicate to the viewer about the story?

3. Why was each shot taken from the camera position that it was? Do these angles adhere to the 180° rule? Is screen direction maintained? If not, why is the viewer not disoriented? Or if the space is ambiguous, what narrative purpose does that serve?

4. If the characters move around, how does the editing (or camera movement) create transitions from one area to another?

5. Is an alternating editing pattern used? Is shot-counter shot used?

6. How does the camera relate to the character's perspective? Are there point-of-view or subjective shots? If so, how are those shots cued or marked? That is, what tells us that they are subjective or point-of-view shots?

7. Is match-on-action used? Are there jump cuts?

8. How does the last shot of the scene bring it to a conclusion?

9. In sum, how does the organization of space by editing support the narrative?

FIGURE 7.31



FIGURE 7.32



Temporal Continuity Within individual scenes, story time and screen time are often the same. Five minutes of story usually takes five minutes on screen. Time is continuous. Shot 2 is presumed to instantaneously follow shot 1. Transitions from one scene to the next, however, need not be continuous. If the story time of one scene always immediately followed that of another's, then screen time would always be exactly the same as story time. A story that lasted two days would take two days to watch on the screen. Obviously, story time and screen time are seldom equivalent on television. The latter is most commonly much shorter than the former. There are many gaps, or ellipses, in screen time. In addition, screen time may not be in the same chronological order as story time. Through flashbacks, for example, an action from the story past is presented in the screen present. So, both time's *duration* and its *order* may be manipulated in the transition from one scene to the next.

To shorten story time or change its order without confusing the viewer, classical editing has developed a collection of scene-to-scene transitions that break the continuity of time in conventionalized ways, thus avoiding viewer disorientation. These transitions are marked by simple special effects that are used instead of a regular cut.

1. The fade. A fade-out gradually darkens the image until the screen is black; a fade-in starts in black and gradually illuminates the image. The fade-out of one scene and fade-in to the next is often used to mark a substantial change in time.

2. The dissolve. When one shot dissolves into the next, it means that one shot fades out at the same time the next shot fades in, so that the two images overlap one another briefly. The final shot from the *Northern Exposure* scene above illustrates this. The final shot is a long shot of Joel and Maggie, as seen through the window of her cabin (Fig.

FIGURE 7.33**FIGURE 7.34**

7.26). From there it dissolves to a close-up of Joel's face in his own bed (Fig. 7.28). The two shots both appear on screen for a short period of time, overlapping one another (Fig. 7.27). Here the dissolve serves to mark the transition from Joel's dream state to "reality." Dissolves are more conventionally used to signal a passage in time; and the slower the dissolve, the more time has passed.

3. The wipe. Imagine a windshield wiper moving across the frame. As it moves it wipes one image off the screen and another on to take its place. This is the simplest form of a wipe, but wipes can be done in a huge variety of patterns. Wipes may indicate a change in time, but they are also used for an instantaneous change in space.

In addition to these transitional devices, classical editors also use special effects to indicate flashbacks. In films of the 1930s and 1940s, the image may become blurry or wavy as the story slips into the past (or into a dream). The special effect signals to the viewer, "We're moving into the past now." During the prime of the classical era, changes in time were inevitably clearly marked, and these techniques continue to be used (as is suggested by the dissolve in *Northern Exposure*).

Fades, dissolves, and wipes were part of the stock-in-trade of the film editor during the cinema's classical era, and they are still evident in today's single-camera productions. Historically, however, narrative filmmakers have used these devices less and less. Initially, this was due in large part to the influence of 1960s European filmmakers, who accelerated the pace of their films through jump cuts and ambiguous straight cuts (no special effects) when shifting into the past or into dream states. The jump cuts in Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960) revolutionized classical editing, breaking many of its most fundamental "rules." And Luis Buñuel's films enter and exit dream states and flashbacks without signaling them to the viewer in any way, creating a bizarre, unstable world.

Classical editing is not a static phenomenon. It changes according to technological developments, aesthetic fashions, and economic imperatives. Current fashion favors straight cuts in narrative, single-camera productions, but fades, dissolves, and wipes are still in evidence. Indeed, the fade-out and fade-in are television's favorite transition from narrative segment to commercial break and back. In this case, the fade-out and fade-in signal the transition from one type of television material (fiction) to another (commercial).

Nonnarrative Editing

Not all television material that is shot with one camera tells a story. There are single-camera commercials, music videos, and news segments that do not present a narrative in the conventional sense of the term. They have developed different editing systems for their particu-

lar functions. Some bear the legacy of continuity editing, while others depart from it.

Commercials and Music Video Editing³ First, note that many commercials and music videos actually involve narrative. Many do tell stories—very brief, highly condensed stories. Advertisements for McDonald’s often show characters involved in some sort of rising action that leads to a climactic encounter with a Big Mac. The video for Bruce Springsteen’s “I’m On Fire” casts him as a mechanic repairing a car for a wealthy woman and confronting his desire for her. The editing for these short narratives is appropriately compressed, with some classical components left out. But the principles of continuity persist. The editing still establishes characters in a specific space and guides us through that space through the (somewhat abbreviated) conventions of continuity editing.

But what of the commercials and music videos that do not tell stories? What editing system(s) do they use?

As we discussed in Chapter 4, the principal strategy behind commercials is an expository one. Commercials need to convince us of the importance of a product—or at least the difference between it and other similar products. To achieve product differentiation, the commercial-makers must quickly present the dissimilarities between this product and all the others. This may result in shots that contrast the advertised product with others. Or it may result in a listing of the advertised product’s advantages. Or, finally, the product may be associated with other desirable objects or persons—as when a beer commercial presents images of slender men and women in brief swimwear (none of whom are actually drinking beer because television regulations prohibit it). Thus, the shots in a nonnarrative commercial tend to be organized according to:

- Product contrast
- A categorization of the product’s virtues, and/or
- The association of the product with other objects/humans/values

Music videos, in their own way, are also selling “product” differentiation, for bands need to differentiate themselves from other groups to sell their music. But music video also represses its function as musical advertising, creating the illusion of aesthetic expression for its own sake. This has led to the occasional music video in which the editing is rather abstract. A variety of techniques are used to hold the editing together, to make disparate shots cohere. The main tools that impart coherence to a music video are the musical recording that the video illustrates and the image of the performers themselves. For example, in *Red, Hot, and Blue* (a collection of Cole Porter songs), David Byrne’s video links close-ups of a number of people mouthing the same song lyric. Byrne is among them, but the consistency lies in the images of

one face after another—it doesn't matter whose—singing "Don't Fence Me In." In this video, consistency arises from another, more abstract, property: unlike most television, it was produced in black and white. Another video from the same collection offers a more vivid example: *I've Got You Under My Skin* connects images of performer Neneh Cherry (a dancer in a skintight, leathery body stocking) and a head-on view of a loudspeaker—all in a glistening, high-contrast monochrome, tinted a deep blue. By far, however, the property that lends music videos their visual coherence is movement itself. Many videos exemplify a form of match-on-action, with more accent on the action than on the match. Whether a body, an object, or the camera itself, generally something is moving. In a drama or sitcom, the possible spatial disruption caused by a cut may be smoothed by connecting shots depicting similar movement by the same character. In a video, spatial unity may be less important than temporal continuity. One shot may be entirely different from the next—even if they both depict the same person, the performer may be wearing a costume in one shot and dressed differently in the next—but movement, supported by the continuity of the music, helps bridge the transition.

News Editing Although the in-studio portion of the nightly newscast is shot using multiple cameras, most ENG (Electronic News Gathering) work is done with a single camera. That is, the stories filed by individual reporters are shot in the field with a single video camera. The editing of these stories, or packages (ranging in length from 80 to 105 seconds), follows conventions particular to the way that the news translates events of historical reality into television material (see Chapter 4). The conventional news story contains:

- The reporter's opening lead
- A first sound bite, consisting of a short piece of audio, usually synced to image, that was recorded on the scene: e.g., the mayor's comment on a new zoning regulation, or a bereaved father's sobbing
- The reporter's transition
- A second sound bite, often one that presents an opinion contrasting with that in the first sound bite
- The reporter's concluding stand-up, where he or she stands before a site significant to the story and summarizes it

This editing scheme was inherited, with variations, from print journalism and a specific concept of how information from historical reality should be organized.

The reporter typically begins by piquing our interest, implicitly posing questions about a topic or event. The sound bites provide answers and fill in information. And, to comply with conventional structures of journalistic "balance" (inscribed in official codes of ethics), two sound bites are usually provided. One argues pro, the other con,

especially on controversial issues. The news often structures information in this binary fashion: pro/con, yes/no, left/right, on/off. The reporter then comes to represent the middle ground, with his or her concluding stand-up serving to synthesize the opposing perspectives. Thus, the editing pattern reflects the ideological structure of news reporting (as discussed in Chapter 4).

MULTIPLE-CAMERA MODE OF PRODUCTION

Although a good deal of what we see on television has been produced using single-camera production, it would be wrong to assume that this mode dominates TV in the same way that it dominates theatrical film. The opposite is true. It would be impossible to calculate exactly, but roughly three-quarters of today's television shows are produced using the multiple-camera mode. Of the top ten most popular prime-time shows in the 1992–93 season, only two were shot in single-camera mode (Table 7.1). This is misleading in that the current popularity of sitcoms, most of which are shot in multiple camera, skews the sample. But still, it indicates just how ubiquitous multiple-camera production is. Furthermore, this doesn't even take into consideration non-prime-time programs such as daytime soap operas and late-night talk shows, all of which are also done in multiple-camera. Obviously, multiple-camera production is the norm on broadcast television, as it has been since the days of television's live broadcasts—virtually all of which were also multiple-camera productions (Table 7.2).

It is tempting to assume that since multiple-camera shooting affords the director less control over the image and is less expensive and faster to produce than single-camera, it therefore is a cheap, slipshod imitation of single-camera. This is the hierarchy of style that television producers, critics, and even some viewers themselves presume. In this view, multiple-camera is an inferior, though necessary, mode. However, ranking one mode of production over another is a futile exercise.

TABLE 7.1

Top Ten Prime-Time Shows: 1992–93

All of the following are multiple-camera productions except for *Murder, She Wrote* and *Northern Exposure*, which use single-camera production.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>60 Minutes</i> | 6. <i>Coach</i> |
| 2. <i>Roseanne</i> | 7. <i>NFL Monday Night Football</i> |
| 3. <i>Home Improvement</i> | 8. <i>Cheers</i> |
| 4. <i>Murphy Brown</i> | 9. <i>Full House</i> |
| 5. <i>Murder, She Wrote</i> | 10. <i>Northern Exposure</i> |

*Television's Style:
Image and Sound*

Top Ten Prime-Time Shows: 1950–51

Of the following, all but the Westerns (*The Lone Ranger* and *Hopalong Cassidy*) and *Fireside Theatre* were telecast live using multiple camera technology. (1950–51 was the first season during which the A.C. Nielsen Company rated programs.)

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Texaco Star Theater</i> | 6. <i>Gillette Cavalcade of Sports</i> |
| 2. <i>Fireside Theatre</i> | 7. <i>The Lone Ranger</i> |
| 3. <i>Philco TV Playhouse</i> | 8. <i>Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts</i> |
| 4. <i>Your Show of Shows</i> | 9. <i>Hopalong Cassidy</i> |
| 5. <i>The Colgate Comedy Hour</i> | 10. <i>Mama</i> |

It is more important to discuss the differences between the two and understand how those differences may affect television's production of meaning. In short, how do the different modes of production influence the meanings that TV conveys to the viewer? And what principles of space and time construction do they share?

Stages of Production

Pre-production Narrative programs, such as soap operas and sitcoms, that utilize multiple-camera production start from scripts much as single-camera productions do, but these scripts are less image-oriented and initially indicate no camera directions at all. Sitcom and soap opera scripts consist almost entirely of dialogue, with wide margins so that the director may write in camera directions; a page from a script for *No Business of Yours* (an unproduced sitcom) is shown in Fig. 7.35. Storyboards are seldom, if ever, created for these programs. This type of scripting is emblematic of the emphasis on dialogue in multiple-camera programs. The words come first; the images are tailored to fit them.

Nonnarrative programs (game shows, talk shows, etc.) have even less written preparation. Instead, they rely upon a specific structure and a formalized opening and closing. Although the host may have a list of questions or other prepared material, he or she and the participants are presumed to be speaking in their own voices, rather than the voice of a scriptwriter. This adds to the program's impression of improvisation.

Production A multiple-camera production may be filmed or videotaped or even broadcast live. *Murphy Brown* is filmed; *Roseanne* is videotaped. Some local news programs and *Saturday Night Live* are telecast live. If a program is filmed, the editing and the addition of

NO BUSINESS OF YOURS Revision #3 13.
 Sep 13 1993 (2/J)

(George, Allen, Mr. Franklin)

ACT TWO

SCENE J

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

GEORGE CUTS MR. FRANKLIN'S HAIR. ALLEN ENTERS.

GEORGE

Well, now, what do you know?

Look who's here!

ALLEN

Hi, Mr. Shearer.

GEORGE

(LOUDLY) Mr. Franklin, you
remember Allen Scott? Used
to work summers next door at
the grocery?

MR. FRANKLIN IS STARTLED AWAKE. GEORGE INTER-
PRETS THIS TO BE A NOD.

GEORGE

(CONT., TO ALLEN) Out of
school and everything. Did
you get the graduation present
from Winnie and me?

ALLEN

Sure did. Thanks. I appreciate it.

music and sound effects must necessarily come later, after the film stock has been processed. If a program is videotaped, there are the options of editing later or while it is being recorded live-on-tape. (Obviously, a live program must be edited while it is telecast.) Time constraints play a factor here. Programs that are broadcast daily, such as soap operas and game shows, seldom have the time for extensive editing in post-production. Weekly programs, however, may have that luxury.

The choice of film or videotape is, once again, dependent in part on technology, economics, and aesthetics. Since the technology of videotape was not made available until 1956, there were originally only two choices for a multiple-camera program: either broadcast live and record the broadcast on kinescope or shoot in film.⁴ *I Love Lucy*, among the first multiple-camera *filmed* programs, made the technological choice to use film because of the economic imperative of making it easier and cheaper to syndicate the program after its first run. After the introduction of videotape, this economic incentive no longer held true. Today, producers who shoot film in a multiple-camera setup do so primarily for an aesthetic reason. They use the higher resolution of the film image to distinguish their programs from videotaped ones (see Chapter 6 on film-video visual differences).

Narrative programs that are filmed and those videotaped narrative programs that are edited in post-production follow a similar production procedure. The actors rehearse individual scenes off the set, then continue rehearsing on the set, with the cameras. The director maps out the positions for the actors and the two to four cameras that will record a scene. The camera operators are often given lists of their positions relative to the scene's dialogue. Finally, an audience (if any) is brought into the studio (see Figs. 5.3–5.4).

The episode is performed one scene at a time, with 15- to 20-minute breaks between the scenes—during which, at sitcom filmings/tapings, a comedian keeps the audience amused. One major difference between single-camera and multiple-camera shooting is that, in multiple-camera, the actors always perform the scenes straight through, without interruption, unless a mistake is made. Their performance is not fragmented, as it is in single-camera production. Each scene is filmed or videotaped at least twice and, if a single line or camera position is missed, they may shoot that individual shot in isolation afterwards.

Further, in multiple-camera sitcoms, the scenes are normally filmed or taped in the order in which they will appear in the finished program—in contrast, once again, to single-camera production. This is done largely to help the studio audience follow the story and respond to it appropriately. The audience's laughter and applause is recorded by placing microphones above them. Their applause is manipulated through flashing "applause" signs that channel their response. (This response is augmented in post-production with recorded

laughter and applause. The resulting laugh track is made through a process known popularly as canned laughter, and called sweetening in the industry.)

The entire process of filming or videotaping one episode of a half-hour sitcom takes about three to four hours—if all goes as planned.

Live-on-tape productions, such as soap operas, are similar in their preparation to those edited in post-production, but the recording process differs in a few ways. Once the videotape starts rolling on a live-on-tape production, it seldom stops. Directors use a switcher to change between cameras as the scene is performed. The shots are all planned in advance, but the practice of switching shots is a bit loose. The cuts don't always occur at the conventionally appropriate moment. In addition to the switching/cutting executed concurrently with the actors' performance, the scene's music and sound effects are often laid on at the same time, though they may be fine-tuned later. Sound technicians prepare the appropriate door bells and phone rings and thunderclaps on audiotape and then insert them when called for by the director. All of this heightens the impression that the scene presented is occurring "live" before the cameras, that the cameras just happened to be there to capture this event—hence the term live-on-tape. The resulting performance is quite similar to that in live theater.

In soap operas, individual scenes are not shot like sitcoms, in the order of appearance in the final program. Since soap operas have no studio audience to consider, their scenes are shot in the fashion most efficient for the production. Normally this means that the order is determined by which sets are being used on a particular day. First, all the scenes that appear on one set will be shot—regardless of where they appear in the final program. Next, all the scenes on another set will be done, and so on. This allows the technicians to light and prepare one set at a time, which is faster and cheaper than going back and forth between sets.

As we have seen, narrative programs made with multiple cameras may be either filmed or videotaped and, if taped, may either be switched during the production or edited afterward, in post-production. Nonnarrative programs, however, have fewer production options. Studio news programs, game shows, and talk shows are always broadcast live or shot live-on-tape, and never shot on film. This is because of their need for immediacy (in the news) and/or economic efficiency (in game and talk shows). Participants in the latter do not speak from scripts, they extemporize. And, since these "actors" in non-narrative programs are improvising, the director must also improvise, editing on the fly. This further heightens the illusion of being broadcast live, even though most, if not all such programs, are on videotape.

Post-production In multiple-camera programs, this varies from the minimal touch-ups to full-scale assembly. Live-on-tape productions

are virtually completed before they get to the post-production stage. But programs that have been filmed or videotaped and not switched at the time of taping must be compiled shot by shot. The editor of these programs, like the editor of single-camera productions, must create a continuity out of various discontinuous fragments.

It might appear that sitcoms and the like would have a ready-made continuity, since the scenes are performed without interruption (except to correct mistakes) and the cameras roll throughout. What we must recall, however, is that there are always several takes of each scene. The editor must choose the best version of each individual shot when assembling the final episode. Thus, shot 1 might be from the first take and shot 2 from the second or third. The dialogue is usually the same from one take to the next, but actors' positions and expressions are not. Inevitably, this results in small discontinuities. In one *Murphy Brown* scene, for instance, TV producer Miles argues with his girlfriend Audrey and her former boyfriend, Colin. In one shot, Colin, on the far left of the frame, is holding a sandwich in his right hand (Fig. 7.36). The camera cuts to a reverse angle and instantaneously the sandwich has moved to his left hand (Fig. 7.37). Evidently, the editor selected these two shots from alternative takes of the same scene.

To hide continuity errors from the viewer, the editor of a multiple-camera production relies on editing principles derived from the single-camera 180° editing system (e.g., match cuts, eyeline matches, etc.). Also, the soundtrack that is created in post-production incorporates music, dubbed-in dialogue, sound effects, and laugh tracks (in sitcoms) to further smooth over discontinuities and channel our attention.

FIGURE 7.36**FIGURE 7.37**

Narrative Editing: The Legacy of the Continuity System

It is striking how much multiple-camera editing of narrative scenes resembles that of single-camera editing. In particular, the 180° principle has always dominated the multiple-camera editing of fiction television. This is true in part because of the aesthetic precedent of the theatrical film. But it is also true for the simple, technologically based reason that, to break the 180° rule and place the camera on the “wrong” side of the axis of action (position X in Fig. 7.2) would reveal the other cameras, the technicians, and the bare studio walls. Obviously, violating this aspect of the 180° system is not even an option in television studio production.

However, acceptance of the continuity editing system in multiple-camera production goes beyond maintaining screen direction due to an ad hoc adherence to the 180° rule. It extends to the single-camera mode’s organization of screen space. As you read through the following description of a typical scene development you might refer back to the description of single-camera space above. Note also that the following applies to all narrative programs shot in multiple-camera, whether they are filmed or videotaped (or recorded live-on-tape).

A scene commonly begins by introducing the space and the characters through an establishing shot that is either a long shot of the entire set and actors, or a camera movement that reveals them. On weekly or daily programs, however, establishing shots may be minimized or even eliminated because of the repetitive use of sets and our established familiarity with them. In any event, from there a conventionalized alternating pattern begins—back and forth between two characters. In conversation scenes—the foundation of narrative television—directors rely upon close-ups in shot-counter shot to develop the main narrative action of a scene. After a shot-counter shot series, the scene often cuts to a slightly longer view as a transition to another space or to allow for the entrance of another character. Standard, single-camera devices for motivating space (match on action, eyeline matches, point-of-view shots, etc.) are included in the multiple-camera spatial orientation.

The differences between multiple-camera programs and single-camera ones may not be noticeable to us. But they do occur, and they do inform our experience of television. The main difference between the two modes is how action, especially the physical movement of the actors, is represented. Although multiple-camera shooting arranges space similarly to the space of single-camera productions, the action within that space is represented somewhat differently. In multiple-camera shooting, some action may be missed by the camera and wind up occurring out of sight, off-frame, because the camera cannot control the action to the degree that it does in single-camera shooting. For

example, in one scene from *All My Children* that was shot in multiple-camera, the following two shots occur:

1. Medium close-up Erica, over Adam's shoulder (Fig. 7.38). She pushes him down (Fig. 7.39) and is left standing alone in the frame at the end of the shot (Fig. 7.40).

2. Medium close-up Adam, seated, stationary at the very beginning of the shot (Fig. 7.41).

Here, we do not see Adam fall, as we would if this scene had been shot in single-camera. Multiple-camera editing leaves out "significant" action that single-camera editing would include. Single-camera continuity editing would probably have matched these shots by cutting in the middle of Adam's fall, showing his action fully, and establishing his new position in the chair.

Small visual gaps such as this and other departures from the continuity editing system occur frequently in multiple-camera editing. What significance do they have? They contribute to the programs' illusion of "liveness." They make it seem as if the actors were making it up as they went along and the camera operators were struggling to keep up with their movements, as if the camera operators didn't know where the actors were going to go next. Of course, they do know the actors' approximate positions, but not their exact ones. In single-camera shooting the action is controlled precisely by the camera, bound by the limits of the frame. In multiple-camera shooting that control is subtly undermined. As a result, in their editing, multiple-camera narrative programs (soap operas and sitcoms, principally) come to resemble talk shows and game shows. The visual "looseness" of multiple-camera editing comes to signify "liveness" when compared to the controlled imagery of single-camera productions. The spatial orientation of the two modes is quite similar, but the movement of actors through that space is presented a bit differently.

Nonnarrative Editing: Functional Principles

The nonnarrative programs that are shot with several cameras in a television studio include, principally, game shows, talk shows, and the portions of news programs shot in the studio. (Sports programs and other outdoor events such as parades also use several cameras at once, but that is a specialized use of multiple-camera production.) These programs do not share the need of narrative programs to tell a story, but their approach to space is remarkably similar to that of narrative programs. Typically, their sets are introduced with establishing long shots, which are followed by closer framings and inevitably (in conversation-oriented genres such as talk shows) wind up in shot-counter shot patterns. Game shows also follow this pattern of alternation,

FIGURE 7.38**FIGURE 7.39****FIGURE 7.40****FIGURE 7.41**

crosscutting between the space of the contestants and that of the host. The *mise-en-scène* of nonnarrative programs (discussed in Chapter 5) is quite distinct from narrative settings, but the shot-to-shot organization of that *mise-en-scène* follows principles grounded in the continuity editing system.

S U M M A R Y

In our consideration of editing on television, we have witnessed the pervasiveness of the continuity system. Although originally a method for editing theatrical films, its principles also underpin both of the major modes of production for television: single-camera and multiple-camera.

The continuity system functions, in a sense, to deceive us—to make us believe that the images passing before us comprise one continuous flow, when actually they consist of many disruptions. Or, in other terms, the continuity system constructs a continuity of space and time. Many techniques are used to construct this continuity. The 180° rule maintains our sense of space and screen direction by keeping cameras on one side of an axis of action. Shot-counter shot conventionally develops the action of a scene in alternating close-ups. Match cuts (especially matches-on-action and eyeline matches) and the basic point-of-view editing pattern motivate cuts and help prevent viewer disorientation.

Time on television is not always continuous. Indeed, gaps and ellipses are essential to narrative television if stories that take place over days or months are to be presented in half-hour, hour, or two-hour time slots. Through editing, the duration and order of time may be manipulated. Within the continuity system, however, our understanding of time must always be consistent. We must be guided through any alteration of chronological order. Fades, for instance, are used to signal the passage of time from one scene to the next.

These principles and techniques of the continuity system are created in both single-camera and multiple-camera modes of production. An understanding of the stages of production—pre-production, production, and post-production—helps us see their subtle differences. The key distinction is that single-camera shoots the scene in discontinuous chunks, while multiple-camera (especially live-on-tape productions) allows the scene to be played out in entirety while the cameras “capture” it. Even so, both modes of production must find ways to cope with discontinuity and disruption, and it is here that the continuity system’s principles come into play, regardless of the actual production method used to create the images.

Nonnarrative television is not as closely tied to the continuity system as narrative programs are, yet it does bear the legacy of continuity-

style editing. Establishing shots, shot-counter shot editing patterns, and the like are as evident on talk shows and game shows as they are on narrative programs.

The power of editing, the ability to alter and rearrange space and time, is a component of television that is taken for granted. Its “invisibility” should not blind us, however, to its potency.

FURTHER READINGS

Editing style and mode of production are discussed in many of the readings suggested at the end of Chapter 5.

The evolution of single-camera production is comprehensively described in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema:Television:Video* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) is not as exhaustive, but it does begin the work of analyzing the multiple-camera mode of production. Few other sources make such an attempt.

In the cinema, the principles of editing have long been argued. This stems from the desire to define film in terms of editing, which was at the heart of the very first theories of the cinema. These initial forays into film theory were carried out in the 1920s by filmmakers Eisenstein, Kuleshov, and Pudovkin. See, for example, Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, edited and translated by Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949); Lev Kuleshov, *Kuleshov on Film*, edited and translated by Ronald Levaco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); and V. I. Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, translated by Ivor Montagu (New York: Bonanza, 1949).

Editing has also been a central component of recent debates within film studies over the position of the spectator, as can be seen in Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, edited by Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 286–98; Nick Browne, “The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of *Stagecoach*,” in Rosen, 102–19; and Daniel Dayan, “The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema,” in *Movies and Methods*, edited by Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) reviews this debate.

Ken Dancyger, *The Technique of Film and Video Editing* (Boston: Focal Press, 1993) offers a broad historical and critical overview of film editing that includes a limited section on editing for television.

Despite the obvious impact of editing on television style, television criticism has been slow to articulate its significance. However, this work has been begun in Jeremy G. Butler, “Notes on the Soap Opera

Apparatus: Televisual Style and *As the World Turns*," *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1986):53–70; and the previously cited Herbert Zettl, *Sight Sound Motion*.

Further, Steven E. Browne, *Videotape Editing: A Postproduction Primer*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Focal Press, 1993) approaches television editing from a hands-on perspective—explaining editing principles and the operation of videotape editing machines.

NOTES

¹ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 243–44.

² Many people use *point-of-view* and *subjective* interchangeably. Here, however, we will distinguish between subjective shots from within the head of the character and point-of-view shots that are nearby, but not through the character's eyes.

³ We group music videos together with commercials because (1) music videos are, in essence, commercials for compact discs (CDs) and cassettes, and (2) music videos and commercials have come to resemble one another more and more, especially in their editing.

⁴ Ampex Corporation marketed its Quadruplex ("Quad") videotape system to the broadcast industry in 1956. Programs that were broadcast live before then did have the option of being recorded on motion picture film while they were telecast. In these kinescopes, as they were called, a movie camera filmed directly from a television screen. The result is rather primitive, but this is how live programs such as *The Honeyymooners* were made available for syndication.

Style and Sound

Up to this point our discussion of television style has dealt primarily with visual elements: mise-en-scene, the camera, and editing. But TV is not solely a visual medium. Sound has always been a crucial component of television's style. This is not surprising when we remember that, in economic and technological terms, television's predecessor and closest relation is *radio*—not film, literature, or the theater. Economically, television networks replicated and often grew out of radio networks. Technologically, TV broadcasting has always relied on much of the same equipment as radio broadcasting (microphones, transmitters, etc.). With these close economic and technological ties to radio—a sound-only medium—it is almost inevitable that television's aesthetics would rely heavily on sound. The experience of watching television is equally an experience of listening to it.

Sound's importance to the medium becomes obvious if we perform a simple experiment. Turn the sound off and watch 15 minutes of a program. Then "watch" the next 15 minutes with the sound on, but do not look at the picture. Which 15-minute segment made more sense? Which communicated the most narrative (or other) information? Which had the greatest impact? Typically, sound without image is more self-sufficient than image without sound. Sound affects us and conveys televisual meaning just as much, and possibly more, than the image does. Indeed, so little is communicated in the visuals of some genres—talk shows, game shows, soap operas—that they would cease to exist without sound.

In approaching television sound, we need to understand

1. The different types of televisual sound;

2. The functions that sound serves on television;
3. Sound's basic acoustic properties and how they are rendered through televisual sound technology;
4. The significance of sound to television's structuring of space, time, and narrative.

TYPES OF TELEVISION SOUND

The types of sound that are heard on television can be divided into three main categories:

1. Speech
2. Music
3. Sound effects

In television's more expensive productions, each of these components is given to a separate sound technician to create and shape. That is, one person does speech, one does music, and one does the rest. Each sound category is recorded separately on a different track of a multitrack tape recorder. The width of a piece of tape in a multitrack tape recorder is electronically divided into separate tracks that resemble the lanes of a four- (or more) lane freeway. A distinct soundtrack can be placed in each of these electronic lanes and thereby separated from the other sounds. This allows the sound editor to manipulate individual soundtracks before combining them into the finished, composite soundtrack. The use of multitrack technology and the assignment of labor to the sound technicians indicates how the industry categorizes sound. This will serve as our starting point.

1. Speech. Without doubt, talk is the most conspicuous aspect of television sound. Soap operas thrive on it and talk shows are defined by it. Even sports programs, which one would think would provide enough visual interest to get along without commentary, rely heavily upon discussion of the game. Once, during the 1980s, a network experimented with broadcasting a football game without announcers, providing only the sights and sounds of the game and onscreen statistics. Sports fans were not impressed by this, and it hasn't been tried since. Apparently, television visuals are lost without speech. Sometimes it appears as if the images were superfluous, as if TV were, as one critic put it, a "lava lamp" with sound.

Speech in narrative television most commonly takes the form of dialogue among characters. Dialogue does not typically address us, the viewers. It is as if we were eavesdropping on a conversation. In some comic situations, however, a character (e.g., George Burns, Dobie Gillis, Parker Lewis) will break this convention of the "fourth wall" and speak directly to the camera. Additionally, narration or voice-over, in which a character's or omniscient narrator's voice is heard

over an image, can sometimes speak directly to us, as when the adult Kevin Arnold talks to the viewer about his younger self in *The Wonder Years*. (Note the difference between “narration,” which refers to a voice speaking over an image, and “narrative,” which we use more generally to refer to a story or fiction.)

In contrast, speech in nonnarrative television frequently directly addresses us (see Chapter 4). News anchors look at and speak toward us. Arsenio Hall directs his monologue right at the camera. The announcers in advertisements cajole us directly, imploring us to try their products. Other programs are more ambiguous in the way they address us. Game shows pose questions to the social actors on screen, but these questions are also meant for us so that we can play along. Needless to say, the way that speech is addressed can be quite complicated and even contradictory.

In terms of standard production practice, speech is most often recorded live on the set, during the production phase, rather than during pre-production or post-production (see Chapter 7). This means that speech is usually recorded at the same time as the image, but not always. Post-production sound work can modify the dialogue or, indeed, can even add to it or replace it altogether—as occurs when sound is dubbed.

In dubbing, one voice is substituted for another. This is illustrated in the backstage film *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), where one woman's voice is dubbed in for another's in the movie-within-the-movie.¹ In television, dubbing is conventionally used in several instances. First, when an actor's reading of a line is not considered satisfactory, it may be replaced with an alternative reading by that same actor. Second, if an actor's voice is not considered appropriate to the character it may be replaced by a different actor's. For example, when Andie McDowell played Jane, a British character, in *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* (1984), the producers felt that her natural Louisiana dialect did not suit the role. Subsequently, Glenn Close's voice was dubbed in for all of McDowell's dialogue. Third, dubbing is used in puppetry (e.g., Alf) and animation, as when Nancy Cartwright's voice is used for Bart Simpson's. Fourth and finally, in the rare instances in which foreign-language films or television programs are shown on U.S. television, they are frequently dubbed into English, although they can be subtitled instead of dubbed. (In subtitling, the English translation is printed on the bottom of the screen and the original dialogue is retained.)

2. Music. Music and speech are inseparable on television. Customarily, dialogue will be accompanied by music throughout narrative programs. Indeed, it is the rare line of dialogue that has no music beneath it. And portions of a program—say, a car chase—that have no dialogue will almost always increase the presence of the music. Television is seldom devoid of both music and speech. It is not a quiet medium.

Television music comes in many different genres—from the country tunes of *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979–85), to the rock soundtrack of *Miami Vice*, to the rap music of *In Living Color* (1990–). Televi-

sion absorbs a fairly broad spectrum of popular music, although it seldom presents avant-garde performances, and classical music appears infrequently (and is relegated to its own "highbrow" ghetto on PBS). Until recently, narrative programs did not use much music by well-known popular performers. If a scene required rock music, then studio musicians were used to create the rock sound, rather than using a well-known performer's work. When *WKRP in Cincinnati* (1978–1982) premiered, it was thought to be ground-breaking because it featured music by original performers rather than sound-alikes.

Television's reticence to use popular music is partially an economic decision and partially an aesthetic one. As far as economics goes, using a song that has been copyrighted requires the payment of royalties for its use.² If there is no current copyright on a piece of music, then it is said to be in the public domain, and may be used without charge. This provides an obvious economic motivation to avoid copyrighted music, and encourages producers either to use public domain music or generate original music. One other, principally aesthetic, reason that some TV genres have shied away from popular music in the past is because rock music during the 1950s and 1960s was associated with subversive or countercultural elements. Soap operas and sports programs, for instance, avoided rock music until the 1980s because it was perceived as too decadent for those historically conservative genres. The fact that both sports and soaps now regularly incorporate rock tunes indicates both a change in rock's position in U.S. culture (it has now become mainstream) and a change in these genres themselves—an attempt on their part to attract younger viewers.

Music fits into television's mode of production somewhat differently than does speech. Unlike speech, little music is recorded live on the set during production—excepting, of course, filmings, videotapings, or broadcasts of live musical performances (e.g., the musical segments of *Saturday Night Live* or the Boston Pops broadcasts). Instead, most music is prepared either before the production or after. In music videos, the music is recorded ahead of time (with a few very rare exceptions). The performers then mouth the words to the song while they are filmed or videotaped. This form of synchronization of image to music is known as lip-sync (see Chapter 10 for more on music videos).

Aside from musical productions, however, it is more common to add music to the image later—in post-production—than before shooting begins. Most scenes are shot without music, even ones in which characters are in a situation where music is supposed to be in the background (e.g., a nightclub). Music is laid on later, so that the sound technician can get a clear recording of the dialogue and the director can tightly control the music's impact.

Live-on-tape productions have a fairly unique approach to music. In both narrative (principally soap operas) and nonnarrative programs (talk shows and game shows) that are recorded live-on-tape, the music is inserted while the scene is being videotaped rather than during post-production. In narrative programs, the sound technician

records the theme song and several generic musical themes ahead of time. When the cameras start to roll, he or she inserts the appropriate music when cued by the director—much like a musical cue in the theater. Nonnarrative programs generally follow the same procedure for their theme music. Some nonnarrative programs such as late-night talk shows include a live band (e.g., Branford Marsalis's on *The Tonight Show*) and live performances by guests. The principle remains the same, however. The music is inserted while the program is being videotaped—the only difference being that the music is performed rather than played back on an audiotape player.

3. Sound effects. All the elements of television's sound that are not speech or music fall into the catch-all category of sound effects. This includes gunshots, doorbells, footsteps on the pavement, the crunch of a fist into a jaw, and so on. It also includes the background sound of a room or other space—in other words, the room's **ambient sound**. In live-on-tape productions, most of these sound effects comprise whatever is picked up on the set or inserted by the sound editor during videotaping. But in programs that are edited in post-production, sound effects can be fabricated and manipulated in seemingly infinite ways.

During the actual filming or videotaping, the sound technician will record the background noise and other sound effects elements, but he or she will try, as much as possible, to isolate those sounds from the dialogue. This gives the technician greater flexibility in post-production sound editing. Footsteps may be made louder to increase suspense, or the background sound of a jet chancing to pass by during filming or videotaping may be eliminated. Sound effects, like speech and music, are endlessly malleable.

Commonly, sound effects are created in post-production using the Foley process. Foley artists view a segment of film or videotape in a Foley stage, a sound studio equipped with different floor surfaces (rug, tile, wood); a variety of doors (car doors, screen doors, house doors); and many other sound effects contraptions. While the segment is projected on a screen, the Foley artists recreate the appropriate sounds. When a character walks up to a door, the Foley artist is recorded walking along the studio floor. When the character opens the door, the Foley artist is recorded opening a door in the studio, and so on. Some programs have only occasional Foley work in them, but others, especially complicated miniseries and made-for-TV films, might create all of the sound effects in this manner.

THE PURPOSES OF SOUND ON TELEVISION

Among the many purposes that sound serves on television are four that will concern us here:

- 1.** Capturing viewer attention;
- 2.** Manipulating viewer understanding of the image;

3. Maintaining televisual flow;
4. Maintaining continuity within individual scenes.

Regardless of the production techniques used to create sound, these are the essential functions that it serves on television.

Capturing Viewer Attention The first and perhaps most significant function of television sound is to snare the attention of the viewer. Television, unlike cinema and the theater, exists in an environment of competing distractions. Most of us watch television in a brightly lit room, with the TV set positioned amid a variety of visual stimuli (unlike the darkened room of a theater). While the television is on, conversations continue, the phone rings, a teakettle may start boiling. In sum, television viewing is an inattentive pastime. Our gaze may be riveted to the set for brief, intense intervals, but the overall experience is one of the distracted glance.

In this setting, visuals alone are not captivating enough to grab our attention. Sound is a much more effective stimulus in this regard. This is not just the case of the loud, abrasive commercial demanding our attention. It's also the sports announcer's excited comments and the cheers of the crowd that cause us to look up from folding laundry to see an instant replay; or the soap opera character posing the question, "So, April, are you ready to reveal the true father of your child?" that brings us running back from the kitchen. Sound invokes our attention, cuing us to significant visual action or a major narrative twist.

Manipulating Viewer Understanding The second function sound serves, once our attention is invoked, is to shape our understanding of the image. The sound-image relationship is a complex one, to which we will return several times in this chapter. In the most general terms, this relationship manifests itself in three ways:

1. Sound and image support one another;
2. Sound and image contradict one another;
3. Sound helps to emphasize elements within the image.

Sound and image can support each other in a variety of fashions. For example, Fig. 7.5 is a medium shot of Maggie and Joel at a table laden with food. Her lips are moving. On the soundtrack is a woman's voice, coordinated to the moving lips, and classical music in the background. The viewer presumes that that voice originates from those lips; the acoustic properties (discussed below) of the voice help characterize Maggie and her attitude toward Joel: slightly flirtatious, inquisitive, probing. Classical music plays in the background (probably dubbed in during post-production), signifying a certain romantic potential in this context. In this simple example, sound supports and heightens the impact of the image.

One of the most blunt ways in which television sound underscores the image and directly attempts to affect our response is the laugh track. The laugh track fabricates an audience, and inveigles us into responding as the ersatz audience is responding. Television may be the only medium that includes its implied audience response within its texts themselves. And, in this case, sound is the vehicle by which this response is presented.

Sound does not always reinforce the image, however. Contrasting sound-image would be exemplified if, in the scene between Joel and Maggie above, Michael Jackson's voice accompanied the image of Maggie's moving lips, or funereal music were played over the flirtatious dialogue. Obviously this stark contradiction between sound and image occurs infrequently on television. When sound does contrast with image, it's to make a narrative or editorial point. If audio of George Bush making his 1988 campaign pledge of "Read my lips: No new taxes" were dubbed over an image of him signing the authorization for taxes a couple of years later, the contrasting sound and image would be used for obvious political commentary.

The sound-image relationship need not simply be one of either support or contrast. Often, sound emphasizes part of the image while negating or de-emphasizing other parts. In Fig. 8.1, the first shot in a scene from *The Wonder Years*, Haley sits in a high school cafeteria, eating lunch. In the background are the program's central figure, Kevin, and two friends. Sound is used in this shot to draw our attention from her to Kevin's table at the back of the image, as we hear what they say about her. Although Kevin and the others are in the background, their voices are louder than the ambient sound. It might seem strange, but Haley does not hear their voices even though we do—and we are closer to her than to them. That is, if we were standing where the camera was

FIGURE 8.1



positioned, we could hear Kevin only if Haley could, too. Even though this use of sound is implausible, it would likely not be noticed by most viewers. Why? Because this use of sound fits the narrative logic of the scene; it helps to tell the story of Haley's interaction with Kevin and his friends.

We could imagine other uses of sound in Fig. 8.1. The ticking of the clock on the wall might be heard above everything else, suggesting the rushed nature of high school lunches. The sound of Haley eating might dominate the soundtrack, signifying that she is a glutton. Or, in contrast, an eerie foreboding could be represented by the lunchroom being totally, unnaturally silent. If the soundtrack were filled with sounds of wind howling and hail pelting the ground (off camera), it would direct our attention in another fashion, and spark other meanings: nice weather for werewolves. Each of these uses of sound and silence would move the story in a different direction. Each is an example of how, in subtle ways, our attention and comprehension may be channeled by the sounds accompanying the image.

Maintaining Televisual Flow The third function sound serves on television is the maintenance of television's pulsion, its forward drive. As is discussed in Chapter 1, television pulls us along in a flow of segments leading from one to the next. Sound plays a major role in this segment-to-segment flow.

Audio transitions between scenes parallel the visual transitions described in Chapter 7. As with image, sound may fade out or in—although the two fades are often not quite simultaneous. Image frequently fades out a bit earlier than sound. Additionally, the sound equivalent of a dissolve is the crossfade, in which one sound fades out while the other fades in and the two overlap briefly. Another term for the transition from one sound to another—especially one song to another in music video presentations—is segue (“seg-way”), which may be a crossfade or a fade out/in.

There are several ways in which sound aids televisual flow, working to keep us watching. First, the speech of television announcers and the dialogue of characters are frequently used to pose questions and enigmas to lure us into staying around to see what happens next. Station promotional announcements promise uncommon sights to come, and narrative dialogue frames questions that we may hope to see answered. In either case, speech plays on our curiosity to pull us into the televisual flow.

But speech is not the only sound device that pulls us into the flow. Music is another common hook. Within programs it is especially common for the music not to end at the same time as the scene. Rather, the music continues—if only for a few seconds. This continuity of music helps to soften the disruption inherent in the transition from one

scene to the next. It is seldom used, however, between one program and the next. Here it is more important for television to differentiate slightly between shows, to signal that one show is ending but that another follows immediately.

Audience applause is one final aspect of sound that plays an important role in television transitions. Applause is commonly used as the marker of the end or beginning of a segment. In contrast to its traditional meaning as a sign of audience respect or appreciation or enjoyment, television applause more often simply means: “This is the beginning” or “This is the end.” As everyone knows, studio audiences of sitcoms and talk shows are *told* when to applaud. Moreover, if the actual audience does not provide enough applause, the sound editor can easily add more—sweeten the soundtrack. So, applause and other sound effects are less a sign of respect than they are a sign of televisual transition: openings, closings, passages to or from commercials.

Maintaining Continuity Within Scenes A fourth and final function of sound is its use within each scene to help construct the continuity of space and time. As explained in Chapter 7, each television scene is made up of a variety of shots that are strung together according to the continuity editing system. The main purpose of this continuity system is to smooth over the potential disruptions that are caused by cutting from one shot to another. In this way the space and time of a particular setting and scene are made to appear continuous, even though they may have been filmed or taped out of order. Dialogue, music, and ambient sound all play parts in maintaining this continuity.

Dialogue scenes, especially in single-camera production, are edited so that the cuts do not coincide with vocal pauses or the ends of sentences. (This is less true in live-on-tape productions, which are switched much more approximately.) Instead, the dialogue usually continues across a cut, helping to ease the transition from one shot to the next. In the scene from *Northern Exposure* analyzed in Chapter 7 (Figs. 7.4–7.26), most cuts come in the midst of a phrase—creating, in a sense, a verbal match cut. The phrasing serves as the glue holding the cut together.

Similarly, music and ambient sound unify the shots. The forward movement of a melody helps to propel the story onward. The temporal continuum of the music, its ability to flow through time, overrides the discontinuous time of the editing. Music helps to draw our attention from jump cuts, continuity errors, or other disruptions in the visual track. Ambient sound serves the same function, though even less noticeably. Ambient sound signifies a specific space and time to the viewer. A particular room, for example, has a particular sound associated with it at a particular time. Even slight shifts in that ambient

sound can disrupt our attention by making it appear that the space and/or time has changed. This is why sound technicians will record ambient or wild sound to lay down over shots that were originally silent, or to make consistent the sound behind dialogue that was shot at different times or locations. Consistent background sound, in a sense, certifies that the action took place in the same location at the same time, even though the shots are from different angles and may have been taken hours or days or weeks apart.

Laugh tracks also function in the background to underscore the continuity of a scene. For example, *The Andy Griffith Show*, a single-camera sitcom, incorporated a laugh track even though there was no studio audience. In each episode, the laughter continues across the cuts within a scene and thereby diminishes their disruptive potential. In theory, we don't notice the cut because we are too busy laughing along with the "audience." In addition, multiple-camera programs such as *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* (1968–73) are videotaped in short segments, with a laugh track tying all the segments together in post-production.

ACOUSTIC PROPERTIES AND SOUND TECHNOLOGY

Sound on television appears deceptively simple. This is because the sounds emanating from the TV speaker closely resemble the sounds that surround us in our everyday lives—unlike television's two-dimensional images, which are fundamentally dissimilar from our visual experience of the three-dimensional world. A person's voice on TV is not that different from the voice of someone sharing the living room with you. But a person's image on TV is flat and two-dimensional compared to your 3D viewing companion. The aesthetic techniques and electronic/mechanical technology that are used to create sound are less intrusive than those used to create image. It sometimes seems as if television sound were merely an exact copy of the sounds of reality. This makes television's manipulation of sound even more difficult to detect than its manipulation of image. One aim of this chapter is to alert the reader to the ways that the makers of television shape our perception and our understanding by controlling acoustic properties and sound technology.

General Acoustic Properties

Even though we are concerned here mostly with the differences between television sound and real-life sound, it would be foolish to presume that there are not rudimentary similarities between the two. Any

television sound shares three basic characteristics with the sounds we hear in reality:

1. Loudness, or volume
2. Pitch
3. Timbre (“tam-burr”), or tone

Loudness How loud or soft a sound is plays an obvious role in our perception of it. The more amplified a sound is, the greater its impact. Loudness is used for more than just emphasis in television, however. It can also signify distance, among other things. The louder a sound is, the closer we assume the person or thing causing the sound must be. Further, the variation of loudness can be used for different effects. A sudden loud noise after a quiet segment causes shock or surprise. In contrast, soft sounds after a loud segment can force us to focus our attention to hear what’s going on.

Pitch Pitch is how high or low a sound is. On television, pitch is especially important to the meanings that voices convey (see Chapter 3). For example, higher pitched voices carry conventionalized connotations of femininity, and lower of masculinity. Pitch is significant to the impact of television music as well as its speech. In narrative scenes, higher notes are often used to accompany suspenseful situations, while lower notes can imply an ominous presence. These examples should not be taken proscriptionally (high notes don’t *always* mean suspense), but they do indicate how television conventionalizes pitch to signify meanings and establish atmosphere. As with all stylistic conventions, the meanings associated with pitch shift over time and from culture to culture. They do not mean the same thing to everyone, everywhere for ever and ever.

Timbre Timbre is a term borrowed from music theory. It signifies the particular harmonic mix that gives a note its “color” or tonal quality. A violin has a different tone than a cello. A saxophone’s tone can be distinguished from a piano’s.

The human voice also has timbre, and that tonal quality can be used by actors and directors to convey meaning. A nasal timbre can make a character into an annoying toady. A throaty timbre in a woman can signify a certain androgenous sexuality. In particular contexts, timbre communicates particular meanings.

Specific Acoustic Properties

The sounds that we hear on television are altered as they journey from sound stage to living room. The technology of various audio machines

affects those sounds and provides the sound technician with opportunities to manipulate volume, pitch, and timbre. Use of this technology is guided by aesthetic conventions, by “rules” regulating the function of sound on television.

Digital versus Analog To start, sounds must either pass through microphones (mikes) and other sound equipment or they must be manufactured, using computer-based technology such as synthesizers. Synthesizers are based on the same digital principles as the audio that is recorded on the compact disc or CD. Before digital technology changed our concept of sound recording in the 1980s, audio and videotapes were based on analog principles—which are still the standards for sound electronics in the home. The difference between digital and analog technology is a bit slippery, but with the increasing presence of digital sound (and image, too) in the consumer marketplace it is important to try to grasp the concept.

Anything labeled “digital” is rooted in digits or, more simply, in numbers. Digital sound is simply sound that has been converted into numbers. Computers are in a sense just fancy number manipulators. Once something has been converted into numbers, computers can play around with them in a variety of ways (see the discussion of digital special effects in Chapter 6). A CD is little more than a collection of numbers recorded on plastic that a computer-based machine (a CD player) can convert into sound. More accurately, the CD player converts numbers into electrical impulses, which speakers can convert into sound waves. Analog sound technology, on the other hand, creates an electronic replica of a sound wave on audio or videotape.³ That is, the sound wave is converted into an electronic image that is recorded on a piece of magnetic tape—a ribbon of plastic with a coating on it that is sensitive to magnetic impulses created by electricity. These magnetic impulses are modulated on the tape in a fashion that parallels the sound wave’s modulation.

If you’re still confused, here’s another way to understand the theoretical difference between digital and analog. An analog thermometer is one in which the mercury appears as a line within a tube. When the line gets up to a certain area it signifies “warm.” When it goes farther, it signifies “hot.” There are numbers calibrating the heat, but they aren’t entirely necessary for us because the length of the line represents, in analog fashion, the amount of heat. A digital thermometer, one that just displays numbers without the line, converts the amount of heat into digits. It doesn’t tell us “warm” or “hot”; it only signifies numbers, which we must then convert into a sensation of warmth. In addition, digital information is packaged in discrete units (a single degree); analog exists on an unbroken continuum (the length of a mercury line in a tube).

That, then, is the theoretical difference between analog and digital. But what is the significance of this distinction to television sound?

For the time being, all of the sounds we hear emanating from the (tiny) TV speaker are being played back in analog form.⁴ However, they were not all recorded using analog equipment. These days, more and more sound is being recorded and/or processed digitally. What difference is there to the listener? If you compare the sound of a digital CD player with that of an analog cassette tape player, you'll notice three differences: (1) less background noise (hiss and the like caused by analog recording) on the CD player, and (2) a larger dynamic range (reproducing softer sounds without noise obscuring them and louder sounds without distortion) on the CD player, and (3) a greater frequency response (reproducing a wider range of low-to-high sounds) on the CD player. The problem with television's use of digitally recorded sound is that it is always broadcast in analog, and viewers' TV sound systems are all analog, too. Thus, the digital sound is always filtered through analog systems, and thereby loses much of the digital advantage. Additionally, noise is added in the broadcast process. Consequently, much of the value of digital sound quality is lost on TV.

Perhaps more significant than the digital recording process and its high quality, then, are the abilities of digital technology both to process existing sounds and manufacture new ones. A broad variety of sound effects are now achieved using a digital mixer (a machine that blends sound sources together). Through sound processing, the volume, pitch, and timbre of any recorded sound may be significantly altered. There is virtually no way for the viewer to tell when this sort of subtle manipulation has taken place. It is equally difficult to discern when sound, especially music, has been fabricated digitally. This manufactured music has become popular in live-on-tape productions where a variety of music is needed, particularly for narrative programs such as soap operas.

Just about any type of instrumentation—from lush orchestral sounds to jazz and rock ensembles—can now be digitally created, instantaneously and inexpensively. This has greatly changed the musical sound of many genres. Productions that previously could not afford a full orchestra may now synthesize that sound cheaply. Soap operas, for instance, always used to be accompanied by a lone organ. That organ sound was so identified with the genre that it was a prominent part of soap opera parodies such as “As the Stomach Turns” on *The Carol Burnett Show* (1967–79). Nowadays, however, the soaps have a wide-ranging variety of music, much of which is synthesized digitally. Economics and technology have worked here to change television's aesthetics.

Sound Perspective One of the principal ways in which a sound recording may be manipulated and thus convey different meanings to the viewer is through microphone placement or position. The position

of a microphone, like the position of a camera, sets up a relationship between the viewer and the person or object creating the sound. The point of view that this relationship implies is its sound perspective. If a mike is placed close to someone's lips, then the sound recorded will be an intimate, "close-up" perspective. And if the mike is positioned far away, the sound perspective will be distant, the aural equivalent of a long shot. In a sense, then, mike position "frames" the sound for us, signaling to us how "close" we are to the sound-producing person or object.

In the aesthetics of TV recording, there are four conventional mike positions:

1. Overhead boom (which can also be beneath the actors)
2. Lavalier
3. Hand-held
4. Close-miking

These positions incorporate different types of microphone technology based largely on the direction in which the mike is capable of picking up sound. Omnidirectional mikes pick up sound from all directions equally. (Fig. 8.2). Other mikes are more sensitive to sound coming from certain directions. These unidirectional mikes usually have somewhat heart-shaped pickup patterns, which have come to be labeled *cardioid* and *hypercardioid* (Figs. 8.3–8.4). A cardioid mike's pickup pattern looks like an inverted heart, with most of its sensitivity aimed toward the front. Similarly, hypercardioid mikes emphasize sound from the front, but they allow sound from the rear to be recorded as well. The aesthetics of microphone positioning works with the technology of microphone directionality to determine how sound is picked up.

FIGURE 8.2

Omnidirectional Microphone

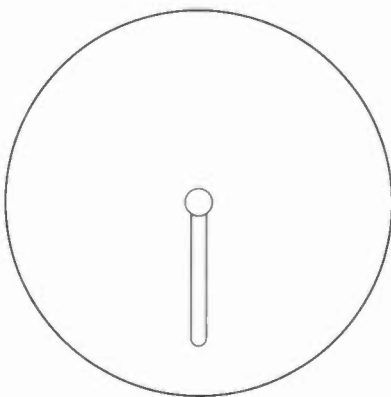


FIGURE 8.3

Cardioid Microphone

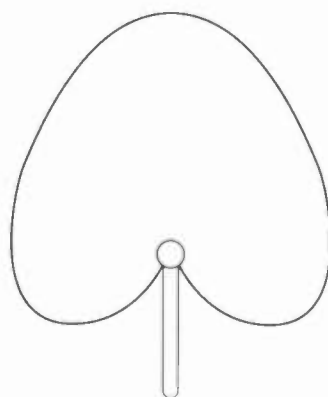
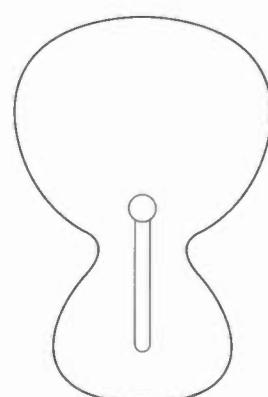


FIGURE 8.4

Hypercardioid Microphone



The overhead boom microphone is held on a long arm that enables the boom operator to position it above the actors' heads, just out of view of the camera. (It may also be placed below the camera frame.) It uses a hypercardioid shotgun mike so that the operator may aim it directly at a specific person and minimize the surrounding ambient sound. Since the mike is three or four feet away from the actors' mouths, the sound perspective is roughly equivalent to the sound we hear when standing near a group of people and engaging in conversation. Boom miking helps position the viewer vis-a-vis the characters or performers. This particular position implies an objective point of view, of being slightly distanced from the characters—or, at least, of not hearing subjectively through a character's mind.

The boom mike position has become the conventionalized norm for most narrative programs, whether in single-camera or multiple-camera production. Moreover, it is the only way that multiple-camera sitcoms and soap operas may be recorded. They are videotaped or filmed straight through, and consequently the mikes must record several persons from one mike position. Thus the economic imperative of shooting these programs live-on-tape results in the technological necessity to use boom mikes, causing the aesthetic consequence of a certain "objective" sound perspective.

The small omnidirectional lavalier microphone is attached to the actor's chest, clipped to his or her clothing with the microphone wire concealed underneath the clothing. Lavalier miking is the norm for news broadcasters in the studio, though not for those out in the field who use a more directional mike to filter competing, incidental sounds. Although closer than boom miking, the lavalier mike is still one or two feet from the broadcaster's mouth. The sound that it picks up is the audio equivalent to the close-up and medium close-up perspectives that typify framing in contemporary news practice.

The hand-held microphone sounds much like the lavalier mike because it is also positioned around chest height, although it may be held higher. Hand-held mikes are used in news and sports field production (e.g., in interviews with athletes) and in talk shows. These cardioid or hypercardioid mikes yield a sound perspective quite similar to the lavalier mike, but, because they are directional microphones, the pickup may be aimed in one direction or another.

Hand-held mikes are never used in narrative programs. Unlike boom and lavalier mikes, the hand-held mike is both visible and obvious to the viewer (the lavalier mike is so small it can be overlooked or mistaken for a brooch or a tieclip). To use it in narrative programs would make evident the technology involved in creating television; it would be like having a camera appear onscreen. This violates conventions of repressing television devices in narrative programs. To see a mike would make us conscious of the whole production apparatus,

which is taboo unless you are Bertolt Brecht or Garry Shandling (in *It's Garry Shandling's Show* and *The Larry Sanders Show* [1992–], both of which originally ran on premium cable channels).

In news reporting, the hand-held mike is sometimes wielded like a club, intruding into the personal space of an interviewee. Thus, the hand-held mike has come to signify broadcast journalism in certain contexts. Occasionally, it means overly aggressive reporting.

In close-miking, the mike is positioned right next to a person's mouth—the “extreme close-up” of miking. This is how radio announcers and television announcers—the ones that read promos and advertisements—are miked. Moreover, it is the miking technique used to record singers in a sound studio. This type of miking creates sound that has a full, rich timbre, a wide frequency response (often emphasizing bass pitch for male studio announcers), and very little ambient noise. Viewers have come to expect the close-miked sound in TV announcements and music videos. For these elements of television, close-miking is the norm. However, it can also prove to be disruptive when used in narrative programs. Dubbing and other dialogue replacements in narrative programs are often recorded in close-miking. This can clash with the viewer's expectations for the sound perspective created with boom-miking. To cut from a boom-miked piece of dialogue to one that is close-miked makes it sound as if the characters were suddenly right on top of you. To avoid this, sound technicians position the mike away from the dubbing actors and Foley artists in the studio, and lay in ambient sound to disguise the dubbing process.

In the examples above, we have suggested ways in which sound perspective may be roughly equivalent to image perspective. But directors and sound editors, especially in narrative programs, need not rely upon that equivalence. Indeed, they may try to subvert it for specific narrative effect. For instance, in the scene from *The Wonder Years* discussed above (see Fig. 8.1), Kevin is shown in the background in long shot, too far away for us to hear; but his voice is presented at “normal,” boom-miked level. Sound perspective contrasts with image perspective to achieve a specific narrative effect. In this case, Kevin's opinion of Haley is presented without her knowledge of it. This is a major plot point in the narrative. Only later in the episode will she learn of his and his friends' opinions of her.

SPACE, TIME, AND NARRATIVE

Much of what we hear on TV comes from a source that we can see at the same time. In other words, much TV sound originates in onscreen space and is synchronized (that is, in sync) with the time of the image.

But this is not true of all sound on television. What, then, is the relationship of a sound to the space and the time of the image that it accompanies? And if it does not match them, what effect does that disjuncture cause?

Sound and Space In Chapter 6 we discussed how the aesthetic/technological fact of the camera frame can be used by the director and videographer or cinematographer to achieve a variety of framing effects. The frame is also important to our consideration of sound. It forms the division between offscreen space and onscreen space, between what is within the frame and what is presumed to be outside it. Often the source of a sound will be situated offscreen. This is quite common in nonnarrative, live-on-tape productions, as when we hear the voice of an actor who is not currently onscreen—e.g., Ed McMahon's chortle following one of Johnny Carson's jokes. And, of course, the laughter and applause of the studio audience normally comes from offscreen, too.

Our commonsensical understanding of offscreen space is also used in narrative programs. A voice or sound from offscreen helps to create the illusion that life is going on all around the characters that we see onscreen. Offscreen space thus aids the construction of the continuity of space, the sense that the onscreen space continues out beyond the camera frame. This can be as simple as the sound of traffic inserted in the background of a scene in an apartment, or it can involve the more complicated manipulation of sounds and framing that create the illusion of a killer following a victim in a shadowy alley. In short, sound draws our mind out past the frame into a fictional world that has been created for this narrative.

Sound and Time When something is recorded on videotape the sound is automatically recorded in sync with the image, but it need not stay that way in the editing process. When filming, in contrast, the sound is recorded *separately* from the image, permitting disjunctions between the two. The time of a sound, in relation to the image it accompanies, can be:

1. earlier than the image,
2. simultaneous with the image, or
3. later than the image.

Obviously, the vast majority of sound falls into the second category, but there are also many instances of sound being displaced from the time of the image.

In a sound flashback we hear speech, music, or sound effects from an earlier time than the image currently on the screen. This occurs frequently in narrative programs. A boy, for example, may be struggling with the temptation to shoplift. As we see his face in close-up, we

might hear his mother's admonition about being honest. Those words come from an earlier time in the story. The reverse—that is, sound later than the image—can also occur. When a sound flashforward is used, we hear sound from a future part of the story. The time frame of a sound is similarly displaced when a character's voice in the "present" speaks over images of the past, as in *The Wonder Years* when we see an image from the 1970s and hear the voice of Kevin in the 1990s commenting on it.

Diegetic and Nondiegetic Sound⁵ Recall that *diegesis* has been used in TV and film studies to refer to the story itself, the narrative action. The physical world in which this narrative action takes place is the **diegetic space**. In *Newhart*, for example, this would be the lobby, kitchen, and rooms in Dick and Joanna's inn and the surrounding town in Vermont, with other locations occasionally incorporated. Diegetic sound, then, consists of speech, music, and sound effects whose source is in the world of the story: the dialogue of Dick, Joanna, and other characters; the noises and ambient sound in the inn.

Diegetic sound may be either objective or subjective. Objective diegetic sound originates in the external world of the narrative and would include, for example, Dick and Joanna's conversation. Subjective diegetic sound comes from inside a character's head and cannot be heard by other characters at the same location. When a voice-over by a character is used to signify her or his thoughts, then diegetic sound is being used subjectively. One strange example of this was in *Hennesey* (1959–62), in which the thoughts of a dog were frequently presented in voice-over.

Not all of the sound on narrative TV programs, however, originates in the diegesis. Most notably, this nondiegetic sound includes the so-called mood music that accompanies each scene. We hear it, but the characters do not because it is not part of their world. They also do not hear the narration of an omniscient announcer (one who is not a character). Nondiegetic music and narration are commonly used to guide our perception of the narrative.

S U M M A R Y

The importance of sound to television is easy to overlook, because it is often difficult to detect how sound has been manipulated by the makers of television programs. When watching TV however, it is important to recognize how the different types of sound (speech, music, and sound effects) have been molded to achieve particular purposes. As always, these manipulations, these purposes, are ruled by television's aesthetics, economics, and technology.

The essential function of sound on TV is to lure us into watching TV itself. This purpose cannot be overestimated. The producers of commercials have long understood the significance of sound in capturing our interest. Once we have been hooked, sound channels our perception of an image either by reinforcing the meaning of that image or directing us toward select elements of the image. In less common instances, it may even subvert what the image seems to be saying.

Sound also functions to propel television forward. Within individual scenes, music, speech, and sound effects are edited so that the illusion of continuity is preserved. Sound thus becomes an integral part of the continuity system. On a larger scale, sound also helps maintain the flow between one televisual segment and the next. Speech is especially significant in its construction of enigmas to pull us into the televisual current.

Sound on television is in some ways identical to the sounds of life. In both, sound may be characterized in terms of its volume, pitch, and timbre. But it would be wrong to assume that TV sound is not manipulated in its transition from historical world to TV speaker. Digital and analog technologies present the sound editor with a broad aural palette from which to choose. He or she may orchestrate preexisting sounds or even create them, synthesize them, from scratch. One of the simplest components of sound technology is the positioning of the microphone and the effect that this has on sound perspective. Different types of microphone technology, in different locations, give us an aural point of view from which to hear the action.

Most of the sound we hear on television is synchronized with the space and time of the images we are watching, but it need not always be so. Sounds can be offscreen as easily as they are onscreen. Offscreen sound draws us out beyond the frame, further constructing spatial continuity. And the time of a sound may be displaced from that of the image. Sound from an earlier or later time can be laid over an image.

Thus, television sound—which so often appears to be the “simple” recording of life’s speech, music, and sound effects—is another manipulated and/or fabricated component of the television medium.

FURTHER READINGS

Sound style is discussed in many of the readings suggested at the end of Chapter 5.

Stanley R. Alten, *Audio in Media*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1994), details aesthetic and technical aspects of sound in radio, television, film, and music recording.

The critical study of television sound is just beginning. See Rick Altman, “Television/Sound,” in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Ap-*

proaches to Mass Culture, edited by Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 39–54. Here, Altman builds on his work on sound in the neighboring medium of the cinema. Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow, "Television: A World in Action," *Screen* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 7–59, does not devote itself wholly to sound, but it does make some keen observations on the sound-image relationship. Also important for their considerations of sound's significance are the previously cited John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, and Herbert Zettl, *Sight Sound Motion*.

The principal essays on cinema sound are collected in Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) and two journal issues on the topic: *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980) and *Screen* 25, no. 3 (May–June 1984).

NOTES

¹ *Looping* is a procedure similar to dubbing. A short piece of film or videotape is made into a loop so that it may be repeated over and over. The film is projected in a sound studio and actors match their dialogue to the projected image. Another, similar process is called ADR (Automatic Dialogue Replacement).

² In a strange twist to the royalties regulations, programs that are shot on film (such as *Miami Vice*) must pay more than those that are shot on videotape (such as *WKRP in Cincinnati*).

³ Earlier sound technologies created mechanical replicas of sound waves on media such as wax cylinders. These are also analog methods.

⁴ The exception to this is a video camera that records and plays digital sound.

⁵ Our discussion of diegetic sound is indebted to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 307–16.

A History of Television Style

G A R Y A . C O P E L A N D

Radio comedian Fred Allen once observed, "Imitation is the sincerest form of television." Allen never made the transition to television, so his remark may have been seen as sour grapes. But, as with many jokes, the humor in the statement comes from its ring of truth. Television has borrowed its visual and aural style from other entertainment forms. Where necessary, it co-opted and transformed these other media to produce the look and sound of the television we see.

Television did not develop a style in isolation from other entertainment traditions. Just as television networks borrowed many of their early programs from parent radio networks, TV also borrowed its style from such diverse entertainment forms as movies, theater, and vaudeville. Each of these contributed in some fashion to television style, but motion pictures and radio—the media most closely associated with television—provided its strongest influences.

The "lifting" of stylistic elements from the various forms of entertainment was often a matter of technological, economic, or aesthetic requirements. Each of these areas was important in the selection of elements from the precursors of television, and each has continued to influence the evolution of television style.

It is difficult to talk about one element—technology, economics, or aesthetics—without also discussing the other two. For example, original 60- and 90-minute live dramas were weekly staples of television in the 1950s. Such TV plays as "Requiem for a Heavyweight," "Twelve Angry Men," and "Days of Wine and Roses," which were later made into movies, were telecast live. They were broadcast in this format for reasons that were technological (videotape was not in use at

the time), economic (to film the plays would have been prohibitively expensive), and aesthetic (many of the actors and crew members came from Broadway productions, and brought to television some methods and goals of the New York theater).

This chapter explores how style has changed in television, and discusses the influence of these three key elements on style, mainly in narrative television. Nonnarrative televisual forms have their own important stylistic histories, but they are so varied and wide-ranging that they extend beyond the scope of this chapter. Elements of nonnarrative television style enter the discussion, however, when they pertain to the stylistics of narrative television under examination.

TECHNOLOGICAL MANIFEST DESTINY

When we think of changes in television style, the first that come to mind are usually technological: color, stereo sound, computer-generated graphics. According to such a view, technology drives change. There is a sense of a manifest destiny within technological developments—a technological determinism. New breakthroughs, it is presumed, will instantly be adopted by the industry and accepted by the public.

This view is, at best, only occasionally correct. For a technology to become accepted it must find an acceptance among consumers/audiences and producers/directors. In fact, technological changes occur only within economic constraints and according to aesthetic convention, which translates into consumer acceptance.

The mid-1980s saw the introduction of AM stereo radio technology (to take an example from broadcasting, though not from television). Heralded by some as the savior of AM radio stations (the vast majority of which lose money each year), stereo AM was going to allow AM radio to compete with its better-sounding cousin, stereo FM. But how many of us today own an AM stereo radio or even know if there is an AM stereo radio station in the area? AM stereo was a failure.

Despite workable AM stereo technology, the AM renaissance never happened. One reason that AM stereo failed to find a niche in broadcasting was that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) refused to endorse one specific AM stereo technology. Competing AM stereo systems were not compatible with one another, and the FCC declined to select a standard for AM stereo to permit all stereo broadcasts and receivers a level playing field. They wished to let the marketplace—economics—decide.

As a result, three systems competed for stations to buy their equipment. Radio manufacturers were left to guess which stereo system

would be the most popular. The radio manufacturer who guessed wrong could end up with many receivers that no one would buy. Consumers were confused. And, to make matters worse, AM stereo was not much better than AM mono; both left and right channels sounded just as bad.

This example illustrates that a technological determinism, or a manifest destiny driven by technological improvements, grossly oversimplifies the process of change in the broadcast media. In addition to the knowledge and ability to build a device, there must be a supportive economic climate, an aesthetic motivation, and consumer interest for such technologies to be meaningful.

The two most obvious components of television are its sights and its sounds. Each has its own stylistic elements, which have evolved at varying rates since television became a viable narrative medium in the mid-1940s. To discuss how style has changed, this chapter is divided into elements of visual style and aural style.

VISUAL ELEMENTS OF TELEVISION STYLE

The Birth of Video

The development of an all-electronic television system replaced earlier attempts, which used a combination of mechanical and electronic technologies. The earliest patented device was devised in 1884 by a German named Paul Nipkow. His television system used a rotating disk with holes arranged in a spiral between the outside of the wheel and the hub. The wheel was turned by a motor, and the spinning wheel broke the picture into bits (a process called *scanning*). Light coming through the hole hit a light-sensitive cell, which converted light into electricity. The television set receiving this signal had a similar wheel, which turned in sync with the camera. Nipkow himself never made his device work, but later inventors were able to develop this electro-mechanical system.

Boris Rosing was the first to develop an all-electronic system using the cathode ray tube (CRT). Rosing, a Russian scientist, successfully transmitted an all-electronic picture by 1911. It was a relative of Rosing's CRT system that eventually developed into the electronic television system. The two inventors most responsible for television technology as we know it today are Vladimir Zworykin, a Russian emigre and a student of Rosing's, and Philo Farnsworth, an American inventor. Both Zworykin and Farnsworth invented a workable all-electronic television pickup tube—the piece of technology that actually changes light into an electronic video image.

The Influence of Radio on Television

The development of television was undertaken primarily by private industry rather than government. Electronics firms that had profited from the development of radio saw television as another potentially large profit center. One key player in the economic development of television was RCA, owner of the NBC radio network.

The corporate strategy for television was the same as the one that had worked so successfully for the development of commercial radio. Radio-set manufacturers became the pioneer broadcasters as a means of creating a market for their products. RCA's strategy was to begin broadcasting television signals so there would be a demand for the television sets rolling off the company's assembly lines.

The end of the 1920s found the new medium of television promoted by NBC, CBS, and a West Coast regional radio network, the Don Lee System. The influence of existing radio set manufacturers, their broadcasting divisions, and existing radio networks in the creation of television had far-reaching impact on the organization, and ultimately the style, of television. From an economic perspective, it was assumed that television, like radio, would be a commercial venture licensed by government but controlled by private enterprise. The configuration of a national broadcasting system designed around commercial networks and their affiliates was hardly questioned, because television was assumed by broadcasters and government to follow radio's pattern of networks and affiliates.

The creative processes, and thus the aesthetics, of television were also heavily influenced by radio. Much of the creative talent for television programming, for instance, came from the networks' radio divisions. This crossover from radio to television ensured that programming on television would be very similar to radio—though with pictures.

In the Beginning: Video

Early experimental television programming was produced exclusively in live video—that is, for immediate transmission. Neither film nor videotape (which was not introduced until the latter half of the 1950s) was used in the programs of the experimental period. The need for bright light to achieve a clear picture, the bulkiness of the camera equipment, and the general vulnerability of the video apparatus required that programs be broadcast almost exclusively from a studio. Thus, the primitive technology and the economic reliance upon radio professionals and their specific aesthetic resulted in a visual style delimited by the television studio. In 1931 experimental television programming consisted of such in-studio shows as *Doris Sharp*, *The*

Television Crooner and *Roger Kinney, Baritone*, along with *The Art of Bookbinding*. Television's reliance on live, studio-based programming mirrored how radio was produced.¹

The importance of programming live rather than recorded telecasts carried over from radio, whose programmers preferred live broadcasts to transcriptions, or recordings on acetate disks.

Part of the preference for live programming was technological. The means for cheaply and efficiently recording television programs had not been developed. The kinescope process (16mm motion pictures created by filming the program off a television receiver) permitted television programs to be recorded on film, but the images were blurry and of generally lower quality. This was also an aesthetic consideration already known to radio audiences, who had learned that "electrically transcribed" shows were generally inferior in terms of both audio and content.

Part of the preference was economic. During the early development in the late 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, the audience sizes were small, and the size of the audience did not justify large expenditures for programming material. In the beginning, the major movie companies were generally leery of "free" television, and hoped to develop their own pay television systems.

The influence of live radio on television was generally pervasive, but is most strongly indicated by the early network use of simulcasts of such programs as *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* (1948–58) on CBS, *The Voice of Firestone* (1949–63) on NBC, and DuMont's *The Original Amateur Hour* (1948–60). Simulcasts, which began on the networks in 1948 and continued until the mid-1950s, were regularly scheduled network radio shows simultaneously broadcast both on radio and television. As a result, people with television sets saw the radio program being produced.

Even television stations not connected by cable to the networks provided the aesthetic of live programming, because of the method by which they received program material. These outlying stations were sent 16mm kinescopes by the networks as a means of broadening the program's audience. The distribution of kinescopes to nonwired affiliates served as some protection against the television station changing affiliations when wired access was available. This use of kinescopes of live productions also provided a transition from the live network television presentations to prerecorded (filmed) programming.

One of the earliest network television programs to use films made specifically for television was *Fireside Theatre* (1949–63). First airing in April 1949, the program began as a mixture of live and filmed episodes. By September 1949, however, the program used filmed stories exclusively. A dramatic anthology filmed mostly at the Hal Roach Studios in Southern California, the series featured a different story and

usually a different cast each week. *Fireside Theatre* and William Boyd's *Hopalong Cassidy* (1949–51) led the field in bringing film to serial television. Other, smaller, independent producers started producing filmed series for television, and were joined by the major Hollywood companies in 1953.

How was the move to the use of film and away from live productions greeted? A 1952 *New York Times* article, titled "A Plea for Live Video," argued,

The decision of television to put many of its programs on film has turned out to be the colossal boner of the year. On every account—technically and qualitatively—the films cannot compare with "live" shows and they are hurting video, not helping it.²

Despite the popularity of the increasing number of filmed network shows, a prejudice against filmed television remained. Notwithstanding this aesthetic preference, the amount of live programming steadily decreased during the 1950s. First film and then videotape were used to record television programs. The television program that did the most to shake television free of the myth of live programming and fix the elements of a television genre to this day concerned a Cuban bandleader and his (supposedly, for the program was produced in black and white) redheaded wife.

I Love Lucy

Programs with a studio audience were always performed live on the networks until 1951. That year, however, a breakthrough show appeared. This show was to have a significance to television that no one at the time could have imagined. One of the most successful television programs—perhaps the most successful—in the world, its popularity over four decades is not the main reason for its pivotal status. *I Love Lucy* is important because it encapsulated what television would become.

I Love Lucy was the first network TV series shot on film before a studio audience. CBS had wanted the show to be produced live, but Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz believed that it should be filmed, even though, to help their comic timing, the two actors wanted a studio audience as well. Ball and Arnaz were the producers as well as the stars of the show; they spent \$5,000 of their own money to film the pilot episode and subsequent shows. This \$5,000 was the additional cost of filming the show before a live audience, and neither the sponsor, Philip Morris, nor the network wanted to spend the extra money. Arnaz agreed that he and Ball would pick up the extra cost if they would then own the program. This investment netted Arnaz and Ball millions and created Desilu.

The advantages of filming a television series instead of broadcasting the show live were numerous. First and principally, film facilitated syndication of *I Love Lucy* to local stations after the network's license period for showing the programs had expired. Programs that were broadcast live were difficult to reuse later. Some live programs, such as the early episodes of "The Honeymooners" on *The Jackie Gleason Show*, were recorded on kinescopes, but have poor resolution compared to programs originally shot on film. The production on film of *I Love Lucy* meant that any subsequent broadcast of an episode could look as good as the initial network broadcast.

The program was shot by several film cameras while the audience watched from bleachers. The cast performed the show as they would a play, running the scenes in the order that they would appear for the home viewer. Fig. 9.1 is from the pilot episode and Lucy, for the first time, is trying to get into Ricky's show. This was not the first use of multiple cameras to film an event, however. Multiple-film camera techniques had been developed about a half-decade earlier, when Jerry Fairbanks created the multicam system to shoot films for NBC newscasts. The camera technique may not have been new, but using it to record a performance before a studio audience was. Hence, Desi Arnaz has been credited with developing the multiple-camera technique for shooting television programs in front of a live audience.

I Love Lucy introduced the visual style of multiple-camera sitcoms that survives today (see Chapter 7 for a full description of multiple-camera production). Lighting is broad and even, to cover all of the actors in a scene. Camera movement is kept to a minimum. Action has to be limited to a restricted number of sets because of the audience. All sets reside on the same stage and should be visible to the audience

FIGURE 9.1



(though that isn't always so); in most cases, sitcoms recorded before a live audience have one main set, with no more than three additional sets per episode.

In many sitcoms the living room or the kitchen serves as the main set. For example, *I Love Lucy*, *The Odd Couple* (1970–83), and *The Cosby Show* used living rooms as their main sets. Main sets can also be garages, as in *Taxi*; or even bars, as in *Cheers*. Most of a sitcom's action, which may be quite diverse, takes place on the main set. In *Cheers*, for example, the barroom served as the site for wedding ceremonies, radio broadcasts, and Diane's rendition of Shakespeare.

Filming before an audience does introduce some limits on the production, but many comic actors feel that an audience is essential for the success of their performance. *I Love Lucy* is thus further significant for introducing a studio audience to narrative television series. Although studio audiences had commonly been used for radio comedy, in television they had been restricted primarily to variety and game shows. The radio precursors had been produced on a theater-style stage, with a proscenium arch framing the action. By contrast, *I Love Lucy* was shot on a cinema sound stage, with the audience seated in bleachers.

Independent and Major Studios

I Love Lucy was the product of one of the many independent Hollywood production companies established to produce television programs in the absence of the major studios. Desilu was formed by Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball to produce *I Love Lucy* and other shows. Other contemporary independent producers included Bing Crosby Productions, Flying-A Productions (Roy Rogers's company), General Service Studios, Mark VII (Jack Webb's company), and Ziv, which specialized in syndicated programs. The company that started with *I Love Lucy* lasted about fifteen years as a company and provided shows for all three commercial networks; at the time Paramount bought it, Desilu was turning out episodes of *Star Trek* (1966–69) and *Mission: Impossible* (1966–73) for network broadcast.

Independent producers could make an impact in television because the major motion picture studios were trying to ignore or impede the progress of television. The motion picture industry feared television would keep people at home rather than buying tickets at motion picture theaters. The fear was well founded; television did affect the attendance at U.S. movie theaters, which declined steadily for years after reaching its all-time high in 1948.

The major motion picture companies continued to ignore television until the Walt Disney Studios signed with ABC to produce *Disneyland* in 1954. Disney originally agreed to the deal as a means to

promote the new theme park he had carved out of some orange groves in southern California. The show proved to be immensely popular, and profitable for both ABC and Disney. Later, the television network and the movie studio signed an agreement to produce *The Mickey Mouse Club*. After Disney broke the ice, other motion picture production companies began to produce programming for the networks, and by 1957 the big Hollywood motion picture corporations were the largest suppliers of television programming in the U.S.

The increasing participation of Hollywood meant a greater volume of production in California and a concomitant reduction in New York City. Approximately two-thirds of the networks' programming was being shot on film in Hollywood by the late 1950s. The migration to the West Coast continued through the 1960s, and by the beginning of 1970, 90 percent of television's entertainment programming originated in Los Angeles.

A comparable geographical shift in television production would not occur again until the 1980s, when many independent TV producers began to move their operations to Canada. Stephen J. Cannell, who produced such shows as *21 Jump Street* (1987–90), *Stingray* (1986–87), and *Wiseguy* (1987–88) found that he could take advantage of reduced production costs and more elastic regulations in Canada. Basing his productions in British Columbia, he found locations that could represent U.S. cities, and established a large production facility in Vancouver.

In the 1980s, such Hollywood majors as Disney and Universal also began to produce television shows in their own newly constructed facilities in Florida. They had moved from California because of cheaper production, and fewer state regulations of the television and movie industries, and as a means to use and publicize facilities that double as theme parks and tourist attractions.

Such migration from Hollywood, however, has not affected the style of production. Most shows look similar, no matter where they are shot. The look of television programs had been set in the early days of television, when independent producers filmed shows using the single-camera technique that is also used to make theatrical motion pictures.

Television and Single-Camera Technique

The introduction of the Hollywood film companies into the creation of network programming introduced the aesthetic standards and conventions of film production to television. The standard mode of production in Hollywood was to use a single film camera and utilize a master-scene technique of production: First, shoot the master long shot of the entire scene; next, shoot the medium shots (e.g., two-shots); and finally, shoot the close-ups. Then let the editor put it all together.

It was not until programs were filmed without an audience that the look of sitcoms changed. The use of a single camera without an audience provided a new freedom to the look of a comedy. A show no longer had to be limited to four sets; and exteriors, though more expensive, were as easy to shoot as interiors. To see the difference between multiple-camera, live-audience programs and single-camera productions shot without an audience, compare *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* as an example of the former and *M*A*S*H* as an example of the latter.

Perhaps more important, the use of film opened up a range of genres to producers and to audiences. Police dramas were difficult or impossible to produce without using the single-camera system, and such popular police shows as Desilu's *The Untouchables* (1959–63) or Jack Webb's *Dragnet* relied on Hollywood-style film techniques.

Film production had at least one advantage over live video or early videotape in that film could be edited in post-production. The immediate broadcast of live video offered no opportunity to correct either performance or technical flaws. A live production might have at most one or two complex shots, because such shots take relatively long to rehearse and block. Thus, live production necessitated a Spartan visual style.

Film provided creative directors a means to gain greater control of the images and the performance than did live video. A scene might be shot several times until the desired performance is captured on film. The editor would then select the best, the most interesting, or at least the most suitable work of the creative team for the finished program. Through the editing process, film also allowed for a more quickly paced program than was generally possible through a live production. In sum, filmed programs could be more effectively manipulated.

Introduction of Videotape

The first videotape recorder (VTR) available to television stations was introduced in 1956 by the Ampex corporation, which had established a reputation for manufacturing superior audio recording equipment. (The company name is an acronym of the initials of founder Alexander M. Poniatoff and the first two letters of the word *excellence*.) (Fig. 9.2 shows an early working model with the engineering team that designed and built it.) Ampex started delivering VTR equipment to networks and stations in 1957. Larger and heavier than an upright piano, these machines made it possible to record programs and replay them immediately. Programs that once had to be broadcast live or from film could now be replayed at any time. The quality of the first videotaped images was not as sharp as current pictures, but they were much better than the competing kinescope technology, and image quality quickly improved to the point where viewers could not tell if the show was live or on tape. Videotape significantly changed the appearance of network

First VTR Engineering Team

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television for people living in the western regions of North America. Before videotape, television shows broadcast live by the networks to the East were recorded on kinescopes for rebroadcast to the western time zones. Recording live programs from New York on videotape provided the West with images as good as those seen by a live audience. NBC's *Saturday Night Live* provides a current example of what was being experienced for the first time in the late 1950s. While the program is live for viewers in the eastern and central time zones, audiences in Mountain and Pacific zones see a live-on-tape version.

There is, however, a difference in appearance between filmed and videotaped images. To compare the difference, you might find a copy of the television program *Max Headroom* (1987) at a video store; it contains segments originally shot on both film and videotape. So does *The Larry Sanders Show*, for which the talk show sequences are produced on tape, while all the backstage stories are shot on film. A *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969–74) episode also provides a good example of the visual difference between film and tape; everything recorded outside the studio is on film, and everything in the studio was shot on tape. One episode includes a brief sketch dealing with the difference, in which one of the Pythons is seen looking through a window from the exterior (film) and from the interior (videotape), and commenting anxiously that the outside is film but the inside is videotape.

Television movies are almost exclusively shot on film. One major exception is NBC's *Special Bulletin* (1983). This Emmy-winning made-for-TV movie tells the story of nuclear terrorism using news reports, and the exclusive use of videotape provides the program with the look of a newscast.

The introduction of videotape did not initially make video the equal to film in terms of artistic control. Many of the early videotaped programs were simply live shows recorded on tape, and post-production work (see Chapter 7) on videotape was difficult, if not impossible, in the beginning. The earliest forms of videotape editing required that the tape be physically cut in the same manner as audiotape or film. The videotape was edited by cutting and gluing the pieces together, using a specially constructed videotape splicer as seen in Fig. 9.3. To prevent the television image from rolling at each splice, the cut and reassembly had to be made between frames. To find those frames a chemical solution was applied to the bottom of the videotape, revealing the spikes that indicated frame changes. This method of editing was cumbersome, inaccurate, and time consuming. Added to these limitations, tape sometimes broke at the splices, damaging the expensive video record/ playback heads of the VTR. Moreover, tapes that had been physically edited were useless for additional use beyond the edited program.

The medium took a leap forward when Ampex introduced the first electronic means of editing videotape: a system called Editech. The ability to edit electronically, rather than physically, made videotape a much more useful medium. Editing systems have become increasingly sophisticated while simultaneously becoming easier to use. Editors can make more edits in less time; they have greater flexibility in pacing and the capacity for complex organization of a program. For example, *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*—the first network series to make extensive use of electronic videotape editing—changed the pace of television thanks largely to the opportunities that evolving editing techniques of-

FIGURE 9.3*Early Videotape Editor*

ferred. Its quick cuts, blackout sketches, and fast pace required electronic methods of editing, and the editors were awarded an Emmy for their stylistic innovation.

Many television shows shot on film are now transferred to videotape for electronic editing, which is faster and cheaper than editing film-as-film on a Steenbeck or Moviola (two brands of film-editing machines). Such developments blur the line between film and video. While the show you are watching may have been shot on film, it probably has been edited as videotape to produce a videotape as a final product, and may never exist as a film that could be projected in a conventional cinema. This combination of technologies opens up a number of possibilities that film alone could not easily accomplish. Computer-generated special effects (SFX), for example, can electronically (rather than optically) manipulate an image (see Chapter 6). The marrying of two film sources or one film and another video through electronic means has reduced the cost of special effects for television programs. Fig. 9.4 shows an example of a modern video suite where editing and compositing may take place.

FIGURE 9.4

Modern Editing Suite, WTTW/Chicago



The conversion from optics (film) to electronics (video) for compositing images also means that the computer may be used for image manipulation to create digital SFX. Video/computer-generated technology is not limited to network or major productions. You probably have seen computer-generated SFX on your local television station's weather reports. The map of weather information for the United States, in front of which the weather reporter stands in Fig. 6.32, is a computer-generated graphic.

Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987–) has made use of both electronic compositing and computer-generated special effects. Transfer to videotape permits special effects to be produced more quickly, more cheaply, and just as convincingly as they were done on film, resulting in more special effects per episode. Many viewers cannot tell the difference between special effects composited exclusively on film and those composited electronically. This increased use of video SFX has allowed television programs to mimic the visual style of more expensive motion pictures. (And, to blur the line between film and video even more, expensive motion pictures such as *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* have incorporated the creative possibilities of high-tech, computer-generated effects, which can be transferred from high-resolution video to motion picture film for theatrical exhibition.)

Color Television

The date of the introduction of color television sets to U.S. homes is a little complicated. As will be explained, there were two introductions of color broadcasting in the U.S. The first, which was initiated by CBS, took place in 1951 but production of those sets ceased in the same year. The second introduction, from which today's color televisions trace their lineage, was in 1954. In that year, RCA introduced its home color television sets. RCA followed the pattern it had developed with radio by using its broadcasting arm, NBC, to create a market for RCA color receivers.

Color television took more than a decade to reach a significant number of households and to enrich RCA by sales of its color TV sets. Color started to predominate in 1966, when CBS converted from all-black-and-white to all-color broadcasting. Ironically, CBS had been both the last and the first of the commercial networks to transmit regularly scheduled programs in color. The irony stems from the way color television was developed.

CBS had proposed a hybrid electronic-mechanical color television system as early as 1946. The pickup tube and picture tube were electronic and black-and-white; but placed before each was a spinning color wheel. The color wheel would spin so rapidly that through persistence of vision the eye would put the three separate colors together

to form a properly colored image. In 1950, after a series of hearings and test demonstrations, the FCC approved the hybrid as the official U.S. color system.

The FCC approved the CBS system over the protests of RCA, which was scrambling to perfect an all-electronic version. The system RCA proposed, but had not yet perfected, would provide color pictures, but would also be compatible with the existing black-and-white television sets. (The approved CBS system was not compatible with the existing sets.) This lack of compatibility upset all the current television set manufacturers, who, along with RCA, protested against the FCC decision. They vowed that they would not produce color television sets using the CBS hybrid system, but CBS promised that they would build the color sets themselves.

CBS began programming in color June 25, 1951. The total potential audience for its kickoff broadcast was small—the number of color sets capable of receiving the broadcast was estimated at fewer than 100. CBS began regularly scheduled network color broadcasts between 4:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon—the hour of the smallest television audience, according to research. Transmitting color programs receivable only by CBS color sets when the audience was smallest, network executives believed, would be least offensive to the overwhelming majority of viewers, who had black-and-white sets. CBS hoped that the hour would not hurt the network's audience figures for its prime-time schedule.

When the government issued an order to stop production of the color sets in November 1951, CBS ceased color broadcasting. The federal government ruled that color set manufacture used strategic materials necessary for the Korean War effort. (The order to conserve strategic materials, however, was not applied to manufacturers of black-and-white sets. This led some to suspect that CBS may have maneuvered the order so they could suspend broadcasting color programs and manufacturing color sets, which were costing the company millions of dollars.) After the CBS system had been accepted by the FCC, RCA and most of the other manufacturers of television sets formed the National Television Standards Committee (NTSC) to develop specifications for black-and-white-compatible color transmission and reception. The NTSC used RCA's all-electronic color system as its basis for development and standards.

The NTSC color television system was accepted by the FCC as the official standard on December 17, 1953. They authorized commencement of commercial broadcasting in color for January 1954, and the NTSC standard is used in the U.S., as well as Canada and Japan, to this day. So, CBS had been the first network to broadcast regularly scheduled color programming—but eventually, the last of the networks to begin color broadcasting.

Color and Style

The initial introduction of color did little to affect the overall style of broadcasting. Early color programs were specials rather than series or serial television, but these specials did not necessarily exploit the abilities of color television by presenting particularly colorful events. One of the early color broadcasts in 1954 was that year's World Series. The coverage was exceptional because it was the first time color television cameras were taken outdoors for a network broadcast. Early color video cameras were very large and cumbersome, weighing around 400 pounds, and their color registration was easily knocked out of alignment. Their size was due to almost three times the number of parts as the black-and-white cameras of the time. While black-and-white cameras had been shrinking in size, color cameras returned television to earlier days of enormous, unwieldy technology.

The standard black-and-white camera of the 1950s had four lenses of different focal lengths mounted on a rotating turret. The introduction of the color camera resulted in the elimination of lens turrets and the subsequent adoption of the zoom lens as the standard. Before the zoom lens, the camera operator selected the proper lens for a given scene, but since each lens was of a fixed focal length, physical movement of the camera was often necessary to achieve the proper framing.

Zoom lenses replaced turrets on color cameras because each lens on the turret had slightly different color properties. With turret lenses, it would have been necessary to readjust the camera after each lens change; a zoom lens required only a single adjustment. The introduction of the color camera thus changed the visual style of television by substituting the zoom lens for a series of fixed focal-length lenses. And focal length has a major impact on the visual style of a shot.

In narrative television, black and white is virtually no longer an option. According to industry wisdom, viewers will not watch programs presented entirely in black and white. During the initial planning of *Hill Street Blues* it was suggested to the network that the show be shot in black and white with hand-held cameras as a means to emphasize its documentary, gritty quality. This notion was quickly axed by NBC, who felt that the audience wouldn't watch a black-and-white television show. However, black and white currently finds frequent use in commercials and music videos and in segments of narrative programs. Its difference from the norm of color is used for various narrative or expressive effects, as in "The Dream Sequence Always Rings Twice," an episode of *Moonlighting* that parodied film noir. Black-and-white images are thought to cut through the continuous clutter of color images that makes up so much of the current television fare.

One recent controversy spawned by color television is the colorization of older black-and-white movies for showing on television. Col-

orization is a process that uses computers and videotape. It is not used to color movies for the theater, because the finished product is videotape; only television and video sales have a use for colorized movies. Producers of colorized films argue that more people will watch a movie in color than one in black and white. The argument against artificial coloring holds that the process ruins the original film, and undermines the intent and artistic integrity of the filmmakers. But, of course, any videotape version of a theatrical film necessarily modifies the original (see Chapter 6).

AURAL ELEMENTS OF TELEVISION STYLE

Dialogue

Most of the early writing and performing talent in television came from radio rather than motion pictures. Television performers and, particularly, writers who came from radio tended to emphasize the aural rather than the visual. As a consequence, radio conventions strongly affected the way television sounds.

Most television genres rely heavily on dialogue to drive the narrative. Sitcoms, dramas, and soaps are usually very dependent on dialogue. Action/adventure shows tend to be less dialogue centered, because, as the name suggests, the show's pleasures derive from action that must be seen. Compare, for example, the use of dialogue in *The Young and the Restless* to that in *The A-Team*.

This reliance on the soundtrack has been especially exemplified in cartoons made specifically for television. Hanna-Barbera, the pioneer in made-for-television cartoons, was able to create and market affordable cartoons for television by reducing the quantity of animation (the number of pictures used to create the animated image), along with some innovations in animation techniques that reduced some of their labor requirements. The reduction in the amount of animation corresponded with an increased investment in the soundtrack to carry the story line (see Chapter 11).

Reliance on audio allows people to do other things while they "watch" television. Research has shown that many people are engaged in a simultaneous activity while they experience television. For instance, a viewer may eat dinner, read the paper, do homework, or fold laundry while she or he "watches" television.

Music

Television's use of music has changed over the years. Early live programs with small budgets were often forced to use organ music (also

performed live, of course) as their sole form of incidental, or non-diegetic, music. This device was adopted directly from radio programming. Producers of early, filmed shows could purchase the rights to production music libraries for use as incidental music. When the major film studios entered into television production, however, they had their own music libraries, as well as composers who could write original scores for a series.

Soap operas are an excellent example of the changes in incidental music in television. When soaps began on television in the 1950s, organ music was used exclusively for incidental music, as it had been in radio soap opera. This association between organ music and daytime dramas became so ingrained that organ music continues to be a cliché associated with soap operas, even though no soap has used a solo organ in decades. Electronic pianos and organs and other synthesizers, which provide a diverse range of musical sounds and styles, replaced the standard organ as the source of music for soaps. Moreover, the music is no longer performed live while the program is shot, but added to the soundtrack using recorded selections.

Today, soap operas and other network series have also licensed the rights to copyrighted popular music for occasional use in their episodes. Several soap opera episodes, for example, will accompany a visual montage of a young couple's romance with a currently popular pop song. (And there have even been cases where a tune written as a soap opera theme has found its way onto the pop charts.)

In this way, soap opera music resembles the music of the style-setting police drama *Miami Vice*. Most of the incidental music that accompanied the adventures of Crockett and Tubbs was created on a synthesizer by the composer Jan Hammer, but the producers also budgeted enough money for each show to include recognizable rock music by the original performers. The show licensed music from Glenn Frey, Phil Collins, Tina Turner, and others. They were to evoke, in former NBC executive Brandon Tartikoff's words, "MTV Cops."

The use of rock and roll on TV sound tracks has become more acceptable over the years, but this was not always the case. A classic example is *Dragnet*. Whenever "teen" themes were part of the narrative in the 1960s–1970s incarnation of Jack Webb's "realistic" police series, the "rock" bore a closer resemblance to Muzak than to Steppenwolf. In shows where the narrative dealt with drugs, *Dragnet* used the same sitar music in several episodes. For many adults, rock music did not have favorable connotations, and the majority of prime-time programming was aimed at adults or at nuclear, middle-class family.

Perhaps ironically in this context, the first nonmusical television show to use rock music regularly was a family-oriented sitcom, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1953–66). Starting in 1957, Ozzie and Harriet's son Ricky (or, Rick, as he was later called) Nelson would per-

form a musical number at the end of each episode as seen in Fig. 9.5. The presence of Ricky's music caused some controversy. Was rock and roll too decadent, too animalistic for a good clean family like the Nelsons? To dispel criticism about the music, in one episode Ricky asks his mother what she thinks of rock and roll. The real audience for Harriet's response is fairly clear; she tells us (Fig. 9.6) that this music may be different from what she is used to (in real life, Harriet was once a singer in husband Ozzie's and other bands), but there is nothing really wrong with it. She likes the energy of the music, she says.

Other family-oriented, domestic sitcoms of the period occasionally included a rock/pop tune within the diegesis. Shelley Fabares, who played daughter Mary on *The Donna Reed Show*, was ordered by the show's producer to cut the single "Johnny Angel." Fabares didn't want to record, because she felt she had no voice for singing. The producer suggested that if she liked her employment with the show she should record the song. The song was recorded and performed by Fabares on *The Donna Reed Show*, and the 1962 single "Johnny Angel" became a hit. At best, however, early television's attitude toward rock was ambivalent.

Rock beats did not invade the nondiegetic music of television until much later. Producers realized that a significant portion of their viewers grew up listening to rock music, and that most still listened. The decision to incorporate a more "modern" sound into television programs resulted not so much from the producers' and networks' discovery of rock, but from the reduction of the threat they felt the music posed. Even shows skewed to an older audience, such as *The Equalizer* (1985–89), have incidental music with distinctive rock stylings.

FIGURE 9.5**FIGURE 9.6**

*Television's Style:
Image and Sound*

Another device carried over from radio to television was the use of laughter on the soundtrack. Two forms of television laugh tracks have evolved: (1) those labeled as coming from a studio audience, and (2) those incorporating recorded laughter, the show not having been filmed before a studio audience. Network executives say that canned laughter, as recorded laughter is sometimes called, is placed on a show's soundtrack to make us feel better about laughing at the program. One network executive claimed that people didn't like to laugh alone. Laugh tracks, according to this view, give us permission to laugh. The laugh track also serves as a signpost pointing to the jokes, which may be less than obvious. Moreover, laugh tracks serve to engage us in the television situation, enticing us to join the responding audience that we hear on the soundtrack, but never see.

During the 1950s and 1960s, adding a laugh track to a show was done by one man. He had a box containing tape loops of various kinds of laughter—titters, guffaws—with each type of laughter activated by a momentary contact switch. He pushed what he considered the appropriate button on his box to elicit the correct demonstration of amusement for that part of the program. A particularly morbid commonplace in the business noted that the canned laughter heard on shows was the mirth of the dead. This was probably very true, because the laughs on the tape loops had been lifted from old, live radio shows.

Producers Gene Reynolds and Larry Gelbart tried to convince CBS to allow *M*A*S*H* to be run without a laugh track, but network executives became nervous at the thought of a sitcom without some type of laughter on the audio track. Tests were run to measure enjoyment of *M*A*S*H* with and without a laugh track, and there appeared to be no difference in terms of enjoyment between the laugh track audience and the non-laugh track audience. Despite these test findings, the network executives remained uncomfortable. Subsequently, the producers and network reached a compromise: no laugh track in operating room scenes, but all other scenes would have the offscreen chuckles and chortles. This distinction was not kept in the exported show, as *M*A*S*H* was shown in Great Britain without any laugh track.

More recently, it seems network executives are beginning to relax more about sitcoms without laugh tracks. Lifetime's *The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd* (1987–91), Fox's *Parker Lewis Can't Lose* (1990–92), and ABC's *The Wonder Years* are examples of comedies (and their audiences) that survived without laugh tracks. Not incidentally, all were, like *M*A*S*H*, single-camera productions.

Even shows with live studio audiences may sweeten the laughter. Programs performed before audiences are often taped twice in front of two different groups. The first time is usually called the dress rehearsal,

and the second time the actual performance. Both performances are recorded, however, and the laughter from the dress rehearsal may be used to augment the laughter in the final production. Another way to augment the studio audience's laughter is to revert to the canned laugh track. The recorded track can be used to make the audience sound larger than it was, or to fill in spots where the production team thinks there should be a laugh, even though the audience didn't.

S U M M A R Y

The history of television style intertwines issues of technology, economics, and aesthetics. No single element explains sufficiently why television looks the way it does today. Though technology, primarily in video, continues to provide a number of evident opportunities for changes in style, technology alone is not sufficient to cause change. There must also be a perceived aesthetic need, and the change must not lose money for a network or a station.

Television drew from radio, motion pictures, and theater for its style. Radio was one of the biggest influences, because control of the television industry rested with those who controlled the radio industry.

Television began as a live medium, and live broadcasting was seen as more appropriate to the medium than recorded performance, and consequently superior. Filmed programs gradually began to replace live ones, and then videotape was introduced, both to replace kinescopes for recording live programs for later playback and to serve as an original recording medium. The introduction and development of electronic videotape editing made videotape even more viable.

Some have argued that television is primarily an aural medium. Despite and in conjunction with the presence of pictures, television audio plays an important role in building both narrative and mood. Musical styles for background and incidental music have changed over the years; the use of laugh tracks has not, in any significant way. Networks seem to be comfortable with the conventional use of recorded laughter in comedies, although some recent television comedies—a small minority—have done without.

F U R T H E R R E A D I N G S

Historical development of the electronic media in general receive excellent treatments in most introductory broadcasting books. See Joseph R. Dominick, Barry L. Sherman, and Gary A. Copeland, *Broadcasting/Cable and Beyond: An Introduction to Modern Electronic Media*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993). These treatments are usually chapter-long highlights of how the technologies evolved and were implemented. Greater depth can be found in Christopher H. Sterling and

John M. Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990).

For insights as well as interesting stories from the period that many of television's finest dramas were being broadcast live from New York, there is Frank Sturcken, *Live Television: The Golden Age of 1946–1958 in New York* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1990).

Those more interested in the technical development of electronic broadcasting might want to read Thomas S. W. Lewis, *Empire of the Air: The Men Who Made Radio* (New York: Edward Burlingame, 1991). This was designed as a companion for the PBS series of the same name but holds up well by itself. See also Joseph H. Udelson, *The Great Television Race: A History of the American Television Industry 1925–1941* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1982).

NOTES

¹ Joseph Dominick, Barry L. Sherman, and Gary Copeland, *Broadcasting/Cable and Beyond: An Introduction to Modern Electronic Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 243.

² Jack Gould, "A Plea for Live Video" *New York Times*, December 7, 1952.

PART THREE

**SPECIAL
TOPICS IN
TELEVISION
FORM**



Music Television

B L A I N E A L L A N

MTV, the United States' first round-the-clock television service devoted to popular music, went on the air in 1981. The first video broadcast featured a song by the forgettable British band the Buggles, titled "Video Killed the Radio Star." Recalling the Hollywood myth about stars of the silent period who because of their voices could not survive the transition to sound cinema, the title seemed to predict that television would supplant radio as the more important medium to the pop music industry. It suggested that video and the exposure of television might destroy some musical careers.

Changes in the world of pop music occur quickly; styles and fads regularly arise and fall away. Whether music television has by its form proved detrimental to any popular musician (except by default, for performers who have not gained access to the airtime that music TV programs and services offer) is questionable, but some have certainly benefited. Music television and videos can themselves be seen as fads of the music and television industries, and their apparent importance may wane as other forms of advertising and promotion or other means of delivering music to consumers develop. Since the early 1980s, however, they have evolved as distinctive and significant forms of television.

MUSIC TELEVISION AND MUSIC VIDEO

For the sake of clarity, we should differentiate between music television and music videos. Music television is a general term used to refer to a system through which programming is delivered. Music TV

may be a cable or satellite service for which the broadcast material is musical, such as MTV (which stands for Music Television) or VH-1 (Video Hits-1) in the United States (or in the countries where the MTV format is licensed), CMT (Country Music Television, which originates in Nashville), or the Canadian English-language Much-Music and its French-language counterpart, MusiquePlus. Alternately, music television may refer to programs and segments broadcast on television services that are not devoted to music. Coinciding with the introduction of MTV, other cable services and networks have introduced programs to compete for viewers interested in pop music; probably the most prominent has been *Friday Night Videos* (1983–) on NBC.

Music television arose as a distinctive form at the end of the 1970s, as satellite communications and cable television services grew. MTV and comparable services arose alongside other specialized channels, directed at audiences that were more narrowly defined than the mass audiences sought by broadcast networks. Youth was quite clearly MTV's target audience, and popular music was the means to deliver that audience to advertisers.

Popular music has formed part of TV programming since television itself began, but the period of music television has been unique due to the proliferation of music videos. Music television, a system, offers music videos, a specific form of production, as the mainstay of its programming. A music video is a visual representation of or accompaniment to a song or other musical selection that usually exists independently as a recording. The fact that the recording is generally available for purchase as a tape or disc underlines the role of the video as an advertisement for recorded music. One of the elegant paradoxes of music television is that the bulk of its programming material is also advertising; videos provided by record companies were free advertising for them, and free program material for the broadcaster, until MTV was challenged to pay fees comparable to those charged to radio stations for playing music on the air.

Although performers and record companies tend to package music in albums (in whatever tape or disc formats), videos are most often produced for individual songs. Sometimes the videos themselves are collected and released for sale or rental on home video, though they are often retrospective collections of diverse clips, such as *Bruce Springsteen: Video Anthology 1978–88* (1989) or Madonna's *The Immaculate Collection* (1990) (sources for many of the examples in this chapter). *Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation 1814* (1989) is a rare exception in which the imagery, style, and theme of videos that were released and broadcast individually have consistency beyond that of the music and the performer.

Music video, a simple term, incorporates two complex elements that merit a brief exploration. For one, in common usage *music video* and *rock video* are generally interchangeable. Employing the former term simply suggests that rock is not the only form of music to lend itself to video. Although rock in its variant forms is the most prominent type of music to receive video treatment, nothing precludes the production and broadcast of videos of any type of music, from heavy metal to grand opera. In fact, a British term for music video is pop promo, which suggests not only the range of pop music, beyond rock, but also the status of the clip as a promotional tool.

Second, many music videos are not shot on videotape at all, but on film. It is difficult to address the issue of differences between the two media without implying the superiority of one over the other, but the relation of film and videotape in the production of music videos illustrates the trade-offs between the two (see Chapter 6). Film offers an image with higher resolution than standard videotape, but video presents a vast range of possibilities for manipulating the picture with electronic, computer-controlled visual effects. As a consequence, while the raw image may be made on film, the film image is often transferred to videotape for editing. Moreover, because the ultimate destination for a music video is a television set (or perhaps, more publicly, a video screen in a bar or club), a videotape is what's needed. So, the video may be completed on tape and never exist as a film at all. As a promotion for Ethiopian famine relief, *Dancing in the Street* (1984), performed by David Bowie and Mick Jagger, showed widely in movie theaters; but that was a notable exception where a video had life as a film. Some videos have been produced with new, high-definition television (HDTV) technology, which produces a more detailed image than any previously existing video standard. But because transmission facilities are still in the future and HDTV productions must still be sent and received on conventional television, any advantages inherent in the process belong to the producers, not the viewers.

Antecedents and Influences

Music videos and music television can be seen as an amalgamation of parts of the cinema, of radio, and of television. The music video draws from the cinema its defining feature, the synchronization of sound and image of musical performance. As far as the cinema is concerned, that feature goes back to the earliest presentations of sound cinema; the Hollywood feature film that popularized "talking pictures," *The Jazz Singer* (1927), was also a singing picture. Hollywood musicals are characterized by the alternation of dramatic sequences, which outline a story, and musical sequences in which characters break into song and

dance. The musical sequences punctuate and comment on the narrative, but they also suggest that the act of performance has value of its own, that singing and dancing have significance. Irene Cara's *Flashdance (What a Feeling)* (1983) and Kenny Loggins's *Footloose* (1984) incorporate images from the feature films they publicized—examples of the contemporary musical; but in Hollywood nowadays musicals are rare. Several of Michael Jackson's videos refer specifically to musicals; in particular, the episodes of urban gang conflict in *Beat It* (1983) and *Bad* (1988) recall the war between the Sharks and the Jets in *West Side Story* (theater, 1957; motion picture, 1961). The sensual, writhing choreography in Paula Abdul's *Cold Hearted* (1989) resembles dances Bob Fosse designed for his film *All That Jazz* (1979), a connection the video makes explicit from the start, when a character calls the number "a Bob Fosse kind of thing."

The method of producing music videos is also essentially the same as that used to produce musical numbers on film. Theatrical films are usually shot with a single camera, with sound simultaneously recorded on a separate tape recorder. The sound and picture are later synchronized, and the different takes edited together to make a coherent whole. If this were the practice with a musical number, the editor would likely be left with different versions of the song, perhaps in different tempos, with differences in the ways it is sung and played. As a result, filmed musical numbers, whether for feature films or music videos, are usually lip-synced ("lip-sinked"), or sung to playback. The camera rolls while the existing recording plays over speakers on the set. This allows the performers to sing along with their own voices and move to the beat of the music, knowing that from one take to the next the musical quality will be consistent. On occasion a video may present a song filmed "live," though it is usually a filmed or videotaped record of a concert appearance, made with more than one camera; Bruce Springsteen's *Rosalita* (1978), shot with several cameras at a Phoenix, Arizona, concert, is a good example. By contrast, his *Dancing in the Dark* (1984), which appears to have been shot live at a concert appearance, was actually shot to playback.

The video takes from the Hollywood musical not only the form of visualized, recorded, musical performance, and the methods of realizing it, but also the importance of the properties of musical performance in determining the form. For instance, musical properties—particularly rhythm and song structure—or physical qualities of the performers may well take precedence over the coherent depiction of space. Probably the best-known examples in classical Hollywood are the Depression-era musicals designed and directed by Busby Berkeley, such as *42nd Street* (1933) and *Gold Diggers of 1933*, in which musical sequences arise in the story as stage shows. With vast arrangements of

bodies and objects framed at unusual angles (overhead shots of chorus girls organized in circles, like human floral arrangements, were a Berkeley trademark), they would have been impossible to stage, and certainly would have been impossible for an audience to see. Such elaborate production numbers are rare in videos (though the deadpan women in Robert Palmer's *Addicted to Love* [1985] and *Simply Irresistible* [1988], who undulate more than dance, can certainly be read as the descendants of Berkeley's chorines), but the spatial incoherence of such numbers abounds. From one shot to the next, the musicians may appear in different costumes, different lighting and visual styles, different hairstyles, or totally different locations; yet they will continue to appear to be performing the same song, without any corresponding aural changes. In fact, the music video has made such extreme visual discontinuity, married to the aural continuity of the music itself, one of the most characteristic parts of its stylistic stock-in-trade.

Music television adapts from radio a format, or pattern of organization, for broadcast. Music videos, of course, could conceivably be introduced into any context television had to offer, but both music television services and programs have tended to emulate the model of popular radio. It involves the serial presentation of individual units (records in the case of radio, videos for television), clustered and punctuated by commercials, promotional messages, news, and other segments. Generally there is a person to introduce the individual song or cluster of two or three. For programs, there are hosts (*Friday Night Videos*, for example, features different celebrities each week); and on the dedicated pop services, such as MTV and MuchMusic, the regular hosts are called VJs (or veejays), meaning video jockeys, adapting the radio term *disc jockey* (or DJ). Each takes a shift of several hours, and introduces videos, makes announcements, and provides general patter. Like other broadcasters' official voices, such as news anchors, commercial pitchmen, or game show hosts, they are authorized to speak directly to the camera, and hence to the viewer. In addition, they may speak to other people—for example, as an interviewer. They act as our mediator, on the one hand speaking to us, on the other speaking for us.

Broadcast media organize not only the material they transmit, such as recorded music, speech, advertising, but also time. Many radio stations operate around the clock, offering a continuous stream of sound that is available to listeners to switch on at any time, like water from a tap. MTV and other music television systems operate similarly. News reports, weather forecasts, and traffic updates—all of which must be regularly changed—act as markers of the “live” nature of radio broadcasting. Music television may be similarly immediate, although in many cases it simply gives the impression of being broadcast live. The segments in which MTV's VJs talk between videos are prere-

corded and dropped in amid the clusters of videos and commercials. In Canada, MuchMusic's and MusiquePlus's VJs broadcast live once during the day, but their entire shows may be rebroadcast later in the day. So the viewer watching in the middle of the night may see the passers-by of a busy Toronto working day through the window on this apparently live program. Although, like radio, music television services may operate twenty-four hours a day, they also include repeat broadcasts. For the viewer this means more opportunities to see a specific program; for the broadcaster it means more time filled with less original programming, and consequently lower costs.

Like radio, music television is organized in relatively small segments. Radio is often used as background to everyday activities; it rarely gains a listener's exclusive attention, though it periodically attracts the listener to the radio for a moment, with a catchy commercial or piece of music or with a familiar record. Table 10.1 charts MTV programming for one half-hour in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and illustrates the size of the segments into which the time is divided. The shortest is 10 seconds, the longest four and a half minutes. The momentary structure of such broadcasting suggests that we are invited to join and drop out at will (or to pass over the station while grazing the channels with a remote control), or to let the television play like a radio until a piece of music or other sound might attract us to pay attention and watch.

TABLE 10.1

MTV Programming, April 29, 1991, 7:00–7:30 P.M., CST

MIN.	SEC.	
0	00	Title: MTV Prime with Martha Quinn
0	15	Video: Divinyls, <i>I Touch Myself</i>
3	45	MTV ID
3	55	Video: Black Crowes, <i>Hard to Handle</i>
7	10	Video: Color Me Badd, <i>I Wanna Sex You Up</i>
11	05	Video: Motley Crue, <i>Don't Go Away Mad (Just Go Away)</i>
15	05	Ad: Madonna: <i>Truth or Dare</i> Contest
16	05	Ad: M & M candy
16	15	Ad: STP automobile products
16	30	Ad: M & M candy
17	00	Ad: <i>One Good Cop</i> movie
17	30	Ad: Vans shoes
18	00	Ad: STP automobile products
18	15	Ad: Z102 FM radio station
18	45	Ad: Comcast cable television service
19	15	PSA: Multiple Sclerosis Society
19	45	Title: MTV Prime
20	00	Announcements: VJ Martha Quinn
21	00	Video: REM, <i>Losing My Religion</i>
25	35	Promo: MTV
26	00	Video: C & C Music Factory, <i>Here We Go</i>

If the precedents of music television and music video can be found partly in the Hollywood musical and in radio, they can also be found in other forms of movies and television. These include such films as *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (1959), *Monterey Pop* (1969), *Gimme Shelter* (1970), and *Woodstock* (1970), filmed records of music festivals from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s; and celebrity profiles like *Don't Look Back* (1967), about Bob Dylan, and Madonna's *Truth or Dare* (1991). They have made the filmed representation of pop music and its performers part of the history of documentary film. Avant-garde filmmakers have frequently married innovative combinations of images to music tracks. Bruce Conner's *Cosmic Ray*, made in black and white in 1961, matches a frenetic arrangement of short fragments of film to a recording of Ray Charles's "What'd I Say?" Using a similar technique, he recombined diverse shots from educational and promotional films to illustrate a recording by Devo in *Mongoloid* (1978). By way of contrast, Bruce Baillie's *All My Life* (1966) matches Ella Fitzgerald's recording of the title tune with a single shot, a three-minute pan and tilt across a fence and a row of flowers under a brilliant blue sky. Music documentaries provide impressions of performers and events, and access to them, to some degree, while the avant-garde films indicate the expressive possibilities in combining images and popular music.

Films such as these were not produced to promote the performers and their recordings, and none of the avant-garde productions depict the performers. Soundies, Scopitones, and Telescriptions, also produced on film, did represent the musicians and were different types of predecessors for music videos and music television; they have been used in oldies video programs, or on more eclectic music television programs, such as *Night Music* (also titled *Sunday Night* [1987–89]). Soundies and Scopitones, produced in the 1940s and 1960s, respectively, were short films of performances by popular musicians that were presented on coin-operated machines, like jukeboxes. Telescriptions, produced by Louis Snader in the early 1950s, similarly packaged musical performances on film, marketed to television stations, which used them as filler or in variety shows. In fact, the earliest format of *American Bandstand* (1957–87, 1989) on television, in 1952 (before Dick Clark and then called simply *Bandstand* [1952–57]), featured an on-camera announcer who introduced Telescriptions—essentially an early, limited version of music television in its present form.

This example indicates that pop music formed part of what television had to offer long before MTV. For many years, variety shows were responsible for introducing the new pop sensations to the broadly based television audience. Elvis Presley, for example, made his first national U.S. television appearances on *Stage Show* (1954–56) in 1956, with subsequent dates later that year on *The Milton Berle Show* and *The*

Ed Sullivan Show—which, until it ended in 1971, was probably U.S. television's most prominent showcase for pop music performance. Television followed the growth of rock culture in the 1960s, even if it did so at a measured pace. U.S. television venues dedicated to pop, with young target audiences, included *Shindig* (1964–66) and *Hullabaloo* (1965–66) and, later, *The Midnight Special* (1973–81) and *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert* (1973–82), which presented concert performances. The BBC series *Top of the Pops* (1964–) was especially significant for fostering and presenting talent to British television viewers.

Among the most appropriate predecessors of contemporary music television were *American Bandstand* and *Soul Train* (1971–), both dance party programs. Their studios fill with teenagers, who dance to current hit records and act as an audience for guest performers who lip-sync their latest hits. Mouthing a song to the recording as it is played back, rather than actually singing it, the performers also guarantee viewers a flawless vocal performance, the same as the one the viewer can purchase. The dance party shows consequently function as showcases for both performers and recordings.

Such variety programs acted as one general source for music television, but the other significant marriage of pop music and television preceding the MTV era was the NBC series *The Monkees* (1966–68). One of the few television programs to dramatize the growth of pop music culture in the 1960s, it was a parody along lines established by the Beatles' films, *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965). It combined situation comedy with musical numbers, several of which became chart hits, as it followed the adventures of a pop group. The Monkees—initially fictional—with the exposure of a weekly television series quickly became an actual hit of the music industry. Mickey Dolenz, Davy Jones, Michael Nesmith, and Peter Tork, the actors who were cast as (and ultimately became) the Monkees, initially lip-synced their own voice tracks, in the manner customary to filmed musical numbers, but played instruments along with tracks that had already been recorded by session musicians. Later, in a widely publicized dispute with record producer Don Kirshner, they won their right to play music themselves, effectively forming themselves as a band, and subsequently played concerts.

The Monkees appealed to young viewers, likely female, like the audiences so visible for the Beatles' shows (as did the Monkees's rare successors on television, such as *The Partridge Family* [1970–74], which made a teen idol of David Cassidy). And despite the frequently anarchic slapstick or subversive humor in the show (in one episode, for example, at a perplexing part of the story, Mickey Dolenz broke character and walked through the set to the writers' room for a solution), the situations that *The Monkees* presented were innocuous; their music

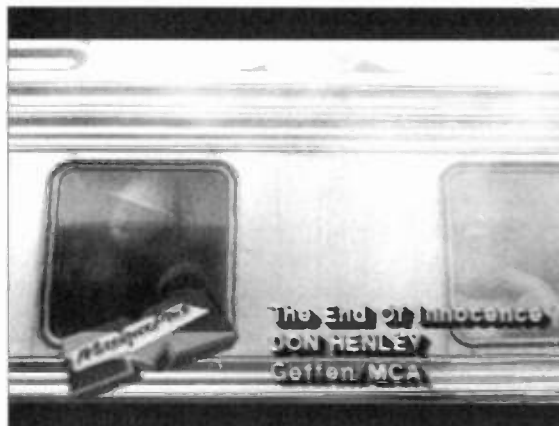
was catchy, rock-oriented pop, but distinctly polished and safe. The influence that the series had on music television was as an early example of the creative combination of television and popular music; television exposed Elvis Presley and the Beatles to mass audiences, but the television industry created the Monkees to be exposed to its broad audience. Incidentally, as president of a company called Pacific Arts, former Monkee Michael Nesmith was one of the pioneer producers of music videos, and his work was influential in the design of MTV and its format. Although accounts suggest that there is no love lost between him and the builders of the music television service, MTV paid homage to *The Monkees* in February 1986, by devoting virtually all of one programming day to airing forty-five episodes of the series.

Music television drew for its format and structure from radio and its precedents in television variety. There is essentially little difference between a DJ introducing a record, a host introducing a performer, and a VJ introducing a video. There may be distinct differences in personality between stiff, older hosts—squares such as Ed Sullivan or Don Kirshner, who seem out of touch with the music and culture they are presenting—and a relaxed, articulate, cool VJ like Downtown Julie Brown, who presents herself as part of the community and culture of the music. These are differences in specific cases, however. The VJ who mediates music television at least in part speaks for the viewer, and the viewer of pop music television is typically young. Similarly, VJs have tended to be young adults who at least appear to be part of the audience for pop music. In Canada, Terry David Mulligan, host of MuchMusic's program from Vancouver, *MuchWest* (1985–), and formerly of CBC's *Good Rockin' Tonight* (1983–93), has been around the pop music scene for years, and is visibly older than the other on-camera personalities. He does not act his age; through enthusiasm and the hyperactive, fast-talking style of an AM radio disc jockey, he conveys youthful energy. However, as a figure with history in the business, he is also host of MuchMusic's oldies program, *Backtrax* (1985–). In a parallel case, CMT, the country music broadcaster, does not have VJs as such, presenting videos without introduction or comment. For several years, though, its onscreen personality was Stan Hitchcock, a portly, middle-aged fellow, a perfunctory musician who could play guitar and sing along with the country star he was interviewing. As much a representative of the broadcaster as any VJ on MTV, he also stood as a point of connection and identification for country music's presumed television audience. Subsequently CMT, like VH-1, opted to use voice-overs to speak for the broadcaster during station identification and promotional spots.

The VJ speaks for the broadcaster, but there are other forms of address on behalf of music television. Probably the most pervasive on

MTV and other services are the titles and graphics that identify each video (Fig. 10.1). Superimposed over the start or end of the video, they graphically name it, usually by song title, artist, album title, and recording company. Different services may include additional graphic or verbal information. VH-1 often superimposes its logo in outline form over entire videos. MuchMusic includes a pictorial graphic that identifies the broadcaster, and its specialized programs have their own logos: a riveted iron "M" or a lightning bolt for the *Pepsi Power Hour* (1984–91), the heavy metal program (subsequently shortened by half and retitled the *Power 30* [1991–]); a throbbing heart for the romantic program, *MushMusic* (1988–91). Its *Spotlight* (1984–) series, a daily half-hour devoted to videos by a single artist or band, also names the album source and release date of the selection. Such information makes it possible for us to identify and buy a copy of an appealing tune. It underlines the status of the broadcaster as an advertiser.

It also tends to attribute authorship for the video to the performer and responsibility to the recording company. Unlike films or other television programs, but not unlike commercials, music video broadcasts tend not to name the individuals or companies that produced the videos themselves. Propaganda Films became known when its logo was affixed to the end of each episode of *Twin Peaks*, but it had no opportunity to publicly advertise its production of Paula Abdul's *Straight Up* (1989), Steve Winwood's *Roll with It* (1988), or Jody Watley's *Real Love* (1989). Similarly, the director of those videos also directed Madonna's expensive and elaborately designed *Express Yourself* (1989), *Oh Father* (1989), and *Vogue* (1990), but those videos are identified less with David Fincher than with Madonna herself. (Fincher later used his experience as a director of considerable style in his first feature film, *Alien*³

FIGURE 10.1

[1992].) Some of the names behind the camera in Madonna's videos may be familiar: Mary Lambert, who directed *Like a Virgin* (1984) and *Material Girl* (1985); or Herb Ritts, the well-known still photographer who directed *Cherish* (1989). But their role remains secondary to Madonna's, at least for the television viewing public. (CMT offers an interesting exception, identifying not only the performer, song title, album title, and record company, but also the video producer, director, and songwriter.) Since most producers and directors are contracted by recording companies to produce the videos to promote their products, it makes sense that the underwriters assume the responsibility.

TYPES OF MUSIC VIDEO

Attempts to pin down a finite number of types of music video generally fall short. The number that have been produced in its relatively short history, and the differences among them, tend to confound easy categorization. There are always examples that defiantly cross lines marking one type from another.

Of course, videos are generally associated with each other through the type of music they employ, not by forms or conventions that might define other types of television. On the basis of content or intent, television might be subdivided into drama; news and public affairs; commercials; games; sports; and other such forms, of which music television would be one. As a narrative form, dramatic television might break down into such genres as police shows, medical shows, soaps, or family dramas, among others. News and public affairs might branch out with morning shows, nightly news, news magazines, and so-called tabloid television. With content as the basis for division, music videos are most likely to be identified through types of music: rock, rap, country, alternative, heavy metal, classical, middle-of-the-road, and so forth. The television services themselves have organized along these lines, with MTV devoted to music for young audiences (rock, rap, metal, alternative); VH-1 to light rock or MOR (middle-of-the-road); CMT to country; and with segments within the broadcast days that are even more specialized and exclusive.

Videos can also be read according to categories that cut across their musical affiliations. As expressive forms, videos are poetic, and like poetry or other art forms, different means have been used to construct different types of expression.

Performance

The basis of the music video is musical performance. All videos concern musical performance, some exclusively so. Performance videos

are often shot at a public concert. (Many videos incorporate concert footage with other visuals; some, like *Dancing in the Dark*, are shot at a concert before the performance starts, to use the fans as unpaid extras.) In some cases, performance film or videotape that has been shot for other purposes is repackaged for television and transformed into videos. A number from, say, a concert film, such as *Monterey Pop*, or a television show, such as *Shindig*, may find itself on an oldies video broadcast. The fact that a video is concerned principally with documenting a performance makes it no less meaningful than any other type of video. Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run* (1987), which is largely a performance video, has something to say about the audience's relations to the music and the performance itself.

Narrative

Many videos are narrative in form; they outline a story, or at least the trace of a story or incident. They delineate fictional characters, or make fictional characters of the musical performers who themselves have public personas. Few of us will be able to claim that we actually know Michael Jackson, Madonna, or Bruce Springsteen, regardless of all the publicity and information that we receive about their private lives. Michael Jackson is not the leather-clad character he plays in *Bad*; the Madonna we know likely does not perform behind glass for paying customers, like the dancer in *Open Your Heart* (1986); and, as sincere as he may in fact be, Bruce Springsteen does not moonlight as a mechanic, the figure he plays in *I'm on Fire* (1985). In such cases, rock stars function as actors. They have already developed roles as musicians through their songs and performances, but the parts they play in videos add to or alter their character images. Jackson, for instance, comes across as someone who gains power and authority through performance itself, while Springsteen appears to be a salt-of-the-earth worker with aspirations that outstrip his means.

By comparison, Madonna became better known to a wider audience through her videos before she had established her skills as a concert performer. Moreover, her videos seemed to describe her talents as a musical actor, as much as a musician. She has taken on a range of roles, from the original Madonna "boy toy" figure of *Like a Virgin* to the Marilyn Monroe-styled movie star of *Material Girl*. She has portrayed a teenage waif who angers and disappoints her father in *Papa Don't Preach* (1986); a salvation hunter in *Like a Prayer* (1989); and a crotch-grabbing sex slave in the futuristic industrial society of *Express Yourself*, with several other stops in between.

In each of these cases, the video outlines a story in which Madonna plays the central character. In *Live to Tell* (1986), however, she portrays a figure whose song comments on the story. This video is a specialized

but not uncommon case; the video advertises not only the recording of the song, but also a feature film, in this instance *At Close Range* (1986), for which "Live to Tell" is a featured theme. Like a "Coming Attractions" trailer, the video borrows footage from the film, presenting visual and narrative highlights that, even though the scenes are brief and out of order, clearly indicate the conflict the young man played by Sean Penn feels. Separated visually from the locations of the movie by the limbo lighting of a darkened studio, Madonna's song addresses his problems—"If I live to tell the secret, / It will burn inside of me"—like the chorus of a classical tragedy,

The ways that such videos fragment the narrative suggest that the flouting of conventions of continuity typical of videos in general persists even in those that are recognizably narrative in form. Understandably for productions that run an average five minutes or so, the stories in videos are very condensed.

Nonnarrative

Narrative suggests a story that is to some degree coherent, with characters who have definable relationships and situations that are recognizable. Many videos, however, appear simply to be strings of images. The images themselves may be recognizable, and will have associations with each other that accumulate to express something about a theme. They may come together less through a story than through ideas, impressions, or feelings. If we think of poetry as a form corresponding to the music video, and narrative videos comparable to narrative poetry, then perhaps nonnarrative videos are the counterpart to lyric poetry. The voice and visual presence of the performer act as a source for the impressions and images that unfold over the course of the video.

Perhaps the most self-evident case of this type of video are those without images of the performer. Springsteen's *Atlantic City* (1982) stands as a short essay on contemporary social depression, represented by an assortment of barren, gray shots of the resort on the New Jersey shore, which in turn illustrate economic and social failure as they are felt by a man who clings to the last trace of hope. Michael Jackson's *The Man in the Mirror* (1988) exhorts listeners to examine their own consciences and actions in relation to the familiar footage of social and natural disasters. Because of their social themes and their documentary imagery, these examples may at first seem more like essays or speeches than poetry, but poetry communicates as wide a range of ideas as any expressive form.

More often, the video incorporates the performer as a visual presence who is both involved with the imagery and, as a writer and speaker, separate from it. Paula Abdul's (*It's Just*) *The Way That You Love Me* (1989) organizes diverse images that illustrate wealth and

power defined by brand names—Dom Perignon champagne, Visa Gold Card, Mercedes-Benz—associating them with a romantic and sexual connection between the singer and a young businessman. This suggests, on the one hand, that material goods are unimportant by comparison with the way that he loves her, and on the other, that she is one among his many possessions. Springsteen's *Tunnel of Love* (1987) visualizes the metaphor of the amusement park ride for the rocky emotions attached to falling in love. Springsteen at one point walks through a midway, but is also seen singing and playing an acoustic guitar in a stark corridor, apparently waiting for a woman who arrives late in the video. In both cases, most of the images illustrate overtly or obliquely what the performer onscreen is singing about, and amplify the commentary.

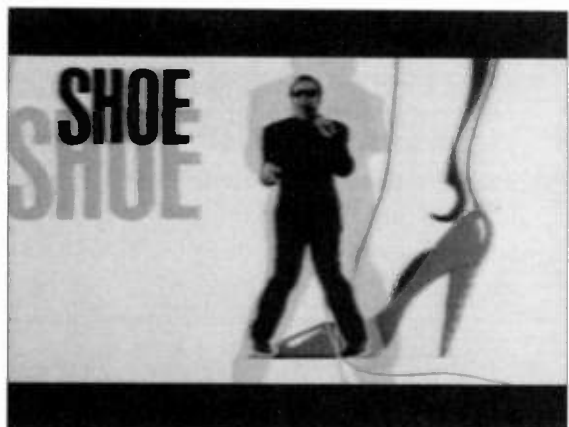
Graphic

Some producers use image-making or image-processing techniques to make videos that are graphically highly imaginative. Techniques may include forms of animation or computer-generated imagery, or may employ video processes that drastically change the nature of a conventionally shot film or video image. Often the net result is the creation of an unusual or alien space for human figures. *You Might Think* (1984), with the Cars, uses video techniques to set the action against a black background, and to manipulate the image of band leader Ric Ocasek—flattening him, or putting his head on the body of an animated housefly—as he relentlessly pursues a young woman. *Kiss* (1988), a cover version of Prince's song, sets Tom Jones against a constantly changing grid of suggestive animated drawings (Figs. 10.2–10.3). In some cases,

FIGURE 10.2



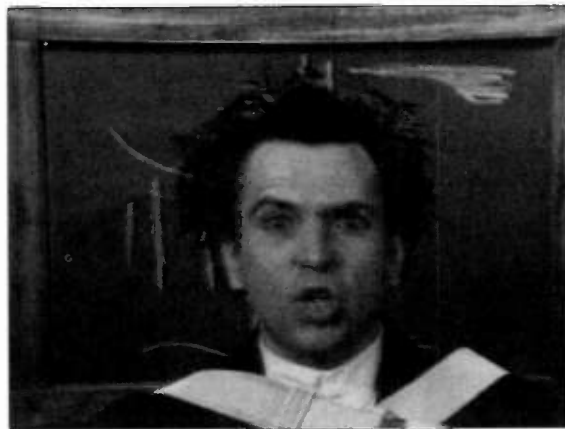
FIGURE 10.3



a capacity to synthesize images and backgrounds makes it possible to create settings that have more concrete roots; the first two videos with the dance band Deee-Lite, for example, are set within bright colors and swirling and geometrical patterns that suggest the psychedelic era of the 1960s.

Among the most complex examples is Michael Jackson's *Leave Me Alone* (1989), an ironic inventory of the star's press coverage. An animated Michael Jackson pilots a little airship through an amusement park that comprises a dazzling collage of images representing his reputed preoccupations. Although this example evidently represents Jackson's attempts to retrieve a sense of self from the tabloid headlines, the human performer is just another element within the video image. This problem was also confronted in the animated *Sledgehammer* (1986). In simple terms, the video pixilates (pixilation is a term for frame-by-frame animation of human figures) Peter Gabriel in a close-up as he sings his hit. Gabriel's image continually transforms itself into something different, adding more and more elaborate animation: designs swirl around him, moving pieces of fruit cover his face and adopt its shape, an ice sculpture of his head appears and quickly melts. The video suggests the hands that would appear between frames to shape the image, including the image of Peter Gabriel himself (Figs. 10.4–10.5).

In form, music videos are aurally restrictive but visually widely variable. Contained by the musical recording that they illustrate, the visuals have exceptionally wide possibilities. They have attracted much attention and appeared to some as an entirely new art form. This is due to visual invention, the abundance of rapidly edited, fragmentary images, and the range of image-making techniques—from photography to ani-

FIGURE 10.4**FIGURE 10.5**

mation to video processing to computer graphics—that producers mobilized to visualize familiar and evolving forms of popular music.

THE SOUND OF VIDEO

The most prominent formal trait of the sound of a music video is its featured musical selection. Usually it was recorded prior to the production of the video and exists independently as a recording. More often than not, it is also a song. Instrumental videos are rare, although some popular jazz artists, such as Miles Davis and Wynton Marsalis, have merited the investment. Like the recording industry, however, video is ruled by pop music, in which vocals predominate.

A video is usually devoted to a single song. The song may form part of an album, and the album may yield a number of video releases. For example, Michael Jackson's album *Thriller* (1983)—a landmark for its success in sales—also produced three important videos in the formative years of MTV: *Beat It*, *Billie Jean* (1983), and *Thriller*. His follow-up recording *Bad* generated even more: *Bad*; *The Way You Make Me Feel* (1988); *Dirty Diana* (1988); *The Man in the Mirror*; and *Smooth Criminal* (1988). Within the video, the song may be introduced or framed by nonmusical material; *Bad*, for example, sets up the song with a narrative prologue much longer than the song itself. But once the song starts, it takes the most prominent role on the soundtrack, and almost invariably runs uninterrupted.

As with any type of television production, a number of elements combine on the soundtrack; principally the speaking voice; sound effects (which may include sounds recorded synchronously with dialogue, or effects added afterward); and music. Music is of course the defining element of music video, so it adopts an understandably important role in relation to speech or other sounds. In movies or television, however, voice and sound effects play important roles in constructing an impression of the reality of the depicted scene. They define an aural perspective that shapes distances and the space we see on a screen—someone or something that appears far away will usually sound far away. The sound perspective and ambience for a musical recording are uniform and consistent, unlike the shifting visual settings of a video. In terms of physical space, then, the relations between music and image may seem disjointed, or the sound may not suggest the dimensions of the visual space at all. *Dancing in the Dark*, for example, seems to catch the tune at a concert where, at its conclusion, Bruce Springsteen tosses away his microphone to pull a front-row fan onstage and dance with her. Although camera angles change from close shots to wide views of the arena, the sound perspective remains consistent.

Sound effects may add to the realism of a video, keeping the music from entirely taking over the soundtrack; or they may have an expressive impact beyond realism. Throughout *Bad*, the dozens of metal buckles on Michael Jackson's leather outfit clank and jingle as he moves. The noise underlines the musical score and reinforces at least one layer of realism in the scene. However, the soundtrack accentuates other movements with effects that are expressive—the gunshot-like beats when Michael Jackson snaps his arms, for example—but inexplicable in any realistic terms. ("Weird Al" Yankovic calls attention to this device in *Fat* (1988), his parody of *Bad*; when he notices that his arm seems to make these gunshot noises, he stops and tries it out a couple of times before he shrugs and goes on with the musical number.)

Voice in music video is mostly musical, whether singing or the rhythms of rap, but many videos also include some dialogue or other spoken voice. In many cases, dialogue is restricted to a prologue or to scenes at beginning and end that frame the musical number with narrative. *Thriller*, in which Michael Jackson is transformed into a monster and sings and dances with his ghoulish pals, is set up by a dialogue scene in which he and his date are returning from a scary movie, and ends with dialogue as he reassures her. As far as broadcasters are concerned, extensive dialogue in music videos may be entirely dispensable. After the first few weeks of its release, for example, broadcasters of *Bad* tended to drop the long sequence in which Michael Jackson's character returns from an exclusive school to the city, where his former buddies challenge him, and picked up the action near the end of their taunting, just before the song starts. In both cases, however, once again a form of nonmusical sound—voice—serves both realistic and expressive purposes.

Knowledge of the history and conventions of pop music aids any discussion of videos, because it helps illuminate the song itself. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to outline a history of popular music, or to do more than suggest the range of current musical forms and styles that have affected the shape of music television. Nevertheless, analysis of music videos cannot justifiably ignore the music any more than analysis of narrative television can disregard exposition. The literature of music criticism has a wide range. Historical, social, and political discussions are offered by such writers as Greil Marcus, Dave Marsh, and Simon Frith; and there is the musicology of Susan McClary (which, simply because of its specialized language, may prove difficult to readers untrained in music theory). However, videos feature songs with lyrics that can be read, quoted, and discussed for what they say and how they are arranged in relation to the images. Similarly, the songs have musical structures—whether the alternating verse/chorus pattern typical of popular song or another, more complex organiza-

tion—and properties that contribute to the effects and meanings of the video. A video that might at first seem less creative or innovative than many others can serve to illustrate this point.

Bruce Springsteen's video *Born to Run* serves as a document and something of a souvenir of his worldwide tour in the mid-1980s, and follows the song's structure closely. It alternates between sequences drawn from a single performance in Los Angeles, at which the audio recording was made, and montages of diverse images from different concert appearances. In the montage sequences, from one shot to the next, the performers may be costumed differently, on obviously different stages, or in the daytime or under stage lights at night. The video starts with a brief montage, but the first two verses comprise a coherent sequence from the Los Angeles show. It returns to a montage only at a saxophone break, then later at Springsteen's guitar break, which leads into the last verse. Instead of returning to the Los Angeles show, the video continues the montage sequence through the verse to the end of the number. The performance of the song builds to its climax through the second instrumental break to the final verse; by following its pattern, then adjusting to change that pattern slightly, the visuals both gain from the force of the music and add to it. By blending images of the many performances of "Born to Run" given by the band on its monumental tour and the single performance that, selected to be issued as a recording and video, gains status as an exemplary performance, the video also implies that all the performances were as special, as exciting, and as rewarding as that one.

THE LOOK OF VIDEO

There are many different looks to music video. Along with commercials and graphic title sequences, videos have been the site for technical and artistic exploration beyond the conventions of everyday television. A lot of money and extensive resources can be concentrated into producing a five-minute music video, such as *Express Yourself*, through which ideas of wealth, power, decadence, and sex are conveyed and associated with Madonna. A down-and-dirty production, costing a couple of thousand dollars, may be more to the point for a new, unknown rapper. At one end of the scale is an expensive production, with considerable planning, a large cast, and elaborate sets and lighting, shot professionally on 35mm film over several days; at the other is a production with only the performer and a few extras on a bare set against a white background. It might seem that Madonna's video stands a greater chance of being broadcast repeatedly on MTV, while the other might be relegated to a slot devoted to rap, or be deemed unacceptable

by MTV and doomed to life only on community access television. That was not the case with Tone Lōc's *Wild Thing* (1989), which did cost very little to produce, received wide airplay, and spearheaded heavy sales for the record.

Visually, there are few requirements or strict conventions in videos. In fact, part of the force of videos resides in their capacity to flout conventions and run contrary to expectations. This is because video producers acknowledge the status of the television as image, not exclusively a representation of the real world. They use and adapt properties of the film and video image that producers of television drama or news are likely not to touch in the body of their programs.

Since the 1960s, for example, color has been a standard for broadcasting. No programs are regularly produced in black and white, and the very few black-and-white sequences that might appear in a television program are bracketed as a character's memories, say, or as historical images. In music video production, the black-and-white image has been adopted as part of the expressive palette. The narrative prologue to *Bad* is depicted in black and white, which changes to color when the Michael Jackson character is transformed and the musical number starts. Other videos, such as Madonna's *Cherish*, *Oh Father*, and *Vogue*, and Bruce Springsteen's *Brilliant Disguise* (1987) are entirely in black and white. Video processing also permits the alteration of tones and color within the image. The overall look of Michelle Shocked's *On the Greener Side* (1989) is black and white, except that in each shot some objects or items of clothing are colored green. Some video producers have mimicked existing visual styles of black-and-white photography: Madonna's *Vogue* (Figs. 10.6–10.7) recalls the rich glamour photogra-

FIGURE 10.6**FIGURE 10.7**

phy of George Hurrell, while Don Henley's *The End of Innocence* (1989) (Figs. 10.1, 10.8–10.9) imitates both the snapshot style and roadside imagery of Robert Frank.¹ But video producers who choose black and white likely do so precisely because it is different from the conventional television image, and consequently stands out as distinctive among images made in naturalistic color.

A wide range of possibilities exists for content, but a music video typically does depict the performer. If the aural function of the video is to present recorded music, the main visual function is to present the performers—to attract fans not only by their sound, but also by the way they look, act, move, and dress. In this way music television adopts the function of its predecessors in television variety, from *The Ed Sullivan Show* to *American Bandstand*. Those programs generally put the performers on a stage, in a concentrated concert; a music video can release the performer from the conventions of stage performance.

Since the musical number exists prior to the video, the images are edited to correspond to properties of the recording. As the *Born to Run* example suggested, such connections can be made on the relatively large level of structure, where sequences in the video correspond to entire stanzas or instrumental breaks in the song. Videos are also edited according to the beat of the recording. This does not mean that every cut or movement happens on a beat of music, but the changes between a loose correspondence and a more rigid one can create a very strong impact. *Papa Don't Preach* starts with a series of static shots around New York Harbor, edited precisely to the beat of the music's introductory passage. A cut fails to coincide with the beat of the music as the instrumental detail increases; in the first shot a flock of gulls scatter, in another a young person on a bench twirls around, and in general

FIGURE 10.8



FIGURE 10.9



movement within the frame picks up, until the camera reaches Madonna's character, as she walks to the beat down a riverside promenade. Subsequently throughout the video, the visual rhythms vary, at some points diverging from this lockstep and at others converging toward a strict correspondence.

As with all television, one of the means by which videos position the viewer is through exchanges of looks by figures onscreen. Often performers look offscreen, toward a single listener or an audience. The listener or audience may be implied, or may be represented through a returned look. Such an exchange, alternating the looks of a performer and a listener, involves the viewer to some degree in the relationship. For most of *Dancing in the Dark*, Bruce Springsteen sings to a large, faceless audience of thousands. We see Springsteen from the perspective of a member of the audience (though one with an ideal viewpoint), and we see the audience for whom he performs. As he reaches the end of the song, the view of the audience concentrates on the front row and several female fans, isolated from the crowd by lighting. What was a generalized exchange of looks between thousands of viewers and one performer becomes an exchange between two people, as Springsteen appears to make eye contact with a woman, reaches out his hand, and pulls her onstage to dance with him as the song fades out (Figs. 10.10–10.18). In a concentrated fashion, this video illustrates the specifics of the relation between performer and fan that the exchange of looks implies.

Often, the performer is also entitled to look into the camera—effectively to make eye contact with and sing directly to the viewer. In some cases, such eye contact may expressively punctuate the video, implying a connection between performer and viewer that is special or

FIGURE 10.10**FIGURE 10.11**

FIGURE 10.12



FIGURE 10.13



FIGURE 10.14



FIGURE 10.15





FIGURE 10.17



FIGURE 10.18

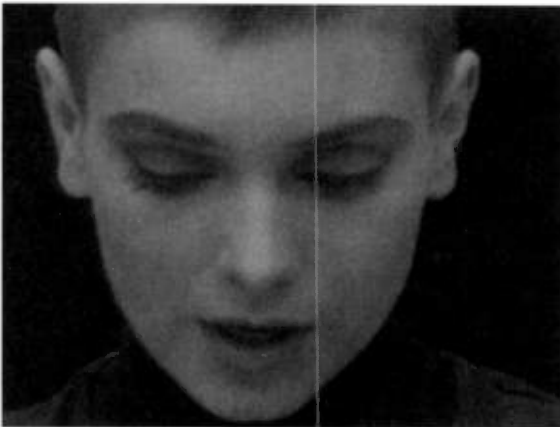


exclusive. Set in a world that separates the decadent and wealthy from slavlike laborers, Madonna's *Express Yourself* outlines a story of a woman, seemingly the prisoner of a wealthy and powerful man, who is rescued by a young, virile, sweaty worker. Characters sharing a scene may exchange looks, but periodically throughout the video, Madonna's character turns to look at the camera, as if to appeal to the viewer, and to establish a complicit bond (Fig. 10.19).

Such a device underscores the address of a song to someone other than the performer, and generates a relation of identification for the viewer with the person to whom the song is addressed. However, it can be used to elicit different emotional reactions. In *Express Yourself*, Madonna's look suggests that the viewer may take a position as her res-

FIGURE 10.19

guer. The fact that the brawny slave who does find her discovers her naked, and that, perhaps separated lovers, they embrace, suggests a sexual appeal in the look toward the camera. Sinéad O'Connor's extended gaze into the camera in *Nothing Compares 2 U* (1989) also suggests a reflective appeal, as the title implies, though her looks off-camera are not directed at anything or anyone, and seem to be moments of punctuation as she collects her thoughts before resuming her song (Figs. 10.20–10.21). Bruce Springsteen's unwavering gaze into the camera in *Brilliant Disguise* adds intensity and immediacy to the song, which recounts a troubled conversation with a lover (Figs. 10.22–10.23). By contrast, the gaze into the camera of David Byrne's *Don't Fence Me*

FIGURE 10.20**FIGURE 10.21**

In (1990) removes personal emotion, depicting in quick succession close-ups of dozens of people lip-syncing the Cole Porter song.

Videos are frequently cited for the diversity of images they include and the rapid pace of their editing. To be sure, such qualities are typical of many rock videos, but they are not a requirement of the form. Some videos are frenetically paced, others have a slower rhythm. *Brilliant Disguise* is an extreme example of the latter, a single shot of Bruce Springsteen sitting in a kitchen, playing and singing as the camera slowly tracks in from a medium shot to an extreme close-up over the course of the number (see Figs. 10.22–10.23). Another example, also a single shot, even more self-consciously runs against the grain of the typical music video: the wryly and subversively titled *This Song Don't Have a Video* (1989), in which Loudon Wainwright III sits in a chair, turns on a tape recorder, and listens to “This Song Don’t Have a Video,” until he gets up, leaves the frame, and lets the song finish and the tape run out.

Such cases, where the visuals are as continuous and unbroken as the music, are rare. Videos are typically discontinuous. A single video may use images ranging from elaborately produced scenes to actual home movie footage (in Carly Simon’s *Coming Around Again* [1986], for example, or John Cougar Mellencamp’s *Jack and Diane* [1982]). Color and black-and-white images may adjoin each other, and pictures of widely varying quality and resolution may be combined to illustrate a single song. They frequently isolate and depict in parts—of bodies, of objects, of actions, and of events. In effect, videos fragment the visible world.

FIGURE 10.22**FIGURE 10.23**

One of the most important features of the video image is movement itself. Obviously, rhythmic movement is an integral part of dance and musical performance. Cutting on movement—making an edit while an object or figure onscreen is in motion, or while the camera is moving—is a convention of editing that often yields an enhanced sense of continuity and seamlessness from shot to shot in the organization of a sequence. Many videos employ an almost constantly moving camera, permitting such continuity, as well as generating a visual rhythm corresponding to the rhythm of the music. The movement of objects or people onscreen, or the movement of the camera over objects, persons, or a scene, along with the continuity of the music track, act as means of reintegrating the visual pieces.

S U M M A R Y

After a history in cinema, radio, and other forms of television, music television and music videos as they developed after the introduction of MTV have had tremendous impact. The fact that it is frequently difficult to tell the difference between a commercial for running shoes or jeans and a music video suggests that each has drawn from the other. Television dramas and situation comedies regularly use music sequences (the original concept of *Miami Vice* was titled “MTV Cops”). Beyond their influence on television itself, videos have been seen as detrimental to morality, as time-wasters; for some as evidence of post-modern culture, for others as evidence of social decay.

Music videos are a form of advertising for recorded music and promotion for the performers they feature, but also comprise the programming material for music television services and programs. They are intended to sell as well as entertain. They have adopted a role as television’s main venue for the presentation of popular music and the representation of its performers. They consequently are affiliated with the music industry and share some of its interests.

Whether narrative, nonnarrative, performance, or graphic (and likely combining elements of these), a video generally revolves around a single musical number. Visually, it may be coherently organized by principles of continuity editing, but more likely it is discontinuous, relying on associations of images to construct themes or evoke feelings that lend it unity for the viewer. The tools by which music television and music videos may be analyzed and discussed are essentially no different than those used for any other type of television, although rhythm and structure, which have as much to do with the music as the video, may seem more abstract than story or character that underpin narrative. By comparison with narrative television, music television is a more evidently open form.

The hit parade of music television changes constantly, making the selection of current examples to illustrate this discussion impossible. When Table 10.1 was compiled, for example, the Divinyls and REM were all over MTV. A year later, they were hardly ever programmed. Videos featuring Michael Jackson, Madonna, and Bruce Springsteen provide many of the examples in this chapter. They were selected because their video work capably represents a range of practice in music television. Also, they are extraordinarily popular musicians, and their popularity has generally sustained over the history of contemporary music television. Accordingly, their videos are probably familiar to many readers. Moreover, many are readily available for rent or purchase on the following video albums: Michael Jackson, *The Making of Michael Jackson's "Thriller"* (1983), *Moonwalker* (1988), and *Michael Jackson: The Legend Continues* (1989); Madonna, *The Immaculate Collection*; and Bruce Springsteen, *Bruce Springsteen: Video Anthology 1978–88*.

The chapter refers briefly to several writers, who can provide a range of commentary on contemporary (and sometimes not so contemporary) popular music and culture. Among their books: Dave Marsh's collected journalism and criticism, *Fortunate Son* (New York: Random House, 1985), and his biographical *Born to Run: The Bruce Springsteen Story* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), *Trapped: Michael Jackson and the Crossover Dream* (New York: Bantam, 1985), and *Glory Days: Bruce Springsteen in the 1980s* (New York: Pantheon, 1987); Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), and *Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Pop* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975), and *Dead Elvis: A Chronicle of a Cultural Obsession* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); and Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). All but Marsh are also included in an anthology edited by Frith and Andrew Goodwin, *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word* (New York: Pantheon, 1990).

Video has become an important part of the world of pop music. This change is reflected in contemporary writing on the music and its performers, such as the five articles Simon Frith commissioned for his anthology, *Facing the Music* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), including his own "Video Pop: Picking Up the Pieces." An early consideration of video by an authority on popular music is Dave Laing, "Music Video: Industrial Product, Cultural Form," *Screen* 26, no. 2 (March–April 1985):78–83. One of the key sources for investigating music television is the popular press, in particular the segment of the press devoted to

music or youth. *Rolling Stone*, for one, covered the innovation and development of MTV, and presented the first book-length assessment in Michael Shore, *The Rolling Stone Book of Rock Video* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1984). For an institutional study of the U.S. music television service, see R. Serge Denisoff, *Inside MTV* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1988).

The impact of music videos and music television is reflected in the volume of criticism devoted to the form in the 1980s. One of the first substantial discussions is Marsha Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator: Television, Ideology, and Dream," *Film Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Fall 1984):2–15, which was reprinted in *Television: The Critical View*, 4th ed., edited by Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 229–54. A later contribution to the same journal is my own "Musical Cinema, Music Video, Music Television," *Film Quarterly* 43 (Spring 1990):2–14. Several journals devoted entire issues to articles on music television, or relations of music, film, and TV. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1986) included a number of influential articles, such as Margaret Morse, "Post Synchronizing Rock Music and Television": 15–28, reprinted in *Television Criticism: Approaches and Applications*, edited by Leah R. Vande Berg and Lawrence A. Wenner (New York: Longman, 1991). *Wide Angle* 10, no. 2 (1988), titled "Film/Music/Video," contains articles not only on music videos and MTV, but also Japanese music video production and Spanish-language music television, as well as musical performance in feature films. A valuable detailed analysis of a single video can be found in Kobena Mercer, "Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson's *Thriller*," *Screen* 27, no. 1 (January-February 1986):26–43.

MTV and the proliferation of music video on television coincided with the rise of postmodernism as an intellectual and historical frame for cultural studies. In fact, television and music television were frequently cited as evidence of the postmodern era. The first book-length, critical study of MTV appeared in this context: E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987). Kaplan's analysis, from the perspective of a U.S.-based feminism, informed by psychoanalytic theory, and an approach deriving from film studies, opened itself up to rebuttal from the point of view of cultural studies, informed by Marxism and musical studies, notably Andrew Goodwin, "Music Video in the (Post)Modern World," *Screen* 28, no. 3 (Summer 1987):36–55. Goodwin developed his discussion in his valuable book *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992). Furthermore, Kaplan's study caught MTV at a point of organizational transition, made clear in Lauren Rabinovitz, "Animation, Postmodernism, and MTV," *Velvet Light Trap* 24 (Fall 1989):99–112. This augments the literature with a brief

discussion of the political economy of MTV, as well as a consideration of the significance of animation techniques in music television. Among other valuable investigations of music television and its political and ideological implications are Deborah H. Holdstein, "Music Video: Messages and Structures," *Jump Cut* 29 (1984):1, 13–14; and Pat Aufderheide, "Music Videos: The Look of the Sound," in *Watching Television*, edited by Todd Gitlin (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 111–35.

Robert C. Allen, ed. *Channels of Discourse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987, revised in 1992, and retitled *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*) is a collection of original essays that discuss television from different critical approaches; and music videos figure prominently in Kaplan's essay on feminism and John Fiske's on British cultural studies. Both use as examples Madonna, and *Material Girl* in particular. Fiske develops his analysis of music TV in his book *Television Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987) and in the two-part chapter titled "Madonna" and "Romancing the Rock" in his *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 95–132. Madonna is also a central character in Lisa A. Lewis's investigations of popular music, music TV, and female fans. See her book *Gender Politics and MTV* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), which concentrates on four stars: Madonna, Cyndi Lauper, Tina Turner, and Pat Benatar.

NOTE

¹ For examples of the photographic style that inspired Madonna's *Vogue*, see George Hurrell, *Portfolios of George Hurrell* (Santa Monica, CA: Graystone Books, 1991). The images of Don Henley's *The End of Innocence* derive from Robert Frank's influential collection *The Americans* (1959; New York: Pantheon, 1986).

Animated Television: The Narrative Cartoon

Animation sneaks into the televisual flow. Animation frequently appears in commercials, credit-sequence graphics, music videos, news, and sports. But programs wholly devoted to cartoons have been mostly marginalized in the TV schedule, relegated to the low-rated television ghettos of weekday afternoons and Saturday mornings. They have never formed a significant portion of the prime-time schedule (see Table 11.1). However, because cartoons are shown during non-prime-time hours to a predominantly young audience does not make them unimportant. For many TV researchers, the appeal of cartoons to impressionable children makes understanding them supremely important.

As much as any other aspect of television, cartoons illustrate the medium's ability to recycle old material. Many of the cartoons regularly telecast today were produced forty, fifty, or even sixty years ago. Thus, to understand animation we need first to examine the evolution of narrative cartoons in both film and television. This will be the general purpose of this chapter. However, as we outline cartooning's history we will also discuss its technology, aesthetics, and economics—each of which plays a significant part in determining how animation is created and presented on television. From *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) to *Ren and Stimpy* (1991–), cartoons have depended upon technology to achieve aesthetic goals that are always restricted by cost (especially since cartoons mainly appeal to children, an audience without direct buying power). This chapter sketches how technology, aesthetics, and economics have intertwined to produce contemporary television animation as it has taken form in storytelling cartoons.

*Special Topics in
Television Form*

Television Cartoon Shows: Prime Time

Walt Disney (1954–83, 1986–90)—anthology, including cartoons
CBS Cartoon Theatre (summer 1956)
The Gerald McBoing Boing Show (1956–1958)
The Flintstones (1960–66)
The Bugs Bunny Show (1960–62; then on Sat. mornings)
Beany and Cecil (1960–62)—originally *Matty's Funday Funnies* (Sunday afternoons, beginning October 1959; sponsored by Mattel), moved to prime time in 1960 as *Matty's Funnies with Beany and Cecil*, soon shortened to *Beany and Cecil*; Bob Clampett's *Time for Beany* puppet show in syndication since early 1950s
The Bullwinkle Show/Rocky and His Friends (1961–62)
The Alvin Show (1961–62)
Top Cat (1961–62)
Calvin and the Colonel (1961–62)
The Jetsons (1962–63)
Johnny Quest (1964–65)
The Famous Adventures of Mr. Magoo (1964–65)
Where's Huddles (summer 1970)
Wait Till Your Father Gets Home (syndication only, 1972–74)
This Is America, Charlie Brown miniseries (fall 1988; summer 1990)
The Simpsons (1989–)
Toon Nite (1991)
The Family Dog (1993)

BEGINNINGS

Figures from cinematic animation were present at the various “births” of broadcast television. Among the very first experimental images transmitted by RCA/NBC engineers in the late 1920s was a wooden doll of Felix the Cat, a cartoon star of the silent cinema. It was placed on a phonograph turntable and slowly rotated under painfully hot lights before the camera.¹ A decade later, Disney's *Donald's Cousin Gus* was broadcast as part of NBC's first full evening of programming, on W2XBS, May 3, 1939. It would be many years, however, before cartoons as we know them would be created specifically for television. Early cartoon programming on television relied instead on short subjects initially exhibited in movie theaters and featuring now familiar characters such as Felix, Popeye, Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Woody Woodpecker, Betty Boop, et al. As these shorts served to establish cartooning's basic mode of production, and since many of them still appear on television, a significant portion of our consideration of television animation will address the cartoon designed originally for the cinema.

Like live-action video and film, animation relies upon the illusion of movement being created from a succession of still frames. Unlike

other forms of video and film, however, the camera in an animation production is pointed at a drawing or painting or normally inanimate objects (e.g., clay figures) rather than people in real settings. The difference is a crucial one. It leads to economic imperatives, necessitates technologies, and raises aesthetic issues that do not apply to other forms of video and film production.

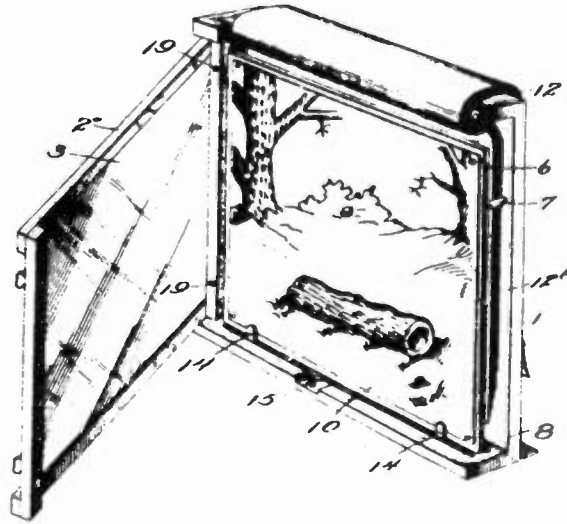
The factors necessary for the creation of film cartoons came together soon after motion pictures were invented in the 1890s, but their initial development was slower than that of live-action cinema. Established newspaper cartoonists such as Winsor McCay became involved with the infant medium after the turn of the century, but their task was daunting: approximately 16–20 frames had to be drawn for every single second of film, 960 to 1200 per minute.² McCay's influential *Gertie the Dinosaur*, which ran about seven minutes, comprised some 10,000 individual drawings. It's a small wonder that McCay's films often took years to prepare. The length of time involved in such cartoon productions discouraged film studio executives. If cartooning were to become a commercial reality, it would need a more cost-effective mode of production.³

This economic imperative led to a simple technological refinement. McCay and other animators had been drawing and redrawing every detail of every frame to show movement, even when the action was occurring in a small part of the frame. In 1914 Earl Hurd applied for a patent on a process in which a transparent sheet of celluloid, commonly referred to as a cel, is placed before a background drawing (Fig. 11.1, a detail from the patent application).⁴ The animator then needs only to draw the segment of the image that moves (which is transferred to the cel). The background stays constant and thus does not need to be redrawn. At the same time, John R. Bray had been aggressively patenting animation techniques and suing anyone who dared infringe on them. He united with Hurd to form the Bray-Hurd Process Company and they began charging a fee for the use of cel technology—thus initially slowing its acceptance. Most animation studios of the 1910s and 1920s continued to painstakingly redraw every detail, to avoid the Bray-Hurd fees and Bray's litigious wrath. It wasn't until the early 1930s that animators converted to Hurd's system, and paid to use his cels. The shift to cel animation came close on the heels of another, more significant technological invention (one that also had economic and aesthetic ramifications): the popularization of sound film in 1927.

During the silent era, cartoons had little more status than parlor games, such as flip cards and the zoetrope, that had been popular during the nineteenth century.⁵ Many of the studios that specialized in silent cartoon production went bankrupt before the coming of sound,

FIGURE 11.1

Earl Hurd's Patent Application for the Animation Cel (detail)



because cartooning had not yet developed an efficient mode of production. With the arrival of sound, a major animation producer also arrived who would standardize and dominate theatrical cartooning and who was the first to take full advantage of the new sound technology. This was the impact of Walt Disney.

The Jazz Singer, the film that popularized sound in live-action cinema, was released in the fall of 1927. In November of the following year Disney released the first significant sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, featuring Mickey Mouse. The popularity of *Steamboat Willie* had three major repercussions.

First, it established Mickey Mouse as a major figure. At that time he had only appeared in two cartoons that had not even been distributed to the public. He would go on, of course, to be possibly the most widely marketed cartoon character in the world, and form a central component of Disney's long-running, self-promoting television program.⁶

Second, *Steamboat Willie* positioned Disney as the 1930s' preeminent producer of cartoons. His studios in California (previously animation production had been based mostly in New York) attracted prominent cartoonists of the time, and he soon developed a cost-effective mode of production. To achieve this economy of production Disney divided his workers into specialized departments. Some focused

on story development while others worked more on the animation. Disney's studio was also the first to use storyboards (see Fig. 7.1), sketches that show the progression of the entire cartoon.⁷ With a precise outline of the full cartoon, Disney's animators were able to work more efficiently, the narrative structure was clearer, and Disney, the producer, was better able to control pre-production (see Chapter 7) and minimize costs. Distribution costs were also standardized in the 1930s when major studios such as Paramount, Warner Brothers, Universal, and MGM signed distribution contracts with cartoon studios, or created their own cartoon departments whose product they distributed to theaters they themselves owned.

Third, with *Steamboat Willie*, Disney set the aesthetic standards for cartoons with sound. His approach to cartooning would continue to govern animation aesthetics throughout the 1930s—determining much of how cartoons looked and sounded.

The Aesthetics of the 1930s Sound Cartoon: Disney's Domination

Naturalism versus Abstraction The aesthetics of animation has long been split between naturalism and abstraction. Naturalism advocates animation that replicates live-action film or videotape as much as possible. According to this aesthetic, cartoon characters should resemble objects in reality, and our view of cartoon figures should resemble a camera's view of real humans and objects. Abstraction, in contrast, maintains that the essence of cartooning is lines, shapes, and colors (or shades of gray)—*abstract* forms that the animator may manipulate as he or she wishes.

The extremes of these two positions seldom exist. There may never be a hand-drawn cartoon that is so detailed that we might mistake it for a film or videotape of a real person or object (although computer-generated animation may yet achieve this). And few cartoons are made that have no characters resembling real life objects, though there have been important exceptions to this, such as Norman McLaren's *Begone Dull Care* (1949). Most cartoons, especially ones that are broadcast on television, balance these two extremes. Drawn characters and objects bear enough correspondence with reality for us to recognize them, but animators do not draw every leaf on every tree.

The naturalist impulse began to dominate the Disney studio's productions in the 1930s as they aspired to feature-length theatrical cartoons such as *Snow White* (1937). Disney's naturalism has continued through its recent releases such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992). Among the naturalistic changes Disney implemented

during the 1930s were heightened rounding and shading of characters and objects. Silent-era characters such as Felix the Cat tend to appear flat, emphasizing their two-dimensionality. Disney's animators used shading to create a more rounded appearance. Their characters, although still two-dimensional, give a greater illusion of three-dimensionality. They seem almost bulbous.

Disney's Use of Sound and Other New Technologies Disney's *Steamboat Willie* was more than a silent cartoon with music attached. After all, this would actually have been nothing new. "Silent" cartoons were hardly ever presented silently. When they were shown in theaters they were nearly always accompanied by a pianist, band, or full orchestra. What is different about *Steamboat Willie* is that the movement in the image is *precisely* synchronized to the music, because *the music was planned before the images*. Linda Obalil explains: "Since music can be broken down mathematically, the animation was drawn to follow a musical pattern. For example, if the music had two beats per second, the animation would hit a beat every 12 frames (based on 24 frames per second)."⁸ With this innovation, *Steamboat Willie* set an aesthetic standard for the synchronization of image and sound in animation. In the most highly regarded cartoons of the 1930s, sound does not merely overlay the image; instead, it dynamically interacts with character movement.

Music often forms the structuring principle for 1930s cartoons—as is evident in the titles of cartoon series such as Disney's "Silly Symphonies" and Warner Brothers's "Looney Tunes" (a rather direct parody of Disney's pretensions) and "Merrie Melodies." Because Max and Dave Fleischer—Disney's rivals—had access to Paramount's music library, their work, which was distributed through Paramount, also makes liberal use of songs. Their Betty Boop cartoons, *Minnie the Moocher* (1932) and *Snow White* (1933), for example, feature the Cab Calloway tunes "Minnie the Moocher" and "St. James Infirmary Blues," respectively. Other Fleischer shorts highlight music by Ethel Merman, the Mills Brothers, and Louis Armstrong (*I'll be Glad When You're Dead You Rascal You* [1932]). Many of these cartoons regularly appeared on television from the 1960s to the present—long after viewers would be familiar with Calloway, Merman, Armstrong, et al. In their interpretation of preexisting popular songs, these musical shorts anticipated the animated music videos of the 1980s and 1990s. (The Fleischers also pioneered follow-the-bouncing-ball musical shorts, in which viewers were encouraged to sing along.)

Disney incorporated other new technologies during the 1930s, always with the goal of greater naturalism. The most influential of these technologies were

- The Technicolor color process
- The rotoscope⁹

The history of color technology in film is long and complicated, but its end result was that Technicolor—a process using three colors of dye (in what was known as three-color Technicolor) would come to dominate color filmmaking in the late 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. Disney was among the first to experiment with the new three-color process, signing a contract with Technicolor that blocked any other cartoon studios from using it for three years. His first cartoon in three-color Technicolor, *Flowers and Trees*, was released in 1932, three years before the first live-action feature using the process (*Becky Sharp* [1935]). It was an instantaneous success and won the Academy Award for best animated short subject.

Although Disney's use of color in *Flowers and Trees* is somewhat stylized, the more routine Silly Symphonies use color in naturalistic fashion. Color was mostly another way for Disney to make cartoons look more like reality (which, after all, is in color). Stylized experimentations with color were left to more avant-garde animators.

Rotoscoping was not invented by Disney's animators, but they used it to greatest naturalistic effect. The rotoscope was patented in the 1910s by Max Fleischer. It is a fairly simple device, still in use today, by which a single frame from a live-action film is rear-projected onto a light table (a table with a semi-opaque glass in the center). The animator places a cel on the light table and traces the image cast by the live-action film—as may be observed in the diagram Fleischer submitted with his patent application (Fig. 11.2). Then the film is advanced to the next frame and the process is repeated. The tracings are rephotographed, and the end result is an animated film that duplicates the live-action images. Fleischer used his invention to create the “Out of the Inkwell” series in 1919, which mixed live-action footage with often bizarre rotoscoped images of Koko the Clown.

In line with their naturalist aesthetic, Disney's animators put the rotoscope to work duplicating human movement. For their first full-length cartoon, *Snow White*, the dancer Marge Champion's body and movements were filmed and then, through rotoscoping, converted into Snow White's. Thus, Snow White is actually a cartoon replica of Champion. Disney's naturalistic aesthetic peaked in *Snow White*. Cartoons were as close to live-action as they would come until the advent of computer animation.

Rotoscoping is not necessarily a tool for Disney-style animation or naturalism in general, however. Fleischer often used it for stylized effects. More recently, music videos have incorporated rotoscoping as a way of transforming performers into animated images, which may then be abstracted in a variety of ways. One of Ah-ha's music videos

FIGURE 11.2

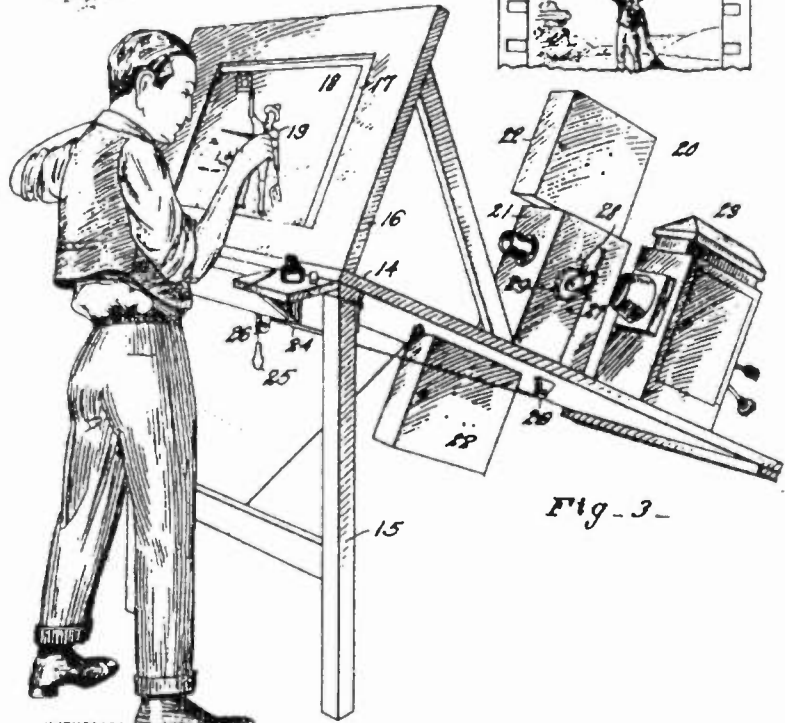
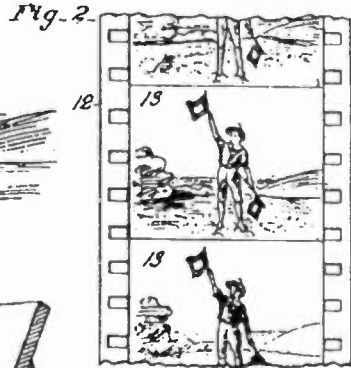
Special Topics in
Television Form

Max Fleischer's Patent Application for the Rotoscope (detail)

M. FLEISCHER.
METHOD OF PRODUCING MOVING PICTURE CARTOONS.
APPLICATION FILED DEC. 6, 1913.

1,242,674.

Patented Oct. 9, 1917.
2 SHEETS—SHEET 1.



WITNESSES

Frank C. Palmer
J. L. ...

INVENTOR
Max Fleischer
BY Munnico
ATTORNEYS

shifts effortlessly between live action and animation through rotoscoping (Figs. 11.3–11.5). The technology of the rotoscope is open to various aesthetic uses, not all of them naturalistic.

As the 1930s came to an end and World War II began, cartoons were well established in the cinema. With Disney's move into features at the end of the decade, he became the most prominent cartoon producer. But there were many other studios cranking out cartoon shorts with characters much more audacious than Disney's: Warner Brothers's Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, and Daffy Duck; Fleischer's Popeye and Betty Boop (officially censored by the Production Code); Walter Lantz's Woody Woodpecker; and MGM's Droopy, The Wolf, and Screwy Squirrel. Every major studio had a division for producing cartoons and, since they owned the major theaters, they also had assured exhibition for their cartoon product.

By this time animation had found its own niche within the expanding film industry. Cartooning had developed an efficient mode of production through industrial specialization, the incorporation of cost-cutting technologies (e.g., the animation cel), and businesslike pre-production planning based on storyboards. It had also settled upon the basic format that would obtain to the present day:

- 6–8 minutes long
- In color
- Structured around music and sound effects

Cartoons' place in theatrical film exhibition seemed assured. At the time, movies were presented in double bills, and cartoons were a routine part of the short subjects (newsreels and the like) that were shown between feature films. Changes in film exhibition and the rise of televi-

FIGURE 11.3



FIGURE 11.4



FIGURE 11.5

sion would change all this, absorbing and bringing to an end one form of the cartoon, but eventually spawning its own assortment of animation. We will detail these economic shifts below, but first we must consider an aesthetic change in cartooning that occurred just as television was beginning to make its presence felt.

UPA ABSTRACTION: THE CHALLENGE TO DISNEY NATURALISM

Disney and his naturalist aesthetic may have governed 1930s animation, but the early 1940s saw the disruption of his economic dominance and the rise of a new aesthetic of abstraction that has continued to have a major impact.

Disney's economic empire was briefly unsettled in 1941 when a strike against the studio resulted in the departure of several key animators. Among this group were John Hubley, Steve Bosustow, and Adrian Woolery, who would form the mainstays of United Productions of America (UPA). Obviously, the strike had little lasting economic impact on Disney as he went on to diversify his investments, founding Disneyland in 1954 and producing his long-running television program. But the eventual formation of UPA did provide the environment to nurture a new animation aesthetic. It contrasted markedly with Disney's work, which, after the 1930s, emphasized feature-length production, leaving the field open for other studios to produce animated shorts.

UPA's animators came to cartooning with a background in the fine arts and drawing. This nurtured an aesthetic that emphasized abstract line, shape, and pattern over naturalistic, rotoscoped figures. UPA first

achieved commercial success in 1949 with the Mr. Magoo series, but its aesthetic wasn't fully recognized until the Academy Award-winning *Gerald McBoing Boing* (1951). We can distinguish several characteristics of this aesthetic, each of which contrasts with Disney-style naturalism:

- Flattened perspective
- Abstract backgrounds
- Primary colors
- Well-defined character outlines
- Limited animation

Flattened Perspective Throughout the history of drawing, artists have been concerned with perspective, with the rendering of the three-dimensional world in two dimensions. Drawings and cartoons have horizontal and vertical dimensions, but they have no true depth. Hence, the illusion of depth must be fabricated. One of the principal artistic developments of the European Renaissance was linear perspective, a method for representing depth in which the parallel lines of “reality” are made to converge at a single point, the so-called vanishing point, in a drawing. Naturalistic animation such as that produced by Disney used linear perspective and other visual cues (e.g., character shading) to heighten the sense of depth in their cartoons.

In a revolutionary move, the UPA animators rejected this illusion of depth. Instead, they flattened and distorted Renaissance perspective—as did avant-garde graphic designers and artists of the time. In one shot from *Gerald McBoing Boing*, for instance, a small boy, Gerald, walks up a flight of stairs. There are four or five vanishing points, and none of them match. A doorway is askew and the side of the staircase is covered with an abstract design. The image resembles cubist paintings more than Disney's *Snow White*.

Abstract Backgrounds Closely related to this flattening of perspective are the revolutionary backgrounds in UPA cartoons. The background in many shots from *Gerald McBoing Boing* consists of broad, abstract fields of color. In one respect, this returned animation to the earliest days when minimal backgrounds were used because animators were redrawing entire frames. After the animation cel was invented, backgrounds became quite elaborate, since they only had to be drawn once for each shot (only moving elements were redrawn). The Disney features in particular have intricate backgrounds in nearly every shot. In striking contrast to Disney, the UPA films completely reject this naturalistic style.

Primary Colors Coloring in cartoons has never been subtle. The technology of the three-color Technicolor process in the 1930s made muted colors tough to achieve because Technicolor's hues tended to be

very rich and deep (i.e., highly saturated). That animators were able to get as much variation out of Technicolor as they did is a testament to their inventiveness. It is somewhat ironic, then, that in the early 1950s, when Kodak was introducing a more supple color technology (Eastmancolor), cartoonists were experimenting with prominent, almost garish, primary colors in the abstract color fields of cartoons such as *Gerald McBoing Boing*.

Well-Defined Character Outlines In another “innovation” that actually made cartooning resemble its formative years, the UPA animators rejected the fully rounded, shaded, and molded look that Disney achieved (at great expense). Instead, they sharply outlined their characters and filled the outlines with single colors (i.e., little or no shading)—as had been done decades before in *Gertie the Dinosaur* and the Felix the Cat series. This contributed to the flattening of perspective by making the characters themselves appear two-dimensional.

Limited Animation By far the most significant change inaugurated by UPA, at least as far as television is concerned, is so-called limited animation. There are three ways in which UPA animation is more “limited” than other animation of that time, especially compared to Disney animation such as *Snow White* and *Pinocchio* (1940).

First, in limited animation, the amount of movement within the frame is substantially reduced. Once animators began using cels, they stopped redrawing the entire image for each frame of film. But still, 1930s and 1940s animators typically redrew entire characters who were involved in any form of movement. Even if a character were just speaking and moving its mouth, the character’s whole body would be redrawn. In the most extreme limited animation, in contrast, when a character speaks, only its mouth moves. Cels of the mouth drawings would be placed over one of the entire character, which, in turn, would be on top of the background. As the character speaks only the mouth-drawing cels are changed. Thus, as animation has become more and more limited, less and less of the frame has been re-drawn.

Second, in limited animation, eye blinks and arm, leg, and head motions are routinely repeated, using the same series of cels over and over. Consequently, the characters move in limited, repeatable directions. In full animation, characters make a large number of unique movements, which demand that a new set of frames be drawn.

Third, movements are constructed from fewer individual frames in limited animation. Consider a simple movement such as Bugs Bunny raising his hand, a movement that takes one second. Since sound film uses 24 frames per second, there must be 24 drawings for this movement. But even in full animation not all of the drawings will be *unique*. The movement might actually consist of only 12 cels, each of which is pho-

tographed twice. In limited animation the number of cels is reduced even below that of “full” animation, and the result is a less fluid movement.

There are obvious economic advantages to UPA’s limited animation, flattened perspective, and abstract design (fewer, less-detailed frames mean faster production time); but there exists an aesthetic rationale independent of the financial advantages. Remember, *Gerald McBoing Boing* was a well-respected, Oscar-winning film of the time. One aesthetic justification is that this herky-jerky animation style mirrors the frenetic pace of the modern world—just as jump cuts do in the French New Wave films of the late 1950s and early 1960s. One argument for the abstract design is that it is the cartoon equivalent of art movements such as abstract expressionism, which drew viewers’ attention to the surface of the painting, making them aware of shape and formal patterns. In this sense, *Gerald McBoing Boing* may well be the only exercise in abstract expressionism which also won an Academy Award and was the model for its own television cartoon show (*The Gerald McBoing Boing Show*).

UPA set the standard for theatrical animation during the gradual demise of cartoons in theaters. UPA’s Mr. Magoo series incorporated the money-saving aspects of *Gerald McBoing Boing*’s animation, watered down its aesthetic of abstract stylization, and established what cartoons would be like during the 1950s and 1960s. All of the major studios soon followed suit with stylized cartoons such as MGM’s *Symphony in Slang* (1951) and Warner Brothers’s *What’s Opera, Doc?* (1957) (Fig. 11.6) and the Road Runner series (Figs. 11.7–11.8). Even Disney finally recapitulated and released the UPA-esque *Pigs Is Pigs* in 1954. The full and total victory of UPA animation style, however, would come in television.

FIGURE 11.6

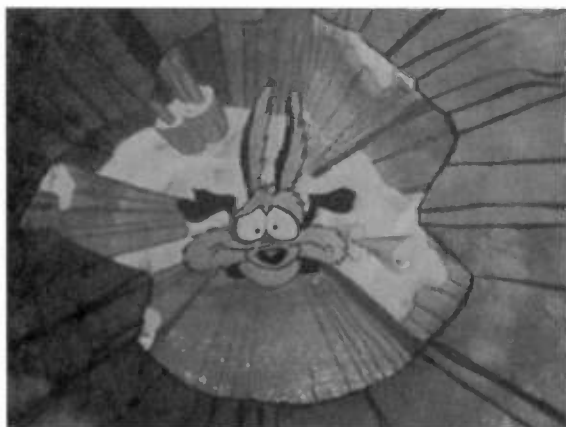
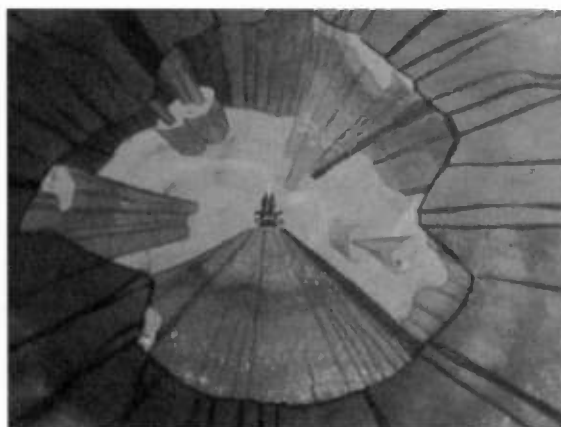


**TELEVISION'S ARRIVAL:
ECONOMIC REALIGNMENT**

Television's ascent in the postwar years had direct and drastic economic effects on narrative cartoons.

First, it contributed to the demise of the theatrical exhibition of cartoons. As the film industry scrambled to economize during the 1950s and into the 1960s, the output of feature films tumbled to barely one-fourth of what it had been during the 1930s—from a yearly norm of approximately 500 to an all-time low of 121 in 1963. Most troubling to cartoon studios was that the film exhibition patterns were changing as the production declined. The double bill, the cartoon's *raison d'être*, was becoming extinct. With its passing, so did the need for short subjects to interject between the features. Shorts were shown before films on some single bills, but they were regarded by theater owners as an unnecessary expense. Perhaps most damaging to the theatrical exhibition of cartoons was a 1948 court ruling that forced studios to sell the theaters they owned, which meant that MGM, Warner Brothers, and the rest were no longer assured a venue for their product.¹⁰ Suddenly, there was no guaranteed place to show cartoons theatrically. Since major studios regarded animation and other short film production as of secondary importance anyway and because cartoons are relatively more expensive to create than live-action films, the cartoon divisions were soon abolished.

As cartoons were virtually eliminated from theaters, they found a new home on television. As we have discussed previously, the television and film industries have come to depend upon one other in a variety of economic ways. For animation, this interdependence meant that the-

FIGURE 11.7**FIGURE 11.8**

atrical cartoon stars such as Bugs Bunny, Popeye, and Woody Woodpecker became broadly known to children of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s through their appearance on television. Most commonly, these cartoons were packaged for television's use in locally produced, after-school children's shows, or grouped together for Saturday morning programming, beginning with *The Mighty Mouse Playhouse* (1955–66).

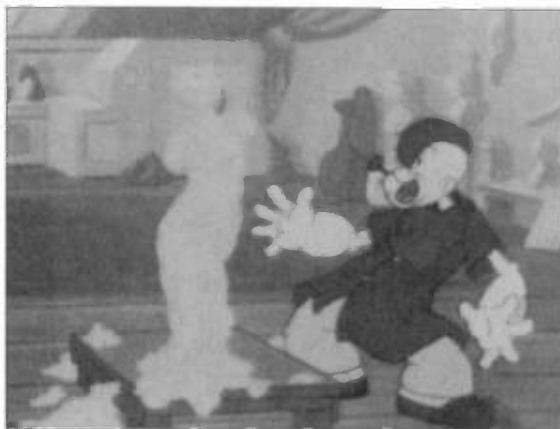
The initial move to television was led by smaller animation studios/distributors because the majors were locked in seemingly mortal combat with television over rights to their film libraries—which included cartoons. Consequently, the minor-league Van Beuren Studios, which had ceased production in 1936, was able to successfully market cartoons (e.g., Aesop's Fables) to early children's programs such as *Movies for Small Fry*, which was broadcast on the now-defunct DuMont network in 1947. Among the first of the majors, Disney came over to television in 1954 with *Disneyland*, and the following year premiered *The Mickey Mouse Club*. These programs maintained his exclusive control over the Disney animation library for decades to come. The other major cartoon studios began capitulating in 1955, when both Paramount-Fleischer-Famous Studios and Warner Brothers released their cartoons to television, and Terrytoons (from Paul Terry's Studio) was bought by CBS.¹¹ By 1960 most of the majors were releasing their cartoons to television, with the exception of the few cartoon series that were still running in movie theaters.

Bugs Bunny and the other Warner Brothers characters (Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, Tweety, Sylvester, and so on) made the most successful transition to television—starting in 1956 with *Bugs Bunny Theater*, which was syndicated to local stations. Then, in 1960, they premiered in a prime-time network series on ABC called *The Bugs Bunny Show* (1960–62). Most significant, the Warners characters found a permanent home on Saturday mornings, debuting in 1962 and remaining on the air ever since—the most long-lived of all Saturday morning cartoon shows. Virtually every child who has grown up watching television in the United States during the past forty-odd years is familiar with these cartoons.

Cartoon compilation programs such as *The Bugs Bunny Show* do not contain new cartoons but use theatrical releases from decades past. This can result in some odd cultural ruptures. For instance, when a child viewer of the 1990s watches *The Goofy Gophers*, a Merrie Melodies cartoon from 1947 still broadcast on television today, he or she will witness one scene in which two gophers pile fruit on their heads and say, "Toodle-oo, Carmen" and "See you tomorrow, Hedda." The first refers to Carmen Miranda, a 1940s movie star, and the second to Hedda Hopper, a gossip columnist from the same era. Both were known at the time for their outlandish headgear. To today's child viewer, plainly, the references can have little significance.

This disjunction between the text's discourse and that of the viewer is not just a matter of a changing frame of reference over the passage of time. It is also because these cartoons were originally designed for a general theatrical audience, an audience that was predominantly adult. Consequently, they were encoded with an adult discourse that even contemporary children could not have decoded. For example, in *My Artistical Temperature*, a Fleischer cartoon from 1937 recently broadcast on WTBS, Popeye and Bluto battle as rival artists. At one point Popeye has trouble arranging the arms on a statue of a woman. Finally, he tears them off, so that it resembles the Venus de Milo (Fig. 11.9), and mumbles, "Oh! I think I got something here: a maskerpiece!" How many ten-year-olds in either 1937 or 1993 would understand this joke? And yet, there is obviously much meaning and pleasure that children receive from cartoons such as this. Theatrical cartoons have often possessed a polysemy, a "double discourse" (child and adult), that has facilitated their long-standing popularity on television.

Thus, the first cartoons on television, as well as many still being telecast, were drawn from the older libraries of theatrical product designed for general audiences (child and adult). The domination of television animation by theatrically exhibited cartoons could not continue once theatrical cartoon production declined. Television required more and more cartoon product, and the cartoon studios' archives were quickly being exhausted. An economically efficient mode of production was needed for the creation of cartoons specifically for use on television.

FIGURE 11.9

The history of cartoons produced for television begins in syndication, rather than network programming. Around the time that UPA was first garnering attention for its new animation style, Jay Ward and Alexander Anderson were preparing to syndicate *Crusader Rabbit* (1949–51, 1957–69). Although never picked up by the networks, *Crusader Rabbit* was quite popular in the major TV markets and established much of the made-for-TV cartoon's mode of production. The persons to benefit most from this format and to bring it to network television were Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera, the preeminent producers of made-for-TV cartoons. *The Ruff and Reddy Show* (1957–60, 1962–64) was Hanna-Barbera's first foray into network TV animation. It was also the first network cartoon series to use material designed specifically for TV—although it also mixed in older Columbia Pictures cartoons. Moreover, *The Ruff and Reddy Show* was the first such show to stake out the territory of Saturday morning children's programming, proving to the networks just how lucrative those time slots might be. Three years later, Hanna-Barbera introduced *The Flintstones* (1960–66) to prime-time network programming. It would prove to be the only successful prime-time cartoon series until *The Simpsons* premiered in 1989. With *Crusader Rabbit*, *The Ruff and Reddy Show*, and *The Flintstones*, the blueprint for the made-for-TV cartoon was instituted. It has changed little since then.

The format of the made-for-TV cartoon can be divided into four characteristics:

1. Program structure
2. Narrative structure
3. Limited animation
4. Emphasis on dialogue

Program Structure Taking into account television's (commercial) interruptions and the need for segmentation, *Crusader Rabbit's* individual cartoons were designed to be even shorter than theatrical cartoons. They were compartmentalized into four-minute segments that could be combined in a single day's program or run separately on subsequent days. Not all made-for-TV programs use such short segments. The average *Flintstones* segment lasts longer than four minutes, for example. The point is that cartoon segments on television are often shorter than theatrical short subjects.

Since 1950s cartoon programs were made up of short individual cartoons, some structure was needed to unify and cohere the segments. Many programs solved this with a human host, sometimes accompanied by puppets. *The Ruff and Reddy Show*, for instance, was

initially hosted by Jimmy Blaine, accompanied by the puppets Rhubarb the Parrot and Jose the Toucan. When revived in 1962, the program used Captain Bob Cottle and his puppets—Jasper, Gramps, and Mr. Answer. These hosts, both human and puppet, provided coherence to the disparate mix of material (old and new cartoons, live-action shorts, sketches performed by the hosts) presented in 1950s and 1960s children's programs. They also lured the viewer into staying tuned by introducing and promoting upcoming segments—much as a news or sports play-by-play announcer does. Since that time, hosted children's programs have gradually lost their hosts. The transitions between cartoons are now accomplished by voice-over narrators and visual material.

Narrative Structure *Crusader Rabbit's* and *Ruff and Reddy's* segments are not self-contained narratives, as in theatrical cartoons. Rather, *Crusader Rabbit* and *Ruff and Reddy* are television's first cartoon serials—one segment picking up the action where the preceding episode left off. As Jay Ward commented, "We wanted to get the effect of an animated comic strip. The commercials would go in between the short segments."¹¹ In effect, each cartoon segment is like one panel in a comic strip. Incomplete on its own, it leads from one narrative segment (panel or animated cartoon) to the next. The effect, obviously enough, is to encourage us to remain tuned in, to impel us to continue watching through the commercials. Theatrical cartoons that have been packaged together for TV cannot provide this narrative propulsion, because they come to an explicit conclusion every seven or eight minutes. *Crusader Rabbit* established a form of narrative segmentation that would obtain in many subsequent television cartoons.

The Flintstones and other Hanna-Barbera programs modified this form of serialization. Like most live-action television series, the Hanna-Barbera programs come to a tentative conclusion at the end of the program. Each episode presents some dilemma that will be resolved. But the end of each segment *between the commercials* ends inconclusively, leading to the next segment—just as in *Crusader Rabbit* and unlike theatrical cartoons.

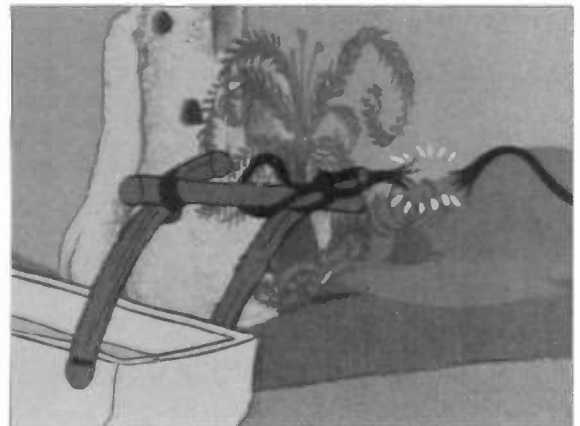
Limited Animation *Crusader Rabbit* established that made-for-TV cartoons would use the limited animation style that had been pioneered by UPA. But made-for-TV animation does not use that style in exactly the same way. Made-for-TV animation rejects the *aesthetic* of abstraction that was embraced by UPA's theatrical animation, and for which it won honors such as the Academy Award. *Crusader Rabbit's* limited animation was born of the necessity to produce an immense amount of animation in a short period of time and for a relatively small amount of money. It was not represented or interpreted as a car-

toon version of abstract expressionism, as was the most-respected UPA work. Does this make any difference in the text itself, in the way that these cartoons look? Do they differ, say, from award-winning shorts such as *Gerald McBoing Boing*? Yes, in small ways. UPA's style, at its most extreme, draws as much attention to the visual design itself as to the story being presented. Made-for-TV animation spurns that approach; the design of an image never intrudes into the storytelling, never impedes the progression of the narrative. This leads to a final narrative component of the made-for-TV cartoon: its reliance upon dialogue.

Emphasis on Dialogue Because of their limited animation and acknowledging TV's low resolution (compared to the cinema), the Hanna-Barbera cartoons do not rely upon the visuals to convey narrative information or other meanings. Consequently, the visuals and the dialogue are often redundant. For example, in one episode of *The Flintstones*, we have the following five-shot sequence:

1. Long shot: baby Pebbles's carriage speeds along, pulled by their pet dinosaur (Fig. 11.10).
 2. Close-up: the leash breaks (Fig. 11.11).
 3. Long shot: the carriage rolls out of control (Fig. 11.12).
 4. Long shot: Fred and Barney chase the carriage (Fig. 11.13). Fred says, "Oh no, the leash broke! Pebbles, stop the carriage!"
 5. Long shot: the carriage passes a sign pointing to the zoo (Fig. 11.14). Barney (in voice-over) says, "Ooooh, she's headed for the zoo!"
- All of the dialogue in this segment reiterates what is already shown in the visuals. As in a soap opera, we could get most of the narrative information from a *Flintstones* episode by listening to it from another

FIGURE 11.10

FIGURE 11.11


room. It has become what animator Chuck Jones called “radio with pictures.” Contrast *The Flintstones* with one of Jones’s Roadrunner cartoons to see the difference. The Roadrunner cartoons are entirely dependent upon visuals; the soundtrack consists almost solely of music, roadrunner beeps, and explosions (see Figs. 11.7–11.8). Dialogue never duplicates image, as it often does in limited-animation series.

The significance of the visuals is, of course, largely a matter of degree. Made-for-TV animation, even *The Flintstones*, does emphasize and derive humor from the visuals occasionally. And most theatrical cartoons are not as extreme as the Roadrunner series in their reliance upon the visuals. Still, it is generally true that made-for-TV cartoons

FIGURE 11.12**FIGURE 11.13****FIGURE 11.14**

rely upon dialogue and deemphasize the image more than theatrical cartoons. This is in keeping with television's overall accent on sound, as we discussed in Chapter 8.

(*The Flintstones* also added a component of TV sound that has not been adopted by many other cartoon shows: the laugh track. This element of the program indicates *The Flintstones*'s close relationship with the live-action genre of the sitcom. In fact, it has often been said that the program was an animated version of Jackie Gleason's *The Honey-mooners*.)

By 1960, television cartooning had developed an efficient mode of production, a cost-effective aesthetic, and successful programming strategies (afternoons and Saturday mornings, but not prime time). There have been few subsequent changes in animation that are as revolutionary as the invention of the cel or the aesthetic of limited animation. There have been some shifts, however, that do warrant our attention.

CONTEMPORARY TV CARTOONING

Mode of Production

In the 1980s, production was internationalized. Much routine animation work, such as inking-in character outlines, began to be sent to firms outside the United States. Korean animators, for example, are largely responsible for creating *The Simpsons*. The major conceptual work of most cartoons is still done in the United States, but the physical creation of the animation is often executed abroad. The reason for this change is clearly economic: Korean labor is less expensive than U.S. labor. Further, it is part of a global economic shift whereby national boundaries are becoming less important than financial ones.

One less marked change in cartooning's mode of production has been the increase in merchandising of cartoon characters. Cartoon characters have been merchandised since at least 1904, when the Brown Shoe Company based an advertising campaign around the Buster Brown comic strip character. But the 1980s saw an intensification of the link between sponsors and cartoon programs as several *already existing* products were transformed into television characters: e.g., Strawberry Shortcake, the Smurfs, and He-Man. The difference between the characters and the products became less and less clear, and the textual difference between the commercials and the narrative cartoons diminished correspondingly. It became difficult for (child) viewers to discern where one ended and the other began. Television network's ultimate goal, to advertise products, had become confusingly entwined with the medium's entertainment function.

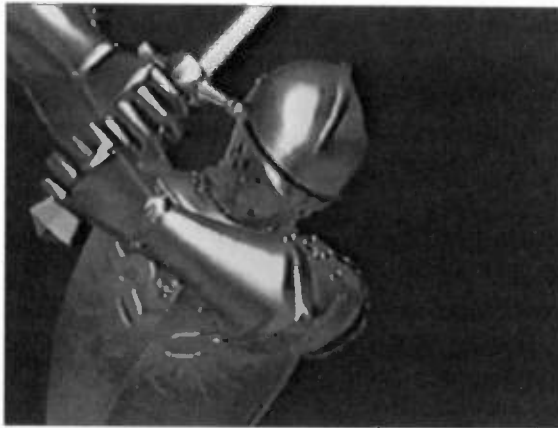
Technology

One major technological innovation that has yet to change most television animation, but could well do so in the future, is the maturation of computer-generated imagery (CGI). As of this writing, CGI has been too expensive to affect the bulk of television cartooning. Instead, it has been used principally for credit sequences (e.g., *Amazing Stories* [Fig. 11.15]), commercials (e.g., Listerine mouthwash), as well as occasional music videos such as Dire Straits's *Money for Nothing*. The ballroom sequence in Disney's theatrical feature, *Beauty and the Beast*, was animated with a computer. Currently, however, none of the Saturday morning animated shows are entirely computer-generated.

For some time now, computer-*assisted* animation has been part of animation technology. In this process, the animator draws frames from certain stages of a movement and the computer creates the frames in between. Full-scale computer-*generated* animation goes far beyond this, however. In that process, a schematic model is created in computer-understandable format. The model may then be controlled by the animator and made to move in a variety of ways. The animator does not draw frames in the conventional sense. He or she directs the computer to generate frames based on the plotted movements of the model. In other words, the computer does the physical act of creating the individual frames based on instructions from the animator.

CGI has its own distinct aesthetic, its own look, that separates it from conventional animation. The coloring and movements are mathematically precise, unlike those done by human hand. The surfaces have a uniform sheen to them. Many of the quirks of human animation are missing.

FIGURE 11.15





Animated
Television: The
Narrative Cartoon

Aside from the aesthetic shift implicit in CGI, there have been a few other changes in recent cartoon texts as narrative.

First, concerns over violence and a discourse that was perceived as antisocial led to modifications of cartoon stories. The brutality of the theatrical cartoons from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s was censored during the 1980s by television networks and syndicators. In Warner Brothers's *Duck, Rabbit, Duck* (1953), for example, Elmer Fudd blasts Daffy Duck in a variety of manners (Fig. 11.16.) When it was broadcast in the 1980s, most of those explosions were cut out. Generally, violence has become much less visual in today's cartoons.

In addition to taming the anarchic violence of cartoon visuals, animators have also grafted so-called prosocial meanings to the discourse of cartoons. For instance, in one episode of *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*, He-Man runs around battling various villains. At the end of the program, he faces the camera and explains the value of cooperation to the (child) viewer. Theatrical cartoons, by virtue of their marginal existence and the distancing factor of drawings (compared to live action), were often permitted to violate social taboos against violence, sexuality, and general chaos. Contemporary Saturday morning cartoons are the enforcers of those taboos. They speak the language of the dominant discourse.

S U M M A R Y

Television animation has appeared in many forms, from theatrical cartoons to computer-generated commercials. In this chapter we have focused on the types of narrative cartoons that have appeared on tele-

vision. We have surveyed the counterbalancing forces of technology, aesthetics, and economics, which have determined the mode of production of those cartoons.

Initially, cartooning evolved a mode of production well-suited for creating films for movie theaters. Cel-and-background animation was coupled with new technologies of sound, color, and rotoscoping, a specialized studio structure, and pre-production planning (using storyboards) to efficiently construct a durable product. Disney, Warner Brothers, MGM, Paramount, and others produced theatrical cartoons during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s that would be run and re-run on television up to the present day—once the studios had overcome their fear of television in the late 1950s.

These theatrical films share a general aesthetic of naturalism, which was most aggressively propounded by the Disney studio. UPA contested that aesthetic with its abstract animation style: flattened perspective, abstract backgrounds, primary colors, well-defined character outlines, and limited animation.

The economic advantages of UPA-style animation necessitated its use in made-for-TV animation, which was inaugurated in syndication by *Crusader Rabbit* in 1949 and on prime-time network television by *The Flintstones* in 1960.

Cartoons quickly adapted to television's special demands. Made-for-TV cartoons rely heavily upon limited animation, taming UPA's abstracted style into "radio with pictures." Because the visuals are so simple, dialogue comes to dominate the presentation of narrative, often duplicating what is presented in the image. Television cartoon segments are shorter than theatrical cartoons, to allow for TV's interrupted and segmented form. Some shows use the serial form, posing enigmas to the viewer just before the commercial breaks begin. Others are more like live-action series: broken into incomplete segments, but ending with a tentative conclusion. Shows that are compilations of new and old cartoons often use a host to cobble all the elements together.

The template for television animation was formalized by the early 1960s. Recent cartoons have modified this template slightly. New economic pressures have driven much animation work overseas and heightened the impact of merchandising. Computer-generated imagery promises to alter fundamental assumptions about how cartoons are made, and may eventually do away with the need for cels themselves. Social pressures have led animators to censor themselves—modifying old cartoons and inserting prosocial discourses into new ones.

In sum, animation continues to exist on television's periphery. It appears most frequently in children's programming and commercials, neither of which ranks high on television's aesthetic hierarchy.

Little has been written specifically on the television cartoon. However, Charles Solomon, *Enchanted Drawings: The History of Animation* (New York: Knopf, 1989), does offer a well-illustrated chapter on the topic. Similarly, Leonard Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons* (New York: New American Library, 1980), chronicles the advent of the TV cartoon after detailing the history of the theatrical cartoon. Solomon's and Maltin's approaches are historical, and offer rudimentary critical analysis of the cartoons.

One of the most detailed considerations of a specific television cartoon is an issue of *Cinefantastique* (June 1993) largely devoted to *Ren and Stimpy*. It includes interviews with the program's creators and an overview of all the episodes up to that time.

George W. Woolery, *Children's Television, the First Thirty-Five Years: 1946–1981* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1985), is a broad-based history of all children's programming, paying particular attention to cartoons. And Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993) analyzes the commercial function of TV cartoons within the larger issue of consumer culture.

Most of the numerous books on theatrical cartoons are lightweight reading. Two books that do attempt a more rigorous critical and/or cultural interpretation of animation are Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898–1928* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), and Eric Smoodin, *Animating Culture: Hollywood Cartoons from the Sound Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

NOTES

¹ Joseph Dominick, Barry Sherman, Gary Copeland, *Broadcasting/Cable and Beyond: An Introduction to Modern Electronic Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 240.

² The speed of silent film was originally around 16 frames per second (fps), though by the 1920s it was above 20 fps. The cameras were cranked by hand at that time and the speed varied considerably. Once sound arrived, the speed was standardized at 24 fps.

³ Leonard Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons* (New York: New American Library, 1980), 3.

⁴ As Donald Crafton explains, Hurd's patent is based on the camera being pointed at the drawings horizontally. In modern animation, in contrast, the background drawings are laid flat and the cels are placed on top of them. The camera is mounted vertically on an animation stand and points down at the drawings. Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898–1928* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 153.

⁵ The zoetrope is a cylindrical toy. On the inside of the cylinder is a series of drawings—say, a monkey doing a backward flip. Between the drawings are vertical slits, through which the viewer sees the drawings inside the cylinder as it turns around. Since the individual drawings are seen in quick succession, persistence of vision creates the illusion of movement.

⁶ The program has been known variously as *Disneyland*, *Walt Disney Presents*, *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color*, *The Wonderful World of Disney*, *Disney's Wonderful World*, and *Walt Disney*. It was broadcast for thirty-four years, second only to *The Tonight Show* in longevity.

⁷ According to Maltin, Webb Smith at Disney was the first to use a storyboard. Maltin, 38.

⁸ Linda J. Obalil, "Steamboat Willie," *The International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers: Films*, edited by Christopher Lyon (New York: Perigee, 1984), 451.

⁹ The multiplane camera was still another of Disney's technological devices that was meant to increase naturalism. However, it had little impact on most cartooning of the 1930s.

¹⁰ The U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the "Paramount Case" in 1948 and ordered the divorcement of the studios' exhibition operation from their production and distribution divisions. Studios were no longer permitted to own theaters, and had to compete with independent producers to get their films shown.

¹¹ To be accurate, some of the early Terrytoons were released to television before CBS's acquisition of Paul Terry's Studio in 1955. They had been seen on the network weekday afternoon program *Barker Bill's Cartoon Show* (1953–56).

¹² George W. Woolery, *Children's Television, the First Thirty-Five Years: 1946–1981* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1985), 74–75.

PART FOUR

**CRITICAL
ANALYSIS:
METHODOLOGY
AND APPLICATION**



Alternatives to Empirical Study

Empiricism has long dominated the study of television—as well as the study of other mass communication media such as radio and print journalism. Most of the research theories and methods taught in mass communication college courses are empirical ones. The basic tenet of the empirical approach is that we may understand a phenomenon through observation and experimentation—be it the pollination of tulips, the popularity of a political leader, or the effect of Beavis and Butt-head cartoons on small children.

Several principles underpin this approach.

1. Knowledge about a phenomenon exists within that phenomenon itself; the researcher “uncovered” it through experimentation and informed observation;
2. Experiments should be repeatable, as in the natural sciences; i.e., you should be able to get the same results if you follow the same procedure;
3. A phenomenon will be understood if enough facts about it can be gathered or its fundamental essence discerned;
4. Research results should be quantifiable; that is, they should be measured and expressed in numbers and formulas (this is true of much, but not all, empirical research);
5. Theory is used to generate hypotheses or ruminate about facts generated through empirical research.

When we apply empirical research to television it can provide us with useful answers to some questions: How many people (and what kind of people) watched *Murphy Brown* at 8:00 P.M., March 15, 1993, on channel 15? Or, do children act more violently after they watch

violent cartoons? But empirical research has been less successful in answering other questions: How does the narrative structure of soap opera differ from action drama? Or, how has the police show genre changed from *Dragnet* to *Picket Fences*? Or, what are the sexual politics—the power relationships between men and women—in the situation comedy?

Empirical research falters when it must explain television's meanings, and it is also unable to explain how narrative and stylistic devices generate those meanings. To best cope with these questions, different analytical methods must be employed. Rather than using empirical methods derived from the natural and social sciences, we may tap the critical approaches used in film studies and literary criticism to cope with television's meaning systems. These research methods are used in television criticism, though obviously we're not talking about criticism on the level of *TV Guide* here.

For the sake of comparison and contrast, this chapter briefly comments on some aspects of empirical research, but does not attempt a full-fledged critique of empiricism. Instead, it outlines approaches to the medium taken by television criticism, and approaches that attempt to chart television's meanings and organize them within specific contexts. The critical approaches we discuss include auteurism, genre study, semiotics, ideological analysis, and feminism. This does not exhaust the nonempirical approaches writers have taken to television, but it does survey the principal trends. Even within this limited scope, we cannot hope to do justice to each method, but we will articulate each method's principal assumptions and suggest how that method might be used to mount an analysis of televisual texts. Readings are suggested at the chapter's end, but the most informative summary of contemporary critical methods is *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, edited by Robert C. Allen.¹

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND TELEVISION: THE INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

The vast majority of empirical research performed on television is commissioned by the TV industry itself. Its principal questions are:

1. What did viewers watch, and what type of viewers watched which shows?

2. What will viewers watch in the future, and what type of viewers will be watching?

The first question is answered by corporations such as Nielsen Media Research, whose ratings are purchased by TV stations and networks so that they may use them to set advertising rates. Ratings not only calcu-

late what was watched, but they also indicate the demographics of the audience: gender, age, income bracket, race, and so on. Demographics are meaningful to stations and networks because they are important to advertisers who want to target viewers to maximize the impact of their commercials.

The second question posed by the industry is answered through market research techniques such as focus groups and cable testing, which ask a small number of viewers for their opinions of upcoming programs or commercials to predict the preferences of the viewing public at large.²

These research methods are of limited usefulness to the critical study of television. Ratings systems view programs as consumable products, without exploring their meanings. Viewers are not even asked *why* they watched a show, only *if* they did. And although market research will sometimes delve into what a program means to its test viewers, it is less concerned with meaning than with viewer preference. That is, the market researcher might show a test program to a group of viewers and ask them why and what they liked about it, but the main question remains *whether* they liked it enough to watch it regularly (and buy its advertiser's products). In one typical market research technique, known as auditorium testing, test viewers assembled in a room receive a device with a dial numbered 1–5 (1 = like; 5 = hate; or some such scale). Then the test audience is shown a program. While the program is running, the viewers turn their dials to indicate their current enjoyment or annoyance level. This information is fed into a computer that can chart the responses and even overlay them on a videotape of the program. To approach information gathering in this fashion indicates just what is crucial to market researchers: the likability of a televisual product, not what it means to its viewers.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND TELEVISION: THE ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

Empirical studies of television conducted within academia are closely related to those within the industry. Many professors at colleges and universities hold positions as consultants to the industry. Academic empirical research is not powered by the same market demands as industrial empirical research, however. Academic researchers are relatively free to pursue "pure" knowledge about television, concerned only about review by their peers. In this endeavor they have cultivated theories for explaining television, and methods for articulating those theories. We will take time to sketch a few of them here.

Empirical Research Theories

The initial academic theories of television were particularly attentive to the impact of TV upon the viewer. The hypodermic needle concept, which television research inherited from post-World War I studies of propaganda in newspapers and magazines, is one of the earliest of so-called effects theories. In this model, we are directly affected by what we see on TV as if we were injected with a hypodermic needle. Or, to borrow a metaphor from Pavlovian psychology, the bell rings and we salivate.

Subsequent theories of the mass media's influence have dismissed the hypodermic needle doctrine as simplistic behaviorism. Television programs are more complex stimuli than Pavlov's bell, and our responses are not as predictable or crude as those of a hungry dog. Various attempts to refine the understanding of media impact have evolved: social learning theory, reinforcement theory, toleration/desensitization theory, vicarious catharsis theory, and so on. All of these may be gathered under the umbrella term limited effects theories. These theories hold that the media do indeed influence viewers and readers, but there are limitations to these effects due to the many variables involved. The hypodermic needle theory says that television will cause us to feel or behave in a certain way; limited effects theories suggest that certain television programs will cause certain viewers, under certain circumstances, to feel or behave in certain ways. The media are still seen to be affecting us, as in all effects studies, but those effects are no longer presumed to be as simple as a hypodermic needle injecting emotions or ideas into a spectator.

Not all empirical researchers view the spectator as passive. The uses-and-gratifications approach, for instance, attempts to chart the uses that we make of television and to quantify how it gratifies our needs. This style of research emphasizes the ways that we employ television, seeking the emotional or intellectual purposes to which we put it. Both effects theories and uses-and-gratifications theory focus on the viewer, but effects theories see him or her as an object that the medium influences, while uses-and-gratifications theory posits a more active viewer who engages with the text and uses it for his or her own needs.

Empirical Research Methods

The above theories have been implemented through particular research methods. In this regard, academic research into television owes much to research in psychology and the social sciences. The methodology of those disciplines is rooted in the scientific method:

1. Derive a hypothesis, based on a particular theoretical perspective informed by an established body of knowledge;
2. Test the hypothesis with repeatable experimentation and observation;

3. Interpret the results.

- a. Do they confirm/contradict the hypothesis?
- b. Does this suggest a change in the body of knowledge related to this hypothesis? Has the understanding of this phenomenon progressed?

This is the ideal, at least, to which empirical researchers aspire in their analysis of television. Often, however, they fail.

Content analysis is one common empirical method that is modeled on the scientific method. Its procedure is straightforward. A textual component is selected based on the researcher's theoretical interests: e.g., sexual behavior in prime-time programs, or sickness and death on soap operas.³ The researcher observes the television text and counts the number of occurrences of this component in a program's **manifest content**, the characters and their actions. (Content analysis seldom addresses television's stylistic aspects.) These data are then "coded" (converted through categorization) into statistical form. From studies such as these we can learn that incidents of hugging in prime-time TV occurred at a rate of .80 per hour during the week of February 2–8, 1989, or that 5.3 percent of soap opera characters die in car accidents.

Content analysis often falls short in its attempt to interpret the significance of its statistical data. What does a .80 hugging rate signify? How do viewers interpret all that hugging, or lack of hugging? Empiricism provides procedures for gathering information (through observation and experimentation), but its method of interpretation, of suggesting what these facts and figures mean, is not well defined. The researchers in content analysis studies often attempt to interpret their data by comparing them with real-life statistics and viewers' presumed attitudes. The problem with this technique, Robert Allen explains, is that it ignores the "transmutation" that a real-life experience undergoes when it is placed in the context of a fictional world.⁴ Sexuality, sickness, and death mean something to us when we encounter them in the real world, but we cannot assume that they serve the same function when viewed in a TV program. Television and other art forms transmute life. The aesthetic text recontextualizes elements from real life in ways that give them new meanings. Directly comparing incidents from TV programs with similar incidents in reality, as do some content analyses, is misleading.

In sum, empirical research incorporates valuable descriptive tools for approaching television. Individual studies isolate small aspects of the television experience for observation and experimental testing. But this does not tell us how television generates meaning for its viewers. Television is a rather untidy system for producing meaning—a system that does not lend itself to quantification or breaking down into constituent elements. As Allen comments, "The harnessing of elements of an open system [such as television] so that they might be examined in

isolation (from confounding variables) is, in the extreme case, tantamount to studying the operating of the automobile engine by taking out each component, one by one, and staring at it for awhile.”⁵

What we need is an understanding of how the televisual text functions as a meaning-producing text and how we understand that text. This is what television criticism aspires toward, although it has not been entirely successful.

THE AUTEUR THEORY

The auteur theory stems from the French term for author, *auteur*. Its basic precept is that a single individual is, and should be, the “author” of a work in order for it to be a good work. A book, poem, film, or television show should express this individual’s personality, his or her “vision.” This notion stems from the Romantic image of the author as a Byronic figure who sits alone in a garret, scratching out angst-ridden poems with a quill pen. The tormented, misunderstood artist is one of the most cherished character types of the twentieth century, as can be seen in portrayals of demented painters and writers in television programs.

The auteur theory originated in French film criticism of the 1950s and 1960s, where it was initially theorized that auteurs could be drawn from the ranks of producers, directors, scriptwriters, actors, and other filmmaking personnel.⁶ However, the vast bulk of auteurist film criticism has been about directors: Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, and Howard Hawks, among many others. In television, however, the director has much less influence than in film. Indeed, most series will employ several directors over the course of a season. Recognizing the diminished power of the director, television auteurism has taken a different tack and focused instead on the producer and his or her “vision.” Auteurist critiques have been published, for example, on producers Bill Cosby, David Lynch (producer of *Twin Peaks*, which he also directed occasionally), Paul Henning (creator of sitcoms such as *The Beverly Hillbillies*), and Stephen J. Cannell (who created *The A-Team* and similar action programs).⁷

Whether they are discussing directors or producers, auteurist critics work along two interconnected lines. First, they discuss how an auteur’s thematics, narrative structure, and stylistic techniques—the use of sound and image—are expressed in individual programs. Second, they articulate the entire career of the auteur, explaining how this particular program fits into the overall trajectory of the auteur’s work. For the extreme auteurist critic, a bad program by an auteur is more significant than a good program by an undistinguished director or producer, because the auteur’s bad program may still tell you something about the auteur’s thematics, narrative structure, and stylistic techniques.

For the auteurist critic, the auteur's vision or presumed personality furnishes the context within which the meaning of a particular element in a particular program will be understood. In David Marc's analysis of Henning, Jed Clampett (*The Beverly Hillbillies*) becomes a go-between, a "moral interlocutor." He divides and judges the contrasting worlds of city and country, the banker Drysdale and Jed's Granny, "modern culture" and "folk culture." Auteur Henning develops this thematic clash between modern culture and folk culture *over the course of several programs*, according to Marc.⁸ The meaning of this character is thus determined by Henning's other work.

Auteurism's interpretive power seems limited, although there have been efforts to make it a more supple critical construct by splicing on structuralism, a theoretical model that examines a phenomenon's underlying structure.⁹ The heart of auteurism's problem is that its Romantic notion of the artist does not suit the corporate and collaborative realities of contemporary television. Bankers, market researchers, scriptwriters, actors, set designers, and others contribute to the production of any TV show. To single out the producer ignores the work of many. Plus, all television programs employ the conventions of the medium; there is nothing totally new on TV or anything totally unique to a televisual auteur. If there were, it would be incomprehensible to viewers as they would have no context in which to place it. Thus, the auteur does not work in an aesthetic vacuum. The conventions of the medium tend to overwhelm any television artist's individual creativity.

It is important to remember, however, that television's corporate/collaborative nature and its lack of uniqueness do not necessarily make it mediocre. The fact that medieval cathedrals were constructed by hundreds of artisans, over decades and even centuries, does not make them less significant. Equating personal genius with aesthetic quality is an outmoded concept that tells us little about television.

GENRE STUDY

Genres are probably the most common way that viewers themselves label television programs. Without giving it a second thought, we call *The Cosby Show* a situation comedy, *Gunslinger* (1955–75) a Western, and *Columbo* a detective show. *TV Guide* and other television listing publications recognize this when they identify programs in the same fashion. To be useful as a method for interpreting television, however, genre study needs to be more precise in its understanding of the genre. Otherwise, generic boundaries blur. Critics devise awkward terms such as "dramedy," which was used to describe comedies such as *Frank's Place* (1987–88) and *Moonlighting* that took on a more serious tone.¹⁰

The assumption underlying genre study is that television programs resemble one another and that grouping them together provides a context for understanding the meanings of a particular program. This would not seem controversial, but at a rudimentary level it becomes difficult to define what a genre is. Here is the dilemma: To conceptualize a particular genre, the researcher must watch TV programs and induce the genre's characteristic thematics, narrative structure, and/or stylistic techniques; but the researcher does not know *which* programs to view until he or she has some idea of what the genre's characteristics are. It's a chicken-and-egg problem: one needs to know the genre's characteristics to pick which programs to consider, but before one can do that one needs to have looked at programs within the genre to define its characteristics, but before one can pick programs one needs to know the genre's characteristics. . . .¹¹ And around and around it goes.

To escape this debilitating dilemma, genre critics have adopted two strategies:

1. Define the genre's characteristics with *a priori* criteria drawn from a predetermined critical method; judge your criteria's usefulness after the study has been done; or

2. Rely on a cultural consensus of what the genre's criteria are; a genre is thereby defined as "what most viewers think a genre is."

In practice, most genre critics combine these two strategies and create a genre's definition *a priori* from what they presume to be a consensual definition of the genre. From this they may devise a working definition of the genre. They may then measure programs by this standard to judge the applicability of the working definition.

Determining such a cultural consensus would appear to be a natural way that empirical methods (say, a survey research project) could be incorporated into the critical method. However, this is seldom, if ever, done in genre criticism. Instead, critics often depend on the slippery conception of the genre that derives from their own "commonsensical" understanding of it.

Historically, definitions of genre fall into three categories:

1. Definition by presumed audience response;

2. Definition by style—techniques of sound and/or image;

3. Definition by subject matter—both narrative structure and thematics.

These categories do not exist in isolation. They frequently overlap one another.

1. Audience response. Several genres acquire their definitions from how the critic presumes the viewer will respond—usually without any empirical evidence as to how actual viewers responded. Comedy and horror are two such genres. Programs as different as *Who's the Boss* (1984–92) and *Saturday Night Live* have been labeled "comedies."

What groups these programs together? The presumption that the viewer will laugh at them.

Television comedies are even more clearly marked as such than are theatrical film comedies because television often includes audience response in the text itself. The television laugh track—whether recorded from a studio audience or fabricated from recorded audio—signals to the viewer what the response to the program “should” be. TV comedies are virtually unique in this regard. Theatrical film comedies never provide a laugh track, and television’s noncomedy programs are not normally accompanied by audience-response sound effects. Even television’s horror programs, the flip side of comedies in terms of audience response, do not possess a “scream track” to cue the spectator when to respond in fear. The only other television programs that do include audience response within the text are nonfiction programs: game shows, talk shows, and similar presentations. But as far as fictional programs go, the sitcom is the only genre that responds to itself.

2. Style. The stylistic definition of a genre is probably the least common. There are a few genres, however, that link programs based on *how* the material is presented. The techniques of sound and image that are used to construct the program become critical to distinguishing it from other genres. Musicals tell stories through singing and dancing. For example, *Fame* (1982–87) told high school stories through song and dance, while the short-lived *Cop Rock* (September–December 1990) used the same technique to construct stories of police officers in action. The only thing linking these two programs generically is their musical style.

3. Subject matter. Most programs are joined into genres on the basis of their content: the stories they tell and the thematic structure that underpins those stories.

In approaching the stories of a particular genre, the critic hypothesizes a *narrative structure* that is shared by the programs within the genre, and *conventional characters* that inhabit that narrative structure. The police show, for example, is populated by familiar figures: the police detectives, the uniformed officers, the victims, the criminals, and so on. These general types could be broken down even further. Television criminals, according to Stuart Kaminsky and Jeffrey Mahan, tend to be individual lunatics or organized crime figures.¹²

These character types are placed into action against one another in the police show narratives. Kaminsky and Mahan note that many police show narratives fit a common pattern or structure:

1. A crime is committed.
2. The police detective is assigned to the case by chance.
3. The destruction widens. The crime invades the detective’s private world and he (usually a “he”) becomes irrational.
4. The detective encounters the criminal, but does not initially apprehend him or her.

5. The detective pursues the criminal, leading to a second confrontation.

6. "... the police destroy or capture the villain. The overwhelming tendency in television is not to destroy, but to capture, to contain and control the symbol of evil."¹³

Kaminsky and Mahan's narrative outline is general enough to provide for the variation within the genre, yet it provides specific information to distinguish the genre from others.

Genre analysis of narrative often relies on the concept of the narrative function, which was originally developed by Russian Formalists in the 1920s.¹⁴ A function, in this sense, is a specific action or attribute of a character. A story, then, consists of a set of functions, as in the above list of police show actions. The critic strives to establish the nature of these functions and their order, analyzing how they affect one another.

Narrative structure is the first level of content in any fictional program. The second level would be the interpretation or decoding, in Stuart Hall's terms, of that narrative.¹⁵ The critic has latitude in his or her interpretation of the genre narrative. The only constraint is the logic of that interpretation. In other words, does the interpretation follow from the narrative "evidence" at hand? There is, of course, no such thing as an "objective" interpretation/decoding of a generic narrative. There will never be one true and final interpretation of a genre. All interpretations are shaped by the ideology of the interpreter. Geoffrey Hurd, for example, sees the following binary oppositions in the British police series:

- Police vs. crime
- Law vs. rule
- Professional vs. organization
- Authority vs. bureaucracy
- Intuition vs. technology
- Masses vs. intellectuals
- Comradeship vs. rank¹⁶

Hurd's interpretation of narrative structure logically supports these oppositions, but it would be misleading to suggest that it is not without ideology, that his analysis is purely objective. Hurd's analysis bears the marks of structuralism, an interpretive method that strongly influenced British cultural studies (including television) in the 1960s and after. This method particularly stressed the importance of binary oppositions, much like Hurd's analysis. Thus, one could say that his analysis exists within the ideology of contemporary British cultural studies. This is not to say that it is wrong or useless, but rather to indicate some of the factors that shape analysis, even on an academic level.

Two of the most typical interpretive strategies to be applied to genres are mythic analysis and ideological analysis. Mythic analysis sees genres as twentieth century myths, as stories shared by large segments of a culture, which offer the researcher evidence of that society's thought processes. The structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss—the basis of structuralism—is one form of mythic analysis. Ideological analysis also sees genres as representative of society, but differs from mythic analysis in that it defines society in terms of social forces.

As suggested above, genres' definitional categories do not exist in isolation. Their blending often leads to hybrid genres or cycles within genres. The situation comedy, for example, is defined as a comedy based on the presumption of audience response (encoded directly in the laugh track), but the "situation" part of sitcoms is a matter of the genre's content. The narrative dilemmas or situations in which the characters find themselves is the principal source of humor in the genre—as opposed to comedies that generate their humor from physical pratfalls or verbal sparring. Hence, its humor is predominantly situational. Of course, the sitcom is a rather "impure" genre; it doesn't generate humor *solely* through situational gambits. Physical humor, for example, was often a part of *I Love Lucy*—as when Lucy was working on a fast-moving pastry conveyor belt. And the humor of *Cheers* often arises from the characters' cutting remarks to one another—a function of dialogue rather than narrative. The point is, the sitcom is a genre that is not only defined by presumed audience response but also by its content.

In addition to articulating genres' presumed audience response, narrative and thematic structures, and aural/visual style, the genre critic is also interested in tracing a genre's evolution. Indeed, genres must evolve to maintain their audiences' attention. A new program within a genre, if it is to succeed, must balance familiar genre elements with innovations that pique viewer interest. When *Miami Vice* premiered, for example, it was immediately evident that it fell within the parameters of the police show. It had various familiar character types—police detectives and criminals and the like—and familiar themes such as order versus chaos. But it also changed the genre by incorporating rock music and music video style. It succeeded largely because it blended the familiar and the unusual.

Many genres fall into an evolutionary pattern. Initially the genre's tenets are established, often after a trial-and-error period where unpopular options are discarded. The genre thereupon enters into what might be called a classical period, during which thematics, narrative structure, and aural/visual style solidify into relatively firm conventions, a code of the genre. At this point the genre becomes recognizable as a cohesive unit. After the classical period comes a time of self-reflexivity that is often accompanied by genre decay or even death,

though not necessarily. In the self-reflexive period, the genre turns inward and uses its own conventions for subject matter. It becomes self-conscious, in a sense, and the result is often genre parodies.

These periods can be observed in the genre of the television soap opera. Initially, the soap opera made a rocky start on television. Although it had been immensely popular on radio, when it began its transition to television in the late 1940s it did not meet with immediate success. It wasn't until the 1950s that soap opera found a format that satisfied a large daytime audience (as well as the economic exigencies of television producers): unending stories of familial relationships, romance, birth, and death; live broadcasts; half-hour long programs (originally they were 15 minutes long); and so on. Thus, the mid-1950s to mid-1960s would be the TV soap opera's classical era. Then, in the 1970s, the genre turned inward through parody: *Soap* (1977–81) and *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* (1975–78). As in any self-reflexive parody, the humor in these programs depended upon a prior knowledge of the genre. *Soap* and *Mary Hartman* could not have existed if there had not been a classical period of the soap opera. A genre's self-reflexivity often accompanies a period of decline and, indeed, the soap opera was suffering from a glut of programs (twenty compared to the current eleven) and reduced viewership in the early 1970s. Rather than become moribund, however, the genre rebounded by incorporating new themes (birth control, abortion, interracial romance, etc.) and younger character types, and enlivening its visual style and pacing (as exemplified by the innovative *The Young and the Restless* [1973–]). The consequence has been a revived genre that continues to attract a large audience. So, genre evolution is not necessarily limited to the pattern we have delineated, but one can often observe the pattern's cycles in television genres.

In sum, genre criticism is not without its weakness. Crucial to the study of any genre is its definition, and it is there that critics must be most wary. And yet, it seems clear that in viewing TV programs, we—critics and viewers—do construct resemblances among programs, and in that resemblance is found meaning. When watching an episode of *Miami Vice*, for instance, we bring to our viewing circumstance associations with dozens of other police shows we have watched. These associations influence the meaning that we decode from individual programs. Genre study provides one method of decoding.

SEMIOTICS

Semiotics is most briefly defined as the *science of signs*, but this does not tell us much about what *semioticians* actually do and what assumptions underpin their work. The basic premise of semiotics is that

all forms of communication (television, movies, books, paintings, traffic lights, and so on) can be broken down into individual units of meaning, which may be studied in terms of their singular characteristics. More importantly, they can be understood in terms of how they interact with other units of meaning. The smallest unit of meaning is the sign, which is combined with other signs into systems, which comprise texts. (Our use of the term *text* for television programs already reveals the influence of semiotics upon television studies.) The semiotician, then, tries to understand the sign systems in a text and postulates how those systems generate meaning.

“Pure” semiotics tends to be text-oriented. That is, it does not deal with the intentions of the producer of that text or with its reception by the reader/viewer, but rather focuses on the text “itself.” More recent work has attempted to blend semiotics with Freudian psychology (i.e., psychoanalysis), theorizing the *relationship* between the reader/viewer and the text. The resulting analyses have been controversial. Psychoanalysis, as it has been rewritten by Jacques Lacan, has greatly affected literary criticism and film studies, but has yet to wield much influence over television studies.

Because the sign is the fundamental unit of meaning upon which all semiotic study is based, there has been a great deal of discussion (and argument) about its characteristics. Our short overview cannot hope to canvas all of the definitions of the sign in all their complexity, so we will consider just one to provide the reader with a sample of the semiotic method. However, it is important to recognize that not all semioticians subscribe to the following definition of the sign.

C. S. Peirce (pronounced “purse”) was among the founders of semiotics around the turn of the century. He theorized that the sign consisted of two components: the signifier and the signified.

The signifier is the physical aspect of the sign: ink on a page (written language), the modulation of air waves in sound (spoken language), light and shadow on a screen (television and film), a blinking light (traffic lights), and so on. The signified, then, is that which is represented by the signifier. The signified may be a concept or an object or a visual field. A video image of the Grand Canyon on a TV screen is thus a signifier; its immediate signified is the physical space of the Grand Canyon. The key to such a process of signification is that the signified is *absent* and must be represented by the signifier to the reader/viewer.

Peirce categorizes signs into three main types, depending upon the relationship of the signifier to the signified:

- The indexical sign, or index
- The iconic sign, or icon
- The symbolic sign, or symbol

In an indexical sign the signifier is physically caused by the signified. A footprint in the sand, for example, communicates the

meaning, “presence of a human.” The footprint is the signifier and it is physically caused by its signified, the human foot.

In an iconic sign the signifier resembles the signified.¹⁷ Most images on television are icons, in this sense of the term, because the light and shadow emanating from the television set (signifier) resembles the visual field (signified; objects in a certain space) that was recorded by a camera. A filmed image of Jerry Seinfeld sitting on a sofa resembles the visual field of the real Seinfeld on the real sofa. That image is thus an iconic signifier of Seinfeld’s appearance.

Finally, in a symbolic sign the signifier and the signified are linked solely through cultural convention. A religious signifier such as a cross or a Star of David is linked to the signified of Christianity or Judaism, respectively, by centuries of cultural convention. A crucifix, however, in which Christ is represented on a cross, would be both an *iconic* signifier of the crucifixion, since it actually resembles what it represents, and a *symbolic* signifier of the principles of and faith in Christianity, since the actual body of Christ represents those signifieds within many cultures (though certain African and Asian cultures do not share these). Most important, all written and spoken languages are composed of symbolic signs. Cultural convention is all that ties a word such as *college* (the signifier) to the concept of college. There is no resemblance between *college* and its signified (as in the iconic sign); and its signified doesn’t physically cause the signifier, *college* (as in an indexical sign).

Thus, television consists of a variety of signs. The video image of someone or something is both an iconic sign and an indexical sign. The image resembles what it represents, but it also is caused by what it represents. Most video images are created by light bouncing off an object and striking a video pickup tube/chip; in this respect, then, the signified causes the signifier, as in an index. The words and graphic characters displayed on the screen are symbolic signs. Moreover, on a secondary level, the video image may iconically signify a symbolic signifier. Sound confusing? All this means is that a videotape image (iconic signifier) could record something symbolic—say, the Emmy statuette—and represent it to the viewer. Objects within the iconic video image often have symbolic significance for the viewer.

Semioticians stress that meaning, signification, is achieved largely through the combination and contrast of signs. A word doesn’t mean much, if anything, until it is placed in the context of a sentence. A single image of an actor on a piece of furniture has little significance until it is combined with other shots (signs) into a sequence of images. This is especially true on a symbolic level. Recall Hurd’s thematic oppositions within the police genre. Without criminals and evil, police and good would have no meaning. It is from opposition that meaning arises.

In semiotics there are two principal ways that signs are combined: the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic.¹⁸

The syntagmatic structure is the way that signs are organized linearly or temporally (over time). Words in a sentence written on a piece of paper follow one another linearly, and their order shapes their meaning. Take the primitive sentence:

Dog bites boy.

If the linear order of the words is rearranged, the meaning is changed:

Boy bites dog.

Or even:

Boy dog bites.

Each of the three versions of this sentence expresses a different meaning, even though the same words are used each time. The same holds true for the temporal order of shots on television, as can be illustrated by manipulating the order of shots in “China After Tiananmen,” a *Frontline* documentary. Our first sequence of shots might contain (Figs. 12.1–12.3):

1. Medium close-up of a Communist official, who contends that most Chinese did not approve of the students’ revolt in Tiananmen Square.

2. Long shot of Tiananmen Square protesters.

3. Long shot of persons waving from a window and applauding.

This sequence of shots suggests that the official is lying and that the applause is for the protesters.

FIGURE 12.1



FIGURE 12.2



FIGURE 12.3

these shots could be rearranged (Figs. 12.4–12.6) so that the order is:

1. Long shot of protestors.
2. Medium shot of Communist official.
3. Long shot of persons applauding.

In this order, a new meaning is signified: the people are applauding the official, and implicitly agreeing with what he is saying. In television, the order of images, their sequence, can have powerful effects.

In semiotics the smallest chunk of story, the smallest narrative unit, is called a syntagm. (Usually this corresponds to a *scene* in television and film.) Just as the arrangement of individual shots can change a scene's meaning, so can the arrangement of individual syntagms/scenes

FIGURE 12.4**FIGURE 12.5**



change the meaning of the entire program. Each of Kaminsky and Mahan's components in their outline of the narrative structure of the police show would be a syntagm. Imagine how scrambling their order could result in different meanings for the genre.

The second way that signs are organized, according to semiotics, is via association, or paradigmatically. If the syntagmatic is linear or horizontal and temporal, then the paradigmatic structure is vertical and atemporal. The paradigmatic consists of the associations we make with a particular signifier that give meaning to that signifier. Let's return to our sentence from above and alter it slightly:

Doberman pinscher bites boy.

The signifier "Doberman pinscher" holds certain meanings (aggression, violence, even militarism) for the reader because of the contrasting associations he or she makes with potential substitutions for that breed of dog:

Chihuahua . . .

Terrier . . .

Collie . . .

Doberman pinscher bites boy.

Doberman pinscher carries its meaning partially because of the paradigm of "dog breeds" from which *Doberman pinscher* is chosen. Obviously, it has much different connotations from, say, *Chihuahua*.

There are many paradigms such as this operating in television. All the elements of mise-en-scene, for instance, derive meaning paradigmatically. Consider the use of sets and props. When a man pulls out an Uzi and begins raking pedestrians with it, the viewer understands that

this is an evil character even before he begins to shoot because of the paradigm of weapons. Because the character uses an Uzi, rather than a Magnum .45 or a Winchester rifle or even a bow and arrow, the meaning “evil criminal” is signified. Where does this meaning come from? It comes from the gun’s paradigmatic association with other weapons that could have been chosen.

It might appear that meanings generated from the syntagmatic and paradigmatic combinations of signs are limitless, open to infinite variation. This is where the semiotic concept of codes becomes significant. Codes consist of “rules,” culturally based conventions, that govern sign systems. These codes may be very precise, such as the grammatical rules that govern language. But more often the codes are ambiguous and changeable, delimited by history and cultural context. Fashion, for instance, has its own mercurial code. A black tuxedo signifies solemnity and is associated with major life events and upper-class characteristics. A lime-green, 100 percent polyester tuxedo with large lapels signifies 1970s garishness and perhaps a bit of sleaze.

In television we can find both codes that are part of the general culture that television inhabits and those that are specific to the medium. The code of fashion exists in reality and also regulates the meaning signified by the clothing worn by actors on television. But the code of television and film editing, discussed in Chapter 7, is specific to these two media alone.

In sum, semiotics offers ways of talking about meaning production in television, and aspires to a “science” of signs. It is not, however, a true science. Semiotic research seldom, if ever, employs the scientific method outlined above. The crucial component that semiotics lacks is the ability to repeat research projects and gather the same results each time. Without repeatability, conventional sciences will always view semiotics as an “impure,” subjective science. What most prevents semiotics from confirming its interpretation through repeatable studies is an undeveloped theory of how the viewer/reader understands the signs before him or her. Psychoanalysis has offered some answers to this problem, but they are far from globally accepted.

IDEOLOGICAL CRITICISM

Ideology is a slippery term. In everyday use it has negative connotations. When politicians speak of “liberal ideology” or “conservative ideology” they usually imply brainwashing, suggesting that their opponent’s political ideology clouds his or her view of the truth. Ideology, in this context, signifies a fraudulent and misguided image of reality. This sense of ideology stems from the original theorist of ideo-

logical criticism, Karl Marx. It is with Marxism, therefore, that we need to begin our consideration of ideological criticism.

For Marx, writing in the mid-1800s, ideology is false consciousness. It is a counterfeit image of the world that is determined by social class: aristocracy, bourgeoisie (middle class), or proletariat (working class). These social classes are grounded in a person's relation to work, to labor. The aristocrat does not work; his or her power (what's left of it) is based in traditional laws of inheritance and ritual. The bourgeois owns the factories, which Marx calls the means of production, where goods are created and where men and women work. The bourgeois therefore holds tremendous economic power. The proletariat must work to survive, and thus must sell his or her labor to the bourgeois. Marx sees history as a struggle among these classes to control the means of production. During any one particular era, one of these three classes will be in control: the ruling class. Since the Renaissance, according to Marx, the bourgeoisie has increased its power and the aristocracy has declined. Thus, over the centuries the bourgeoisie has become the ruling class.

Marx's explanation of class is significant to his theory of ideology, because he sees ideology as being fundamentally delimited by class. A woman who owns a factory will interpret the world through bourgeois ideology. A worker in that factory will, presumably, interpret the world through working-class ideology. However, Marx contends, the class that controls a society's means of production and commands its economy also rules ideologically: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society [that is, which controls the factories], is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force."¹⁹ This gives rise to the notion of a dominant ideology, a system of beliefs about the world that benefits and supports a society's ruling class. In the contemporary United States, the ruling class is the bourgeoisie; and its ideology, according to Marxists, is the dominant ideology.

For example, one tenet of bourgeois ideology is that anyone may become financially successful if he or she works hard enough. This obviously benefits the capitalist system, because it encourages proletarians to labor tirelessly—although economic success is more commonly based on the financial stature of the family into which one is born than on an individual effort. As multimillionaire Malcolm Forbes put it when asked by David Letterman how he earned his incredible fortune, "My father died."

So, Marx concludes, most workers will subscribe to the dominant (bourgeois) ideology because they have been intellectually bludgeoned into those beliefs by the agents of the ruling class: schools, the legal system, churches, the military, and so forth. The ideological superstruc-

ture of a society is supported and determined by its economic base or infrastructure. Ideology follows economics.

This view posits that television is an agent of the ruling class. Because huge, often multinational corporations own all television networks, the programs broadcast must toe the ideological line. In other words, television shows—both fiction and news—must necessarily support dominant ideology. Moreover, all viewers, whatever their class, are so inculcated with ruling class ideology that they accept this version of reality as truth.

One need not be a Marxist or a socialist to hold this view of television's ideological function. Indeed, political and moral conservatives also see TV as an ideological demon, but from a different perspective. To them the values represented on television are decadent and immoral, ideologically offensive because they are too liberal. And yet, they share the classical Marxist assumptions that

1. Ideological apparatuses (such as television) contain a homogeneity of ideas; there are no contradictions within ideology;
2. The person exposed to the dominant ideology will necessarily accept it as truth.

The classical Marxist conception of ideology has been the topic of much debate over the past thirty years. During that time, a more limber theory of ideology has evolved. As far as television studies is concerned, there are two central components of the current notion of ideology.

First, a society's ideology consists of many conflicting sets of meanings—discourses—competing with one another. As John Fiske elaborates, a discourse is "a language or system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area."²⁰ The dominant discourse is the one that is taken for granted, is seen as the commonsense explanation of the world within a particular society or within a social group inside a society.

Second, the position of an individual within ideology has been re-examined. This, for some theorists, has involved the introduction of psychoanalytic theory into the discussion of ideology. In psychoanalytical Marxism, the individual in society is viewed as a subject, a psychological construct who enters the meaning-filled world of ideology through certain Freudian mechanisms (specifically, the Oedipal complex). Other theorists eliminate Freud (and his major revisionist, Jacques Lacan) from their theory of the ideological subject, but are still concerned with the individual's entry into the ideological world and his or her relationship to ideology. Regardless, contemporary ideological criticism contests the classical Marxist assumption of an individual who is molded solely by the circumstances of his or her class and the influence of ruling-class ideology.

What impact does this recent work have on the study of television?

Under the banner of cultural studies or ethnography, a group of theorists has been attempting to analyze television in the context of contemporary ideological criticism. Stuart Hall, of the University of Birmingham (England) Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), initially led this effort, and his work has been elaborated upon by David Morley, Charlotte Brundson, and other scholars in the United States, Australia, and elsewhere.

Hall argues that television texts are encoded with many meanings—many discourses—by the television apparatus.²¹

Television as “apparatus”—an idea that is not unique to cultural studies—deserves further elaboration. The television apparatus consists of bankers, media corporations, producers, directors, scriptwriters, et al. They create TV according to taken-for-granted “rules” of genre, narrative, and technique, etc., as well as economic limitations imposed by television’s mode of production. The apparatus includes all those factors—from flesh-and-blood bankers to ephemeral rules of editing—that construct the medium as a pleasurable viewing experience, as something viewers enjoy doing. “Apparatus” is thus a wide-ranging term to refer to the televisual experience and everything that goes into constructing it.

Hall rejects the wholesale condemnation of the television apparatus by classical Marxists who criticize TV as an ideological monolith, kowtowing to ruling-class ideology. Hall contends instead that television texts are encoded with many meanings, a polysemy. Television’s meanings may even contradict one another, as is the case when a program about a promiscuous playboy is interrupted by a public service announcement urging sexual restraint.

Television’s polysemy, however, is not completely free-ranging, according to Hall. He writes, “Any society/culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a *dominant cultural order*, though it is neither univocal nor uncontested.”²² Television does not show us *everything*. It cannot signify *everything*. For years the life experiences of minorities were virtually invisible as far as television was concerned. Homosexual characters and culture are still largely marginalized; their threat to the nuclear family remains too great. Many subcultures are simply unspoken, unable to be classified, repressed from the television world by the dominant cultural order.

In any event, a large part of television’s pleasure can be attributed to its polysemic nature. With so many meanings being transmitted, viewers can largely pick and choose those that adhere to their own ideology. This brings up another tenet of Hall’s theory: decoding. Viewers decode television texts from three different ideological positions.²³

1. The dominant-hegemonic position. Viewers who fully subscribe to ruling-class discourse interpret television according to the preferred reading that is encoded on the text by the television apparatus. Such viewers presumably include members of the class wielding economic control, but comprise also working-class viewers who value the dominant system.

2. The oppositional position. Viewers whose discourse is totally foreign to ruling-class discourse fully reject the preferred reading of the text, lending it their own interpretation. Individuals who are aggressively disenfranchised from the benefits of the ruling economic system decode television texts in unique ways. This includes ghetto residents, recent immigrants who do not speak English, and so on.

3. The negotiated position. By far this is the most common decoding position. Most viewers are neither wholehearted supporters of dominant discourse nor wholly detached from it. The negotiated interpretation permits the dominant discourse to set the ideological ground rules, but it modifies those rules according to personal experience. Viewers select the meanings that apply to their personal situations.

Hall and other ethnographic researchers approach television from two tacks. They seek to understand the ideological discourses in the text and the preferred readings that the television apparatus elects, but they are also concerned with the ideological discourses of the viewer. The process of ideological criticism for ethnographic researchers is to comprehend the following:

- How are these discourses produced?
- Which discourses are privileged over others?
- Which social and economic interests are served by these discourses?
- How do the discourses of the text relate to the discourses of the viewer?

This last question has led ethnographic researchers to incorporate television viewers into their studies, unlike most of the critical theorists summarized in this chapter. Frequently, ethnographers conduct interviews with TV watchers as a significant part of their research. Such methods draw ethnographers closer to traditional empirical research, especially uses-and-gratifications theory, but still ethnography remains distinct from empiricism. Where empiricism assumes that the answers to research questions lie in the acquisition of quantifiable numerical data, ethnographers see research as a more volatile and less quantifiable *interaction* between the discourses of the text, the discourses of the viewer, and even the discourses of the researcher. Knowledge about society is not pictured as being “out there,” waiting to be dug up, but in flux, in a process of signification—a system of counterbalancing or competing discourses.

Although feminism has been a central component of critical studies—particularly literary criticism and film studies—for the past twenty or thirty years, it has been slow to affect traditional mass communication research, including traditional work on television. (But then, it has been slow to influence empirical studies in other social sciences and psychology as well.) Recently, however, the ideological criticism of television has given fresh impetus to the importance of feminist criticism. Feminist criticism, like all ideological criticism, is concerned with social discourses. In particular, feminist criticism concentrates on the volatile province of gender discourse—on the way that the male-female relationship is portrayed in language, literature, film, magazines, television, and other media.

Historically, the women's movement has centered on specific social and political concerns: equal job opportunity, combating violence against women, abortion rights, affordable day care for children. In other words, feminism has long battled in the arena of sexual politics—as Kate Millett refers to the power relationship between men and women.²⁴ But feminists have not been concerned solely with this political agenda, with marching in the streets to protest for abortion rights or against domestic violence. Intertwined with feminist political concerns is an interest in the *representation* of women in the mass media and the *interpretation* of those images by viewers, both women and men. How are women's images used in the media? What is the significance of those images in television? What ideas, concepts, discourses are associated with or encoded upon woman as defined by television? How do viewers interpret or decode those images?

“Image-of-Women” Feminist Criticism The simplest form of feminist television criticism presumes that television is a direct reflection of society. This approach searches for stereotypes on television, which are argued to be the result of ideologically defined social types of women that were prevalent at the time of the program's production. Donna Reed, for instance, is said to represent the stereotype of the 1950s American “housewife.” More recently, detectives Cagney and Lacey or the women of *Designing Women* are said to represent the “liberated” social types of contemporary women.

This approach to women in television has been criticized for three reasons:

First, it overly simplifies the television-to-society relationship. A mass medium such as TV has a complex relationship with the society that produces it. Television stories, for instance, do not automatically or naturally “reflect” the ideology of the society that produces them.

Rather, they emphasize some factors while repressing or even inverting other elements. A society's ideology is mediated by several factors—scriptwriters' and directors' aesthetic concerns, network executives' economic preoccupations—as it makes its way into a television program.

Second, the image-of-women approach overly simplifies the television-to-viewer relationship, assuming that viewers accept and believe everything they see on TV, as in the discarded hypodermic needle approach. As Hall argues, the discourses of the viewer interact with those of the text, rather than the text's discourses being forced upon the unwilling and unwitting viewer.

The third problem with this approach is that it does not account for the style with which women are represented in television. It focuses on what type of women are on television and neglects the way that that type is presented.

Recently, feminist scholars have abandoned the image-of-women approach in favor of more subtle methods that attempt to explain how beliefs about gender circulate in a society and on television. These scholars start from the premise that a society run by men will probably encourage systems of beliefs that keep men in power, *but*—and this is crucial to contemporary feminist criticism—these systems of belief are not uncontested or monolithic. There are oppositional discourses that contradict patriarchal ideas, and patriarchal discourses are themselves riddled with contradictions. Moreover, contemporary feminist criticism has been strongly influenced by recent studies of the viewer, and has subsequently struggled to develop a theory of the female viewer's perception of television.

Soap opera, with its largely female audience, has proven to be the test case for the feminist analysis of television. In an early, groundbreaking essay, Tania Modleski writes about the soap opera in terms of the narrative pleasure it affords the female viewer.²⁵ She is also interested in the ways that women are positioned within the narrative. The constant interruptions, the lack of a conclusion, and other soap opera characteristics, she suggests, may qualify the genre as possessing a feminist narrative structure.²⁶ Her argument is typical of contemporary feminist criticism in that it articulates the ways that women are represented on television (specifically, through the narrative structure) and the position of the female spectator vis-a-vis the images that she sees on the screen. In so doing, Modleski is helping to define television viewing from a feminist perspective.

In sum, then, feminist criticism of television deals with a gendered discourse, with belief systems based on what have come to be known as women's issues. A feminist critique of any television show must remain alert to the program's sexual politics at the same time that it dissects the positioning of women *within* the text and the experience of female (and

male) viewers before the TV set. In a sense, therefore, feminist criticism of television is an important subset of general ideological analysis.

S U M M A R Y

As illustrated by the ethnographic approach to television, “critical” methods and “empirical” methods are no longer as separate as they once were. It is difficult to predict how far critical methods will venture in this direction, however. There has already been some retrenching on the part of ethnographic researchers as they confront the problems of survey or interview research: that interviewees don’t consistently say what they mean, that their responses are always influenced by the style of the questions, and that people sometimes lie when filling out questionnaires or talking to interviewers. Still, it seems likely that researchers such as David Morley and others belonging to or influenced by the CCCS will continue to investigate audience research methods distinct from traditional empiricism.

Most of the critical methods surveyed in this chapter remain far removed from empiricism. Auteur theory, genre study, semiotics, feminism, and nonethnographic ideological criticism have historically focused their attention on the television text—its meanings and the construction of those meanings through specific narrative devices and audiovisual techniques. With the exception of semiotics, which aspires to be a science of signs, each of these methods provides a lens through which to view television’s polysemy:

- auteur theory → the producer/director’s career
- genre study → films linked by similar audience response, style, or content
- ideological criticism → class and gender representation

More recently, the impact of psychoanalysis and its theory of the subject has forced proponents of these critical methods to rethink their concept of the viewer and of his or her significance to the construction of meaning. And yet, auteurism, genre study, and ideological criticism are still distinguished by their emphasis on the text and the meanings it might communicate.

The brevity of this chapter has led to simplification (perhaps even oversimplification) of these critical methods. And we have had to be selective in our choice of methods to present. Some contemporary critical methods that have been applied to television but are not considered here include rhetorical criticism, dialogic criticism, reader-oriented criticism, and post-structuralism. The diversity of television critical study prohibits sampling all of the critical methods currently being applied to television.

*Critical Analysis:
Methodology and
Application*

Several anthologies offer more extensive introductions to critical methods than could be presented in this short chapter. Of these, the most ambitious is Robert C. Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). Separate chapters, with annotated bibliographies, cover semiotics, narrative theory, audience-oriented criticism, genre study, ideological analysis, psychoanalysis, feminism, and cultural studies. One chapter also outlines the debate over postmodernism and television.

Similarly, Leah R. Vande Berg and Lawrence Wenner, eds., *Television Criticism: Approaches and Applications* (New York: Longman, 1991) introduces the reader to fourteen separate critical methods, some of which have been influenced by a speech communication perspective. Although it does touch upon several of the same topics as *Channels of Discourse*, it also provides space for dialogic, hermeneutic, mythic, rhetorical, and sociological critical methods. *Television Criticism* furnishes applications of each method, and the authors and Vande Berg and Wenner comment upon them. In contrast, *Channels of Discourse* adopts a more summary approach, synthesizing a method's precepts and then providing examples of how it might be applied.

Other general anthologies are less explanatory in their presentation, but do offer the reader a sampling of critical methods: Tony Bennett, Susan Boyd-Bowman, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott, eds., *Popular Television and Film* (London: Open University Press, 1981); Todd Gitlin, ed., *Watching Television: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture* (New York: Pantheon, 1986); Andrew Goodwin and Garry Whannel, eds., *Understanding Television* (New York: Routledge, 1990); E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1983); Colin MacCabe, ed., *High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Patricia Mellencamp, ed., *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Horace Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View*, 4th ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

Anthologies organized around specific critical methods within television studies are less common. However, two collections devoted specifically to a cultural studies perspective are Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis, eds., *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Hutchinson, 1980); and Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth, eds., *Remote Control: Television, Audiences, and Cultural Power* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

Single-author books offering helpful overviews of television criticism include John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema:Television:Video* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), which is particularly valuable for its cor-

NOTES

¹ Robert C. Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

² In focus groups, a few individuals are gathered in a room, shown a program or commercial, and asked for their opinion. The newer technique of cable testing has selected viewers watch an unreleased program or commercial in their own homes, over their cable TV systems. (Only those viewers may see the program or commercial; it is not shown to everyone on the cable system.) Then they are interviewed over the phone.

³ Barry S. Sapolsky and Joseph O. Tabarlet, "Sex in Primetime Television: 1979 versus 1989," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electric Media* 35, no. 4 (Fall 1991):505–16; Mary Cassata, Thomas Skill, and Samuel O. Boadu, "Life and Death in the Daytime Television Serial: A Content Analysis," in *Life on Daytime Television: Tuning-In American Serial Drama*, edited by Mary Cassata and Thomas Skill (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1983), 23–36. The latter is critiqued in Robert C. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 36–38.

⁴ Allen, 37–38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶ The term is based on the phrase "*la politique des auteurs*" (the policy or polemic of the author) that appeared in a 1954 *Cahiers du Cinéma* essay by François Truffaut. It was translated into "author theory" by American film critic Andrew Sarris in the early 1960s.

⁷ David Marc, "The Situation Comedy of Paul Henning: Modernity and the American Folk Myth in *The Beverly Hillbillies*," in *Demographic Vistas: Television in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 39–63; Bishetta D. Merritt, "Bill Cosby: TV Auteur?" *Journal of Popular Culture* 24, no. 4 (Spring 1991): 89–102; Robert Thompson, "Stephen J. Cannell: An Auteur Analysis of the Adventure/Action Genre," in *Television Criticism: Approaches and Applications*, edited by Leah R. Vande Berg and Lawrence A. Wenner (New York: Longman, 1991), 112–26. Auteurist premises also underpin two collections of essays on directors and producers: Christopher Wicking and Tise Vahimagi, *The American Vein: Directors and Directions in Television* (New York: Dutton, 1979); and David Marc and Robert J. Thompson, *Prime Time, Prime Movers: From I Love Lucy to L.A. Law—America's Greatest TV Shows and the People Who Created Them* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992).

⁸ Marc, 46, 62.

⁹ Structuralism is rooted in Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology. It posits a structure of binary oppositions (e.g., raw or cooked) within narratives and other phenomena. For its application to auteurism, see Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 74–115.

- ¹⁰ Leah R. Ekdorn Vande Berg, "Dramedy: *Moonlighting* as an Emergent Generic Hybrid," in Vande Berg and Wenner, 87–111.
- ¹¹ Andrew Tudor terms this the empiricist dilemma, because it is an observational question, a question of which programs to observe. To clarify the distinction between empirical studies and critical studies, I have avoided using his term. But it should be noted that critical studies do have empirical aspects, just as empirical studies have critical aspects. See Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film* (New York: Viking, 1973), 135–38.
- ¹² Stuart M. Kaminsky and Jeffrey H. Mahan, *American Television Genres* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1985), 56.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 61–62.
- ¹⁴ V.I. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, translated by Laurence Scott, with an introduction by Svatava Pirkova-Jakobson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).
- ¹⁵ Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 128–38.
- ¹⁶ Geoffrey Hurd, "The Television Presentation of the Police," in *Popular Television and Film*, edited by Tony Bennett, Susan Boyd-Bowman, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott (London: British Film Institute, 1981), 66.
- ¹⁷ Iconic signs are the most confusing and the most controversial within the study of semiotics. Some of the confusion stems from the use of the term *icon* or *ikon* in art history and religion to refer to an object with symbolic significance. The semiotic controversy revolves around the very question of iconicity. Many semioticians reject the notion of resemblance between signifier and real-world objects, contending that all signification is *constructed* by human interpretation, and that "resemblance" implies an impossible, "natural," or necessary correspondence between signifier and signified. Ferdinand de Saussure, another one of semiotics' founders, is among those who reject the entire principle of iconicity.
- ¹⁸ Beware of confusing the semiotician's *paradigmatic* with the more conventional sense of the term *paradigm*, which is a model or pattern.
- ¹⁹ Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Part One, edited and with an Introduction by C.J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1947), 64. Originally written 1845–46.
- ²⁰ Fiske, *Television Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 14.
- ²¹ Hall, "Encoding/Decoding."
- ²² *Ibid.*, 134.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 136–37.
- ²⁴ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970).
- ²⁵ Tania Modleski, "The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas," in *Loving with a Vengeance* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1982), 85–109. Originally published in 1979. See also Modleski, "The Rhythms of Reception: Daytime Television and Women's Work," in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches*, edited by E. Ann Kaplan (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1983), 67–75; and Charlotte Brunson, "Crossroads: Notes on Soap Opera," in Kaplan, ed., 76–83.
- ²⁶ Modleski, *Loving*, 105.

Sample Analysis

Over the course of *Television*, we have suggested a variety of techniques for looking at television critically. In so doing, we have drawn examples from an assortment of television programs and other material to illustrate theories of analysis that remain rather abstract. In this final chapter, we knit together various critical techniques and make more concrete the abstractions we have discussed. The best way to accomplish this is to apply our analytical principles to one television program.

As we have done in the preceding chapters, we will consider TV in terms of specific systems:

- Narrative structure
- Mise-en-scene
- Cinematographic style
- Editing patterns
- Sound design

We will discuss how these systems fit together into the overall form of the program. We will be concerned with how the program manages televisual flow, how it adapts to television's polysemy, interruption, and segmentation.

The choice of a program is somewhat arbitrary. If these analytical principles are to be useful they must be applicable to a broad spectrum of series, serials, and other programs. Thus we should be able to pick just about any program and analyze it. To that end, we have chosen the situation comedy *Designing Women*. It was on television long enough to establish formal patterns and, in practical terms—since the program has entered syndication—its episodes are generally available.

We have made our analysis more schematic than we usually do so that the reader might better discern how our interpretive strategy may be implemented.

NARRATIVE AND OVERALL PROGRAM STRUCTURE

How does the program allocate its time?

Like most situation comedies, *Designing Women* is a half-hour show. More accurately, it is a 28-minute program.¹ We may divide its time (approximately) into:

- Narrative 21 min.
- Commercials/promos 4.3 min.
- Credits 1.6 min.

These three components are organized into a consistent pattern, which comprises the program's televisual flow:

1. Opening credits
2. Commercial break
3. Narrative segment
4. Commercial break
5. Narrative segment
6. Closing credits
7. Commercial break
8. Closing credits (continued)²

This structure is quite typical of half-hour narrative programs. What concerns us here is how *Designing Women* makes use of this fundamental structure, how it accommodates its narrative to the needs of series television.

What do the credits tell the viewer about the program? Specifically, what do they indicate about the show's narrative? What do the credits reestablish each week?

Designing Women's opening credits start each week's program. (There is no pre-credit sequence used to "tease" or "hook" the viewer, as in a sitcom such as *Cheers* or *Roseanne*.) They serve to reestablish the setting and the characters to the viewer—as well as fulfill contractual obligations to identify the actors and crew. The show presumes that the viewer has seen it before, and the credits merely serve to reinstall the setting and the characters in the viewer's mind. This is different from the credits of a made-for-TV movie or

other one-shot presentation, where the characters are presumed to be unknown and the credits merely list the cast or perhaps hint at the program's nature.

More specifically, the location of *Designing Women* is reestablished through the credits' theme song—either “Georgia on My Mind,” performed by Doc Severinsen, or Ray Charles’s “Georgia.” Although the credits' visuals have changed over the years, a Georgia-oriented song has remained constant.

The cast has been reintroduced in different ways during the program's run. In fact, during the 1992–93 season (its seventh and final), the level of assumed familiarity was so high that the credits were reduced to the show's title alone, without the actors' presence in any form. Instead, the cast's names appeared over the first few lines of dialogue.³ More typically, however, *Designing Women* began with still images of the individual women—whether in picture frames or filling the entire image—followed by one group shot. Each of the actors is presented in a fashion that signifies some aspects of her character. Consider, for example, the presentation of Delta Burke and Dixie Carter—who played Suzanne and Julia, respectively. Burke is posed glamorously, head back, hair tumbling around her shoulders, her blouse cut low in the front—suggesting Suzanne's beauty-queen past (Fig. 13.1). Julia's forthright approach to life is represented through Carter's direct gaze into the camera, her eyeglasses (suggesting intellectualism in TV iconography), and her no-nonsense businesswoman's jacket (Fig. 13.2). Thus, from the first few seconds of the program, the contrast between the two sisters is confirmed to the regular viewer of *Designing Women*.

FIGURE 13.1**FIGURE 13.2**

**How many commercials are there, and where are they positioned?
What characterizes the program's commercials? What do they tell us
about the program's presumed viewer?**

After the opening credits, the show flows into the first of three commercial breaks. In a March 1991 program, the products advertised in those breaks were:

Commercial Break 1

Maidenform brassieres
Dupont Stainmaster carpet
Honda cars

Commercial Break 2

Buick cars (Regal sedan)
Advil pain reliever
Discover credit card
Maxwell House coffee

Commercial Break 3

Hallmark Easter baskets
Prego spaghetti sauce

The commercials programmed for *Designing Women* reveal the type of viewer for whom the program is designed. These commercials figure into the meanings signified during the program's time slot. Evidently, advertisers assume a predominantly female audience (which may perhaps be borne out by Nielsen's demographic breakdown of the ratings). One commercial is for women's underwear, and five are related to issues that advertisers presume are the woman's province within the family: health (pain reliever), cleaning (stain-resistant carpet), child care (Easter baskets), and food preparation (coffee and spaghetti sauce). That *Designing Women's* commercials are aimed at women is most clear in the Dupont Stainmaster spot, which shows a romantic candlelit setting and a handsome man walking toward an elegant woman. The narrator poses the question to the viewer, "Do certain women possess a beauty secret you do not?" Since the subject of this question is "certain women," the "you" it refers to must also be women. That is, this rhetorical question aims at women and excludes men entirely.

Several of these commercials cast women in traditional roles (e.g., two sisters shopping for Easter baskets determine that they've turned into their presumably traditional mother). But at least one suggests that these roles might be changing. The Maidenform brassiere ad cuts together shots of women in older costumes that were underpinned by various girdles and corsets (Figs. 13.3–13.5), accompanied by a children's tune: "Did you ever see a lassie go this way and that way?" The narrator, a woman, asks the viewer, "Isn't it nice to live in a time when women aren't being pushed around so much anymore?" Ever since the 1960s' women's movement, brassieres have become emble-

matic of how society molds and constricts the female body for male pleasure. The implication of Maidenform's question is that women aren't being abused and manipulated as they used to be, that they have become tougher and more powerful. Thus, the spot is targeting a female audience that sees itself as less traditional, as willing to break with some past conventions. This also is a theme of the narrative portion of *Designing Women*, an aspect of the program's polysemy.

FIGURE 13.3**FIGURE 13.4****FIGURE 13.5**

How is the narrative segmented? How does it begin? What catalyzes the story?

For the viewer, the heart of *Designing Women*, naturally, is the narrative, the stories it tells. This narrative is structured in two segments, or acts, each of which is divided into two or, at most, three scenes. At the start of the first narrative segment we normally find the type of exposition typical of series narrative structure. As usual, the first scene must establish the narrative enigma for a particular week, but it doesn't spend time establishing the characters, as they are presumed to be known from previous episodes.

Who are the program's central characters? How do they relate to one another? What meanings begin to arise from their relationships? Does the program favor some characters over others? How?

It should be noted also that *Designing Women* does not focus on a single protagonist, but rather has five (approximately, depending upon the season) of relatively equal importance: Julia, Suzanne, Mary Jo, Charlene (or her sister Carlene), and Anthony (although his presence is not as strong as the others'). This multiplicity of characters allows the program to shift the narrative spotlight from one to the other while maintaining the show's basic premise and setting. One episode will focus on Mary Jo's being mugged, and the next will detail Julia's menopause. The women are (mostly) united by their work and by their independence from men (only Charlene's husband survives, but not long after their marriage they both leave the show), but there is enough variation among them to provide the opportunity for very different stories.

The four protagonists of *Designing Women* have been created to contrast with one another, providing an ongoing narrative framework. Julia is the program's mouthpiece for its liberal and feminist discourses. Her sister Suzanne provided her foil until her departure in 1991. Suzanne was politically conservative and definitely not a feminist—she was also petty and self-centered. Julia and Suzanne were constantly at odds over political issues. Their conflict was central to the show's narrative dynamic for five seasons. When Suzanne left the show (due to the controversial departure of actor Burke), the producers replaced her with her cousin, Allison Sugarbaker (Julia Duffy), who served an *identical* function within the narrative. Just as Suzanne before her, Allison argued with (and usually lost to) Julia about politics and women's issues. Allison lasted only one season, however. In the 1992–93 season, she was replaced by B.J. (Judith Ivey), who is not as egocentric as Suzanne or Allison, but who still contrasts politically with Julia.

In the midst of this Julia-versus-Suzanne/Allison/B.J. confrontation is Mary Jo—an “everywoman” character with liberal and feminist tendencies, who was initially not as ardent as Julia. As the

program continued her politics became increasingly liberal/feminist, but originally she was somewhere between the extremes of Julia and Suzanne. Similarly, Charlene did not side with either Julia or Suzanne. Instead, her naiveté placed her outside the confrontation entirely, and her innocent comments often functioned as comic relief. This function is important to the narrative's structure, and when Charlene left the show in 1991 her position was immediately filled by her sister Carlene, who serves the same function Charlene did. Thus, even though the characters may change, the narrative structure remains the same.

What recurring dilemma underpins the program's narrative?

At the core of *Designing Women's* assorted plots is a recurring dilemma, a problem that must be provisionally worked out each episode, but which is never totally resolved. If it were, the series would have no rationale for continuing, for it would have achieved full closure. But such is never the case. Episode after episode, this dilemma forms the narrative engine for the series. In the case of *Designing Women*, that dilemma is how women cope with their limited options and with their exploitative, sometimes brutal treatment by men and society at large. The broad ideological question it seeks to answer each episode is, "How can women survive and combat sexism in its various forms?" This has resulted in episodes that deal with issues that have historically concerned feminists—such as equal job opportunity and sexual harassment.

Designing Women's narratives have engaged the feminist discourse that grew out of the women's movement of the 1960s. The crucial point regarding the program's narrative dilemma is that each episode one aspect of this dilemma serves as the program's central enigma. Moreover, although a small part of the dilemma must be partially resolved by the episode's conclusion, the root dilemma is never totally resolved. In the case of *Designing Women*, attitudes toward and treatment of women would have to change radically for its narrative dilemma to run out of steam. If women were suddenly accorded fair (in feminist terms) treatment in all aspects of social life, then *Designing Women* would have exhausted its subject matter. This does not seem likely.

Using one or two episodes to illustrate your argument, explain how a central enigma, related to the recurring dilemma, is played out in specific narratives.

Take as an example the issue of violence against women. In an episode of the 1990–91 season, Mary Jo is attacked and her purse is stolen. Initially this led to an episode in which she takes self-defense courses and learns to deal with the threats women face, but later in the

season the issue was reprised in an episode titled “I’ll See You in Court” (March 18, 1991). Its incorporation of that issue within the narrative is typical of the program’s overall strategy. The first narrative segment in this episode begins with Charlene, Julia, and Anthony discussing an upcoming marathon of *Rocky* films. This discussion serves as a recurring motif in the episode. Soon the central enigma for that episode is posed. Mary Jo enters the Sugarbaker living room and breathlessly announces that she’s seen the man who mugged her. The narrative enigma thus becomes, Will Mary Jo confront this criminal? Or, more globally, Can women effectively fight violence through our criminal justice system?

This scene also establishes the secondary plot line for the week—which, in this case, showcases Suzanne’s selfishness. (When Julia forces her to drive older women to the mall to shop, Suzanne requires that they buy gifts for her.) Hence the episode also asks, Will Suzanne’s selfishness be permitted? The primary and secondary enigmas thus instituted, the program proceeds to pose protagonist (Mary Jo) against antagonists (her mugger and the callous criminal justice system) and begins the narrative development.

How does the program accommodate television’s interruptive and commercial nature?

After scene 2, in which Julia and Charlene encourage Mary Jo to have her attacker arrested, scene 3 takes us to a police station, where Mary Jo must wade through red tape to press charges. This is the scene that concludes the first narrative segment and leads into the commercial break. The scene ends by raising a question to maintain viewer interest during the commercial interruption. In this episode, the pre-commercial scene ends with Mary Jo in the police station, seated among various disreputable-looking individuals. She makes the acquaintance of the one man there who doesn’t look threatening, but when he raises his arm to shake her hand, he reveals the manacles on his wrist. Fade to black. Start commercials. So, just before the commercial break, the episode piques viewer interest in Mary Jo’s fate at the police station. The viewer is meant to wonder, Will the manacled man attack her?

How does the narrative progress? What devices does it use to develop the conflict but delay its quick resolution?

When the narrative returns, following the commercials, the manacled man is completely forgotten. In scene 4, the setting has shifted back to the living room, and Mary Jo is agitated about her battle against the attacker, Norman Bates: “Norman Bates is going to rue the day that he ever messed with Mary Jo Shively because I am mad as hell

and I am not going to take it anymore. [Audience applauds.] 'Scuse me for cussin'." There must, of course, be impediments to her success, or the narrative would end right there. In scene 5, Mary Jo's enthusiasm is deflated. She's had a bad day in court and is ready to give up. Julia and Charlene must encourage her to return, and so she does. The progression continues.

How does the narrative come to an (inconclusive) conclusion?

Finally, in scene 6, we reach our (provisional) conclusion. In a courtroom, Mary Jo's trial begins and ends in short order: the defendant has made a plea bargain and the judge sentences him to a suspended sentence and parole. Mary Jo is initially disappointed that she wasn't accorded greater revenge. As she says, "I feel cheated." But Charlene puts it in perspective for her: "You had the courage and you went the distance." Mary Jo agrees and puts her hands in the air in a Rocky-esque stance. The image freezes and the theme from *Rocky* begins.

There is some closure in this ending. The central enigma is answered: she triumphs over the man who had victimized her. (Also, the secondary enigma is answered when Julia forbids Suzanne to take gifts from the older women.) But Mary Jo's triumph is incomplete. She wins her case, but the attacker isn't punished in any meaningful way. Women can have small, personal victories in the battle against violence; but the violence remains, and the ineffectual criminal justice system cannot eradicate it. It would take a fundamental change in society's view of women for the violence to end. Thus, this episode ends by parceling out some closure, but leaving other questions open. This must always be the case in a television series if it wishes to return to the airwaves the following week.

IMAGE AND SOUND

Which mode of production is used? What limitations does this place upon the program?

When considering the visual style of *Designing Women*, note first that it was shot using the multiple-camera mode of production (with a studio audience) and that film—not videotape—cameras were used to record it. The economic decision to use this mode of production had aesthetic consequences:

1. Few scenes were shot on location; hence, most scenes took place indoors.
2. The number of sets were limited to three or four each week. One served as a recurring, central setting (the Sugarbakers' living room).

3. The lighting was broad and even so that the actors were fully covered as they moved around the sets.

4. Since the scenes were shot live-on-film, the cameras had to be positioned on the edge of the set; this permitted few subjective or point-of-view shots.

5. Blocking was mostly lateral, as the actors moved side-to-side in front of the studio audience.

These characteristics are not unique to *Designing Women*. They are common to many situation comedies and provide the framework within which the program's producers work.

How does mise-en-scene contribute to the narrative? How does it shape the stories that are told?

The most important component of the mise-en-scene of *Designing Women* is the Sugarbakers' living room set (see Figs. 5.1–5.2). Nearly every episode begins and ends on this set. Its iconography establishes the character of the Sugarbaker design firm—tasteful, mostly traditional (no postmodern furniture), upper class. Each of the characters stakes out turf in the living room (e.g., Mary Jo's desk area), but since Julia is the only one to live there full-time, it mostly reflects her character. That is, the props serve as objective correlatives for her. Other rooms in the house are occasionally shown, but they command less screen time than do rooms in *The Cosby Show*, *Roseanne*, or *Family Ties*—where kitchens and bedrooms occupy nearly as much screen time as the living room does.

The choice of a living room set functions well in the program's overall form, too. Television living rooms are spaces where people—especially families and quasifamilies such as the design firm—can interact. And the form this interaction takes is almost exclusively conversation. Not much physical action occurs in living rooms. Car chases, sexual activity, murder and other mayhem occur elsewhere in the TV world. Living rooms are for talking, which is why the Sugarbaker living room is especially appropriate for *Designing Women's* central setting. After all, the “action” of *Designing Women* is normally verbal, not physical. For the characters to actually do something they must leave the living room set and go elsewhere—as when Julia is a model in a fashion show at a downtown hotel and embarrasses herself by walking down the runway with her dress stuck in her pantyhose. This incident is then the object of much discussion back at the Sugarbaker living room. Suzanne comments, “The woman who mooned Atlanta!”

Does the program's sound design affect its narrative and/or its meanings?

Dialogue, rather than music or sound effects, is the principal concern of *Designing Women's* sound design, as might be expected. And

there is little evidence of sound manipulation in the program. Typically, the sound we hear directly matches the image we see. Mary Jo speaks and we see her lips move while we hear actor Annie Potts's voice. Music is used to establish the program's setting in Georgia and for transitions between scenes and into/out of commercial segments, but it seldom is more important than the dialogue. Sound effects are also used "invisibly" to support the dialogue.

One significant aspect of the program's sound style is its use of a laugh track. The laughs of a studio audience are recorded and then augmented, or sweetened, with prerecorded laughter—common practice on situation comedies filmed or videotaped before studio audiences. This laugh track not only cues the viewer when to laugh, but uses applause to certify the opinions expressed by the characters. An episode titled "The Strange Case of Clarence and Anita" was broadcast in 1992, soon after law professor Anita Hill accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment. The program's perspective is signified by the audience applause that interrupts the following dialogue:

- Mary Jo: Senator John Danforth was on the CNN this morning, saying that some psychiatrist had come forth who thinks that women who accuse men of these kinds of things are delusional. I think I'll just call up Mr. Senator Danforth and tell him [applause] that maybe some white male aging senators are delusional to think that the American women are going to continue to re-elect them when they get up there on the TV and say stuff like that. [applause] It's busy! You know, that's all you ever get when you call the Senate. And they say women talk on the phone!
- Carlene: Hey Mary Jo, listen, I hate to make you madder, but the polls are showing that the majority of American women believe Clarence Thomas.
- Mary Jo: Oh come on, Carlene, the polls say too that most women aren't feminists. But, if you ask most women about individual feminist issues the majority of them are for them. They just don't want to call themselves "feminists" because George Bush and Phyllis Schlafly want to make people believe that feminists are all these big-mouthed, bleeding heart, man-hating women who don't shave their legs. Well, I shave my legs and I'm a single parent, a working mother and if believing in equal pay and mandated child-care makes me a feminist then I am damn proud to be one. [wild audience applause]

The issue is not whether the producers of *Designing Women* "faked" audience applause to support Mary Jo's feminist manifesto, but that its

inclusion here confirms her speech to the viewer, regardless of how the applause was created. The situation comedy is one of the few art forms that includes its own audience response within its text.

FEMINIST DISCOURSE AND DESIGNING WOMEN

What meanings—discourses—are encoded on the program, presented for the viewer to decode?

As the dialogue above indicates, *Designing Women* is obviously engaged with the feminist discourse. Some of the feminist issues it has addressed include:

- Women's position in the workplace

- Equal job opportunity

- Equal pay for equal work

- Freedom from sexual harassment

- Women's control over their bodies

- Abortion rights

- Single-parent pregnancies

- Women's bodies reduced to providing pleasure for men

- Sexist advertising

- Sexually explicit magazines

- Freely available daycare

- Women's need to be able to choose between child care and work outside the home

- Rape and other violence against women

In addition to feminist issues, *Designing Women* has incorporated a liberal discourse, with Julia taking progressive positions on such topics as gun control and unionization.

How does the program deal with TV's polysemy? What range of meanings is highlighted? Are some meanings emphasized over others?

How?

Although *Designing Women* is widely perceived as endorsing feminist and liberal discourses, the program's narratives and their presentation through visual and aural style are not entirely univocal. A range of meanings is suggested. A certain polysemy surfaces. Sometimes the feminist position is undermined.

Consider again "The Strange Case of Clarence and Anita," the episode in which Mary Jo declares herself a feminist, which is one of the program's clearest statements of its association with the women's movement. In that episode Mary Jo speaks out on behalf of Anita Hill and ad-

vocates the feminist condemnation of sexual harassment. Her narrative antagonist is Allison, the program's least sympathetic character. Their antagonism is conspicuous in their respective T-shirts. Mary Jo's reads, "He did it" (Fig. 13.6), and Allison's declares, "She lied" (Fig. 13.7). So, the feminist discourse is clearly associated with Mary Jo and the opposing position is linked to Allison. Carlene is positioned between the two, posing naive questions to Mary Jo about sexual harassment.

If this narrative configuration were all there was to this episode, then we would have to say that it is promoting a profeminist discourse, since Mary Jo is set up as the more admirable of the two women. Her position is validated by the applause for her declaration, "... if believing in equal pay and mandated child-care makes me a feminist then I am damn proud to be one" (see above). However, the program's meanings are complicated and even contradicted by the introduction of the episode's secondary plot: Mary Jo's and Julia's performances as the Bette Davis and Joan Crawford characters, respectively, in a local production of *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*

During the second narrative segment of this episode, the characters have learned of Thomas's confirmation. They are all gathered at Allison's house for her birthday party. Mary Jo and Julia decide to attend while wearing their *Baby Jane* makeup. Mary Jo, as Bette Davis, is particularly garish and odd-looking: her face caked with makeup, her lips garishly red, and her eyes black sockets.

A television reporter comes to interview Allison about her support of Thomas. She comments, "We won! And if you [feminists] don't like it you can just go have yourself a big ol' brassiere bonfire. And in conclusion, nyah nyah nyah!" This provokes Mary Jo's response. She shoves Allison out of the way and shouts directly at the *Designing Women* cam-

FIGURE 13.6



FIGURE 13.7



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era, as if it were the news camera: "All we want is to be treated with equality and respect!" Her eyes are bulging, and the Bette Davis makeup looks hideous (Fig. 13.8), undercutting any plea for equality or respect. She then continues at length:

I'm sorry, I don't mean to be strident and overbearing, but "nice" just doesn't cut it anymore. Like a lot of women out there tonight, I'm mad! . . . And I don't know about the rest of you women out there, but I don't give a damn anymore if people think I'm a feminist or a fruitcake! What I'm going to do is get into my car and drive to the centermost point of the United States of America and climb the tallest tower and yell, "Hey, don't get me wrong, we love you, but who the hell do you men think you are?!"

FIGURE 13.8



FIGURE 13.9



FIGURE 13.10



At this point, she rears back as Bette Davis might, and opens her eyes wide, reemphasizing her peculiar makeup (Fig. 13.9).

Her outburst is marked as excessive (“strident” and “overbearing”—two catchphrases of opponents to feminism) by the text itself. Bernice, a friend of the group, says to Anthony, “Don’t leave me. Those women are crazy!” And Mary Jo herself, looking defeated, admits to Julia, “Well, I guess I blew it. Mary Jo Shively goes berserk. Film at eleven.” By implicitly criticizing Mary Jo’s feminist position through her bizarre appearance and extreme performance style, and explicitly criticizing it through dialogue, the episode contradicts its supposedly feminist discourse. It fissures that discourse and allows for a multiplicity of meanings, a variety of decoding positions.

The episode concludes with an atypical segment. The program departs from its usual narrative development to present documentary videotape clips from the Thomas confirmation hearings and his subsequent swearing in by President George Bush. They are cut together to make a final ambiguous point. This short montage starts with a senator addressing the hearing room: “None of us wants to discourage women from coming forward with charges of sexual harassment.” The next three shots belie that comment, however, as we see three persons attack Hill—illustrating the indignities that women who report sexual harassment must suffer. The montage then skips ahead to the swearing-in ceremony and President Bush declaring, “America is the first nation in history founded on an idea—on the unshakable certainty that all men are created equal.” The next shot implies that Bush’s exclusion of women in the phrase “all *men* are created equal” is not merely a figure of speech. We are shown a freeze frame of Hill at the hearings, looking downward in defeat and humiliation (Fig. 13.10). This shot suggests, as Julia says earlier in the episode, that “once again, the old boys’ network kicked in and we [women] were sent packing.”

This melancholy conclusion suggests that the “final” meaning of this episode may well be that “he did it” and that the feminist discourse is the correct perspective. But it would be wrong to suppose that this meaning is presented without contradiction, without allowing for alternative interpretations (e.g., all feminists are strident, overbearing fruitcakes). Such is the flexibility allowed by television’s polysemy.

NOTES

¹ Timed from the beginning of the opening credits to the end of the closing credits.

² During the 1992–93 season, this structure was varied somewhat. Two commercial breaks divided the narrative into three separate segments. Still, these episodes adhere to the principles suggested here.

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³ This analysis presumes the reader is familiar with the show. For those who are not, the central characters over the course of *Designing Women's* run have been:

Julia Sugarbaker (Dixie Carter)—the head of Sugarbakers interior design company and a strongly opinionated woman

Suzanne Sugarbaker (Delta Burke)—Julia's sister, a selfish former beauty queen

Allison Sugarbaker (Julia Duffy)—Suzanne's and Julia's cousin, and Suzanne's surrogate when she left the show (though Allison only lasted one season, 1991–92)

Mary Jo Shively (Annie Potts)—a feisty decorator with two children

Charlene Frazier (Jean Smart)—Sugarbakers's business manager; a woman from Arkansas with a gentle, sweet nature and the only one who is married

Carlene Frazier (Jan Hooks)—Charlene's sister, who shares many of Charlene's characteristics and was added to the cast when she left the show

Anthony Bouvier (Meshach Taylor)—an ex-con rehabilitating himself, who eventually becomes a partner in Sugarbakers

GLOSSARY

Compiled by Rosemary McMahon

abstraction

In animation, the emphasis consists of lines, shapes, and colors, abstract forms manipulated by the animator at will. The opposite of *naturalism*.

act (segment)

A portion or segment of the narrative presented between commercial breaks. Consists of one or more *scenes*.

actor movement

Typically referred to by the theatrical term *blocking*.

actualities

Events from the *historical world* used in news and sports programs.

additive color

In video, the combination of red, green, and blue phosphors to generate a spectrum of colors.

aesthetic

A philosophy of the beautiful; criteria that define art (or television) as good or bad. Also used to refer to determining factors of television that are neither technological or economic.

ambient sound

The background sound of a room or other space.

analog sound

An electronic replica of a sound wave on audio or videotape; the sound wave is converted into an electronic copy or analog. This type of sound recording is being replaced by *digital sound*. Vinyl albums and audiocassettes create sound through an analog process; compact discs and digital audiotape (DAT) create sound digitally.

anamorphic widescreen

A film process (under such trademark names as *CinemaScope* and *Panavision*) used to create an image wider than conventional television's. The *aspect ratio* of most films made with anamorphic lenses today is 2.35:1, while the conventional television image's aspect ratio is 1.33:1.

antagonist

Character or situation that hinders the protagonist from achieving his or her goal.

antinaturalist performance

Performance style in which the viewer is kept aware that the actor is pretending to be a character.

aperture

Regarding narrative, a conclusion with an ambiguous ending, and/or without resolution. The opposite of *closure*. Regarding video and film cameras, the opening in the lens through which light passes.

arc ing

In television studio production, the semicircular sideways movement of the camera.

aristocracy

In the context of Marxism, the most elite social class—consisting of individuals who do not work, and hold power through inheritance: kings, queens, princes, princesses, and so on. According to Marx's analysis of history, the aristocracy controlled European countries until the *bourgeoisie's* rise to power in the centuries after the Renaissance.

aspect ratio

The ratio of height to width of a video or film frame. The conventional ratio for television is now 1.33:1 or 4:3, but may change with the advent of *high-definition television*.

auteur theory

Posits that a director is the author of a film or television program in the same manner that a writer is the author of a novel. The director is seen as injecting a personal artistic vision into a film or television program. Over time, stylistic and thematic tendencies are discernible in the body of the director's work.

axis of action

In the *continuity* (or *180° system*), the line of action around which the space of the scene is oriented.

back light

In the *three-point lighting* system, the source of illumination placed behind and above the actor. Its main function is to cast light on the actor's head and shoulders, creating an outline of light around the actor to distinguish him or her from the background.

balance

In color film and video, the blending of three colors (yellow, magenta, and cyan in film; red, green, and blue in video) to produce a spectrum of colors. Different film stocks and video processes favor some colors over others, resulting in various types of color balance.

base (infrastructure)

In film production, the celluloid backing on a piece of film to which the *emulsion* adheres. In Marxist terms, a society's economic system, upon which is built its *superstructure*.

blocking

The actor's movement around a set; the director's incorporation of the actor into the *mise-en-scene*.

boom microphone

A microphone held on a long arm by a *boom operator*, positioned above the actors' heads and out of view of the camera. It is equipped with a *hypercardioid* microphone so that sound from the direction at which it is pointed will be recorded, and ambient sound will be minimized.

boom operator

The sound technician who operates the overhead *boom microphone*.

bourgeoisie

In Marxist terms, the middle class; owners of the *means of production* and employers of the *proletariat*.

Brechtian performance

Antinaturalist, confrontational performance style based on the theories of German playwright Bertolt Brecht. He demanded that the viewer constantly be made aware that he or she is watching a play and should be distanced from the characters (see *distanciation*).

camera obscura

A darkened chamber with a hole in one wall through which light enters, creating an image of the outdoors on the opposite wall. *Camera* is Latin for *chamber*.

camera operator

The person who handles the film or video camera.

cardioid microphone

A *unidirectional microphone* with most of its sensitivity aimed toward the front, and a *pickup pattern* that resembles an inverted heart.

cathode ray tube (CRT)

A television picture tube. The cathode ray excites the *pixels* to create the video image.

cause-effect chain

In narrative structure, the way one event leads to (causes) another and is the result (effect) of a previous event.

cel (celluloid)

In animation, a transparent sheet of plastic on which images are drawn and painted.

chiaroscuro

A *low-key lighting* style, with a high contrast between light and dark.

chroma

See *chrominance*.

Chroma Key

An electronic special-effects process, specific to video, making a single color (usually blue or green) transparent so that one image may be inserted into another—e.g., a weather map with a forecaster superimposed over it.

chrominance

The level of *saturation* of a color: the color's purity, how much or little grayness is mixed with it.

CinemaScope

A *widescreen, anamorphic* film process.

cinematographer

The person overseeing all aspects of the film image—including lighting and camera operation.

cinematography

The process of making a film image; the characteristics of the film image.

classical Hollywood cinema (Hollywood classicism)

A conventional style of filmmaking with a particular model of narrative structure, editing technique, *mise-en-scene*, dialogue, music, etc. Narrative is presented in a clear cause-and-effect chain, with definite *closure*.

classical period

In the history of theatrical cinema, the 1920s-50s—when the Hollywood studio system of film production held total power and evolved the classical style of filmmaking. In a genre's evolutionary pattern, the stage during which thematic, narrative structure, and aural/visual style are solidified into firm conventions, a recognizable cohesive unit.

close miking

The positioning of a microphone very close to the performer's mouth; often used by singers and radio and TV announcers.

close-up (CU)

A framing that presents a close view of an object or person, filling the frame and separating the object or person from the surroundings. Conventionally, a TV close-up of a person is from the shoulders or neck up.

closure

Occurs when enigmas opened at the beginning of a program and throughout are resolved; all of the narrative's questions are answered. The opposite of *aperture*.

code

A set of rules; a historically and/or culturally based set of conventions.

color announcer

A television sports announcer, often a former athlete and/or coach, with firsthand expertise.

colorization

A computerized process by which videotapes of black-and-white films are artificially colored for showing on television.

content analysis

An *empirical* method of analysis that selects a textual component, counts and codes the number of occurrences of this component into a statistical form, and results in quantifiable data.

continuity editing (invisible editing)

A style of editing that creates a continuity of space and time from the fragments of scenes contained in individual shots. The shots are arranged to support the progression of the story, and the editing technique does not call attention to itself.

continuity person

The person in a production responsible for maintaining consistency in all details from one shot to the next, including action, lighting, props, and costumes.

continuity system (180° system)

Set of editing conventions that evolved from Hollywood classicism, in which shots are arranged so that the viewer always has a clear sense of where the characters are and when the shot is occurring.

copyright

The exclusive legal rights to perform or sell a song, book, script, photograph, etc. To use copyrighted material (e.g., a piece of music) in a TV program, a fee or *royalty* must be paid to the copyright holder. If there is no copyright, the material may be used for free and is said to be in the *public domain*.

craning

A movement deriving its name from the mechanical crane on which a camera may be placed. In a crane shot, the entire camera, mounted on a crane, is swept upward or downward.

crossfade

Akin to a *dissolve*; one sound fades out while the other fades in, resulting in a brief overlap.

CRT

See *cathode ray tube*.

cultural studies (ethnography)

A critical approach arguing that viewers *decode* television *texts* based on their ideological position in society; it looks at the interaction between the ideological *discourses* of the text and those of the viewer.

decoding

In cultural studies, the reader/viewer's interpretation of a *text* that has been *encoded* with meaning by its creators.

deep focus

When all planes (foreground, middleground, and background) of an image are in *focus*.

deep space

A type of *blocking* associated with single-camera productions, particularly those shot on *location*. The depth of the "set" is emphasized by the ability of one actor to be positioned near the camera and another far away; the actors may move toward one another, or participate in independent actions.

definition

In videography and cinematography, the capability of the visual medium to separate and depict detail. This is sometimes termed resolution.

demographics

The characteristics of an audience, usually broken down in terms of age, gender, income, race, etc.; used with *ratings* to set advertising rates.

depth of field

The range in front of and behind the *focus distance* that is also in focus.

dialogue

Speech among characters, which does not usually address the viewer. Also, a type of interview in which the voices of the interviewer and the interviewee are heard, and both persons may be visible on camera.

diegesis

The world in which the narrative is set; the world fictional characters inhabit.

diegetic sound

Dialogue, music, and sound effects that occur in the *diegetic space* of the television program; i.e., sound that is part of the characters' world.

diegetic space

The physical world in which the narrative action of the television program takes place.

digital sound

A technology (e.g., compact discs) that converts sound into numbers; this allows computers to process and/or change the recorded sound. It has been replacing analog sound (e.g., vinyl albums and audiocassettes).

digital video effects (DVE)

Special effects created on video using a computer.

director

A person in charge of a television show, on the set or in a control booth, during production.

discourse

Socially based belief structures. The viewer brings discourses to the *reading* of the television *text*, which contains discourses that match or clash with the viewer's.

dissolve

A special effect wherein simultaneously one shot fades out as the next fades in, so that the two images briefly overlap. Often used to shift from one scene to the next.

distanciation

A technique of *Brechtian performance* style wherein the actor retains the sense of him/herself as an actor; thus the viewer and actor alike are distanced from the character rather than identifying with it.

dolly

A wheeled camera support that permits a rolling camera movement. In conventional television usage, dollying refers to forward or backward movement and *trucking* (which is accomplished with a dolly) refers to sideways movement.

dominant ideology

In Marxism, the system of beliefs about the world propagated and supported by the society's *ruling class*.

dubbing

The replacement of one voice with another.

dynamic range

A range of sounds from soft to loud. A measurement of the limits of microphones, recording and playback machines, and other audio equipment.

Editech

The first electronic editing system for videotape; invented and marketed by Ampex.

effects theory

A type of communication theory (e.g., *hypodermic needle concept*), which proposes that, because viewers are passive, television directly affects them.

electron gun

A mechanical device, located in the rear of a television's picture tube, which fires an electron beam at the *pixels*. Scanning line by line across the lines of the television image, it causes the pixels to glow and create the television image.

electronic effects

Special effects (including *fades*, *dissolves*, and *keying*) created on video using an analog special-effects generator.

electronic news gathering (ENG)

The videotaping of news events or *actualities*.

emotional memory

Technique of *method acting* wherein the actor draws upon memories of previous emotions that match the emotions of the character.

empiricism

A theoretical approach that advocates the understanding of a problem through systematic and controlled observation/experimentation, with research results measured and expressed in numbers and formulas.

emulsion

The mixture of photosensitive chemicals with a gelatin medium attached to the *base* of a piece of film.

encoding

In cultural studies, the creation of meaning within a *text* by a cultural institution such as the television industry. The reader/viewer may *decode* this preferred meaning when exposed to the text, or he or she may take a position opposing it.

ENG

See *electronic news gathering*.

epic theater

Brechtian theory of theatrical presentation in which the viewer is alienated from the character.

establishing shot

A long shot that positions the character within his or her environment, and helps to establish the setting.

expository mode

Mode of television that presents an argument about the *historical world*; the “facts” of that world are assertively or even aggressively selected and organized and presented to the viewer in a direct address.

exterior scenes

Scenes set outdoors, often in particular *location* settings.

extreme close up (XCU)

A framing that presents a view closer than a conventional close-up—e.g., a shot of an eye that fills the entire screen.

extreme long shot (XLS)

A framing that presents a distant view of an object or person—e.g., an aerial shot of a car on a street.

eyeline match

An editing principle of the *continuity system* that begins with a shot of a character looking in a direction, then cuts to a second shot, which shows the area toward which the character was looking.

fade-out/fade-in

A special effect often used for scene-to-scene transition. In a fade-out the image darkens until the screen is black. In a fade-in, the image starts out black and then gradually becomes visible.

false consciousness

In Marxist terms, a counterfeit image of the world determined by one’s social class.

feminism

In television studies, a critical approach that concentrates on gender *discourse*, the manner in which the male-female relationship is portrayed.

fill light

In the *three-point lighting system*, a source of illumination used to fill the shadows created by the *key light*. It is directed obliquely toward the actor from the opposite side of the key light, at approximately the same height (or a little lower), and is generally half as bright as the key light.

film stock

The type of film used to record images.

filter

In lighting, a colored *gel* placed in front of a light source. In cinematography or videography, an optical device (colored, polarized, etc.) attached to the lens.

fine grain

A type of film stock in which the *grain* is smaller, resulting in higher image *definition*.

flashback

A disruption of the chronological presentation of events, in which an event from the past is presented in a program’s present. See *flashforward*.

flashforward

A disruption of the chronological presentation of events, in which an event from the future is presented in a program's present. See *flashback*.

flow

Television's sequence of programs, commercials, news breaks, etc. The overall flow of television is segmented into small parcels, which often bear little logical connection to one another.

focal length

The distance from the optical center of the lens to its *focal point*, usually measured in millimeters. There are three conventional types of focal length: *wide angle*, *normal*, and *telephoto*.

focal plane

The plane within a camera where the light strikes the film or electronic pickup.

focal point

In a camera lens, the spot where the light rays, bent by the lens, converge before expanding again and striking the film or electronic pickup at the *focal plane*.

focus

The adjustment of the camera lens so that the image is sharp and clear.

focus distance

The distance from the camera to the object being *focused* on.

Foley

A *post-production* process wherein sound effects are fabricated for a filmed/videotaped scene while the Foley artist watches a shot projected on a screen.

format

In film, the film width measured in millimeters (e.g., super-8, 16mm, and 35mm). In videotape, the combination of the width of the tape, measured in inches (e.g., 1/2", 3/4" and 1") and the process used to store the images on tape (e.g., VHS, Beta).

framing

Determines what the viewer can and cannot see due to the manipulation of the camera frame (the edge of the image).

frequency response

A range of sound frequencies (pitch) from low to high. A measurement of the limits of microphones, recording and playback machines, and other audio equipment.

function

In narrative study, a single action or character attribute. Based in Russian Formalism and the work of Vladimir Propp.

gel

A piece of plastic or gelatin placed in front of a light source to change its color.

genre

Groupings of television programs defined by their narrative structure, thematic content, and style of sound and image.

grain

The silver halide crystals suspended in the *emulsion* of a piece of film. When struck by light and chemically processed, these crystals change color, resulting in the film image. The smaller the grain, the higher the *definition* of the image (i.e., the sharper the image).

hand-held

A technique in which the camera or microphone is held by the camera operator or reporter, rather than fixed to a mount such as a tripod or *dolly* or mike stand or boom.

hard light

Direct, undiffused light, resulting in harsh, distinct shadows.

hard news

News stories about events that affect society as a whole (e.g., national politics and international relations).

high angle

A shot in which the camera is placed higher than the filmed/taped actor or object, so that the camera looks down on the actor or object.

high-definition television (HDTV)

A technology in which the number of *scan lines* of the video image is increased (to 1125) and the size of the *pixels* decreased, resulting in an image of high *definition*.

high-key lighting

A lighting style in which the ratio in intensity of *key light* to *fill light* is small. The result is an evenly lit set, with a low contrast between the bright and dark areas.

historical world (historical reality)

The reality that is processed, selected, ordered, and interpreted by non-fiction television programs.

hue

A color from within the visible spectrum of white light—e.g., red, green, blue.

hypercardioid microphone

A highly *unidirectional* microphone, for which the *pickup pattern* is narrower than that of a *cardioid microphone*. So-called shotgun microphones have a hypercardioid pattern.

hypodermic needle theory

An *effects theory* purporting that all viewers receive the same mass media messages, perceive the messages in the same fashion, and respond directly and immediately in the same manner.

icon

In general, an object that represents a theme or an aspect of the character or the like. In the context of *semiotics*, a type of *sign*, where the *signifier* physically resembles the *signified*. For example, a photograph (*signifier*) is a mechanical reproduction of what is photographed (*signified*).

iconography

The objects that signify characters and themes of the narrative.

ideological analysis

An analytical method, concerned with class and gender representation, that studies society's competing *discourses* and the position of the individual within society.

illusion of depth

The ability of the two-dimensional television image to create an illusion whereby space seems to recede into the image. A *telephoto lens* creates a small illusion of depth, and a *wide angle lens* creates a large one.

improvisation

Technique of *method acting* used mostly in rehearsal; the actor puts him/herself into the mind of the character, places the character into imagined situations, and proceeds to invent dialogue and action.

indexical sign (index)

In the context of *semiotics*, a type of *sign* in which the *signifier* is physically caused by the *signified*. For example, where there is smoke, there is fire. Thus the *signifier* (smoke) is physically caused by the *signified* (fire).

infrastructure

See the Marxist definition of *base*.

interactive mode

Television *text* in which the *historical world* is mixed with that of the video/film maker—according to Bill Nichols's approach to nonfiction television and film. This occurs in one of two ways: the *social actor* is brought into a television studio; and/or a representative of television enters the historical world to provoke a response from social actors. In another context, interactive is coming to refer to the capacity of the viewer to respond to or affect what is seen on television—for example, through home shopping services.

interior scenes

Scenes set inside, in particular on *studio sets*, though also including *location* interiors.

intertextuality

The intertextual, self-reflexive quality—as when one television *text* (e.g., a commercial) refers to another (e.g., a program or previous commercial) or to other types of *media texts*.

jump cut

An editing technique wherein one shot does not match the preceding shot, resulting in a disruptive gap in space and/or time.

keying

An *electronic effects* process, specific to video, in which an image or text is inserted into another image. See *Chroma Key*.

key light

In *three-point lighting*, the main source of illumination and the most intense light on the set. It is normally positioned above the actor's head, and several feet in front of him or her.

kinescope

A film copy of a television program; made by aiming the film camera at a television screen. Used during the early years of television (before videotape) to record programs that were broadcast live.

laugh track

A soundtrack of recorded laughter, recorded on the set or added in *post-production* to a comedy program with no studio audience.

lavaliere microphone

A small microphone often clipped to a performer's tie or blouse.

lead

In news stories, the reporter's opening comments—designed to capture viewer attention.

letterboxing

A process by which a *widescreen* film is presented on video. The top and bottom of the video frame is blackened, and the widescreen film frame is reduced to fit into this frame-within-the-frame. See *pan-and-scan*.

lighting color

The color of a light source, which may be manipulated with *gels*.

lighting diffusion

The hardness or softness of a light source. *Hard light* casts a sharp, definite shadow.

lighting direction

The positioning of lights relative to the object being shot. The norm for lighting direction is *three-point lighting*.

lighting intensity

The power of a light source. Regarding the relative intensity of lighting sources, see *three-point lighting*.

limited effects theory

A communication theory (e.g., social learning theory, vicarious catharsis theory) that regards media as having conditional influences on the viewer; due to intervening variables, the effects of media on the viewer are limited.

linear perspective

A method of drawing or painting that converts the three dimensions of reality into two dimensions. Originally developed during the Renaissance, it formed the foundation for how lenses represent a visual field.

lip sync (or lip-synch)

Synchronizing a performance to recorded speech or music; most frequently found in *music videos*, wherein the performers mouth the words to the prerecorded song while they are filmed or videotaped.

live-on-tape

A video production that is recorded live, much like a stage show, with most of the editing done while the scenes transpire (rather than in *post-production*).

location

Pre-existing settings that are chosen as backgrounds for television programs.

long shot (LS)

A framing that presents an entire object or person, situating it or him or her in a setting.

low angle

A shot in which the camera is lower than the filmed/taped object; thus, the camera looks up at the actor/object.

low-key lighting

A lighting style wherein the *key light* is so much more intense than the *fill light* that there is a high contrast between bright and dark areas.

luminance

The brightness or darkness of a color. See *chrominance* and *saturation*.

magnetic tape

A ribbon of plastic with a metal oxide coating on it that is sensitive to magnetic impulses created by electricity. In *analog* technology, these magnetic impulses are modulated on the tape in a fashion parallel to the sound wave's modulation. In *digital* technology, magnetic tape is used to record sounds encoded as a string of numbers that will later be converted into sound.

manifest content

In the context of a *content analysis* of a television text, the characters and their actions.

masked widescreen

A nonanamorphic film process, resulting in a wide *aspect ratio*. In masked films, blackened horizontal bands are placed across the top and bottom of a 1.33:1 frame, creating a wider *aspect ratio* of 1.85:1.

match cut

An editing principle of the *continuity system* that maintains continuity by fitting (matching) the space and time of one shot to that of the preceding shot.

match-on-action

An editing technique of the *continuity system* wherein a cut is placed in the midst of an action, so that the action from one shot continues to the next.

means of production

Marx's term for the locations (factories and the like) at which men and women labor and goods are produced.

media text

Any item in the mass media (e.g., a TV commercial or program, film, magazine, interview, public appearance, etc.).

medium close up (MCU)

A framing in between *medium shot* and *close-up*.

medium long shot (MLS)

A framing in between *long shot* and *medium shot*.

medium shot (MS)

A framing that presents a moderately close view of an object or person. Conventionally, a TV medium shot of a person is from the thighs or knees up. Two common types of medium shots are the *two-shot* and the *three-shot*.

method acting

Naturalist performance style that encourages the actor to become the character, at which point the gestures/dialects necessary for the performance will emerge organically. Approaches used to achieve this union between actor and character are *emotional memory*, *sense memory*, and *improvisation*.

microphone (mike)

Device used to record sound. The *pickup pattern* of a microphone may be *omnidirectional* or *cardioid*. See also *lavaliere microphone* and *hypercardioid microphone*.

mise-en-scene

The staging of the action for the camera; all of the physical objects in front of the camera and the arrangement of those objects by the director; the organization of setting, costuming, lighting, and *actor movement*.

mixer

A machine that blends various sound sources.

mode of production

In the context of television, an aesthetic style of shooting that relies upon a particular technology and is governed by a certain economic system. Television's two principal modes of production are *single-camera* and *multiple-camera*.

mode of representation

The manner in which a nonnarrative television program depicts *historical reality* and addresses itself to the viewer about that version of reality; modes include *expository*, *interactive*, *observational*, and *reflexive*.

motivation

In narrative structure, a catalyst that begins the story's progression—a reason for the story to begin.

multiple-camera production

A *mode of production* unique to television, wherein two or more cameras are used to record the scene, enabling simultaneous and/or *post-production* editing. The mode used in most sitcoms and all soap operas, game shows, sports programs, and newscasts.

multitrack tape recorder

Used in the sound editing process, this recorder holds a tape that is electronically divided into four (or many more) separate *tracks*. On each is a sound category (*dialogue*, music, effects) separated from the others, allowing the sound editor to manipulate individual soundtracks before producing a finished soundtrack.

musical director

Person who selects and arranges the music for a program.

music television

Generally refers to a system, such as a cable or satellite service (e.g., MTV, CMT), through which musical broadcast material is delivered.

music video

A visual representation of or accompaniment to a song or other musical selection that usually exists independently as a recording.

mythic analysis

An interpretive strategy of *genre* analysis that approaches genres in terms of archetypes—stories shared by large segments of a culture—which offer the researcher evidence of that society's thought process.

narration (voice-over)

When a character's or omniscient narrator's voice is heard over an image.

narrative enigma

A question that underpins a story and will (in classical films) or will not (in soap opera) be answered at the conclusion.

narrative image

A representation of a program created by advertising and *promotion* to entice viewers.

National Television Standards Committee (NTSC)

A committee established by manufacturers of television equipment to develop a set of standards that would render color transmission and reception compatible to black-and-white television sets. The initials NTSC are also commonly used to refer to the 525-line broadcast standard used in the United States.

naturalism

In animation, the aesthetic tenet advocating that cartoon characters should resemble objects in reality, and the audience's view of these characters/objects should resemble that of a camera. The opposite of *abstraction*. Also a performance style in which the actor attempts to create a character that the audience will accept as a plausible and believable human being, rather than an actor trying to portray someone.

negotiated reading

In *cultural studies*, the interpretation of the *text* that partially accepts and partially rejects the meanings emphasized by the *text*.

nondiegetic sound

Sound that does not occur in the *diegetic space* (the characters' world), such as music that is added in *post-production*.

nonnarrative television

Television texts (e.g., news and sports programs, game shows, some commercials) that present reality to us without using conventional narrative structures. Instead, nonnarrative television relies on *expository, interactive, observational, and/or reflexive modes of representation*.

normal lens

A lens whose *focal length* seems to approximate most closely the human eye's range of vision. (In actuality the range of vision is narrower in a normal focal length lens, with less *illusion of depth*.)

NTSC

See *National Television Standards Committee*.

objective correlative

An object that comes to represent an aspect of a character—e.g., Lucas McCain's (the Rifleman's) Winchester rifle representing his frontier style of justice.

optical effects

Special effects (including *fades* and *dissolves*) created on film using an optical printer.

observational mode

Type of television text wherein a television producer's presence is not obvious to the viewer, and his or her manipulation of the *historical world* is minimal.

omnidirectional microphone

A microphone that is able to pick up sound equally from all directions.

180° rule

An editing principle of the *continuity* (or 180°) *system*, which dictates that cameras remain on one side of the *axis of action* to preserve the scene's spatial continuity and *screen direction*.

oppositional reading

In *cultural studies*, the interpretation of the *text* that is wholly contrary to the *text's* dominant meanings.

package

In television journalism, an 80-to-105-second news story shot in the field and filed by a reporter.

pan-and-scan (scanning)

A process by which a *widescreen, anamorphic* film (2.35:1) is reduced to television's smaller 1.33:1 *aspect ratio*. The most significant part of the original frame is selected, and the pan-and-scan frame can slide, or "scan," left or right across the original frame. See *letterboxing*.

Panavision

A *widescreen, anamorphic* film process. (Also, the name of a company that manufactures a variety of film equipment.)

panning

The action of rotating the camera left and right, on an imaginary vertical axis. Only the tripod head is moved, not the entire support. *Pan* also refers to the resulting horizontal movement of the image.

pantomime

A style of *naturalism* in which the actor presents the character with specific gestures that, through convention, represent specific emotions or actions.

paradigmatic structure

In *semiotics*, a manner in which *signs* are organized and meaning created. Paradigmatic structures create meaning through association, in contrast to *syntagmatic* structures, which create meaning through sequence or chronological order. In baseball, for example, the players that might replace one another in the batting lineup are in paradigmatic relationship to one another. The television viewer flows syntagmatically through the evening's programs (one after another) and surfs paradigmatically across the channels (with the remote control) to view what is on concurrently.

pedestalizing

Raising or lowering the camera on the vertical post of the camera support. *Pedestal* is also the term given to the moveable camera support (the shaft in the center of a dolly) used in studio television production.

perfect fit

In the study of television stars, a matching of a particular role's characteristics to a star's *polysemy*.

phosphors

See *pixels*.

pickup pattern

In *microphones*, the shape of the space in which the *microphone* is sensitive to sound. Common patterns include *omnidirectional* and *cardioid*.

pilot

A program, sometimes a made-for-TV movie, which introduces a possible new *series*. Programs for which no subsequent series is produced are called busted pilots.

pitch

How high or low a sound is. See *frequency response*.

pixels

Phosphorescent dots, arranged in horizontal lines on the television screen, which produce the video image when struck by a beam from the *electron gun*.

play-by-play announcer

A type of television sports announcer, usually a professional broadcaster, who functions as narrator of the game's events, keeps track of game time, prompts the comments of the *color announcers*, reiterates the score, modulates the passage of time, and may lead into commercial breaks.

point-of-view shot

A shot in which the camera is situated very close to a character's position; thus, the resulting shot approximates the character's point of view.

polysemy

Literally, many meanings. Refers to television's ability to communicate contradictory or ambivalent meanings simultaneously.

post-production

Everything (e.g., editing, sound effects) that transpires after the program itself has been shot.

preferred reading

In *cultural studies*, the interpretation of the *text* that is stressed by the *text* itself. Marxists presume this reading to align with the *dominant ideology*.

pre-production

The written planning stages of the program (script preparation, budgeting, etc.).

problematic fit

In the study of television stars, a matching of a particular role's characteristics to a star's *polysemy*.

production

The shooting of the program.

proletariat

In Marxist terms, the working class; this least powerful group in a capitalist system works to survive, selling its labor to the *bourgeoisie*.

promotion

In the study of stars, a type of *media text* (e.g., an appearance on a talk show) generated by the star and his or her representatives in a deliberate attempt to shape viewer perception of the star. Also, material created by networks and stations to advertise their programs; abbreviated as *promos*.

pseudomonologue

Type of interview in which the interviewer and his or her questions are not evident in the *text*; only the interviewee's answers are included.

public domain

Material (e.g., a piece of music) that is not *copyrighted*, which may be used in TV programs without paying a fee or *royalty*.

publicity

In the study of stars, a type of *media text* (e.g., an unauthorized biography) that presents information outside the control of the star and his or her representatives.

pulling focus

See *racking focus*.

racking focus (pulling focus)

Shifting the *focus* from foreground to background, or vice versa.

ratings

Based on a random sample of television viewers, the calculated amount and percentage of viewers watching a particular program on a particular station.

reading

The viewer's active interpretation of a *text*, whether written (e.g., a book) or visual (e.g., a television program or film).

reestablishing shot

A long shot that once again positions the character(s) within the environment of the scene, helping to reestablish character and/or setting; also used as a transitional device.

reflexive mode

Nonnarrative television *text* that draws the viewer's attention to the processes, techniques, and conventions of television production.

repertory

Naturalist performance style in which the actor constructs a performance by selecting gestures and spoken dialects.

rhythm

The timing of speech, music, sound effects, or editing.

rotoscope

A device used in animation wherein a single frame from a live-action film is rear-projected onto a table with a semi-opaque glass in the center; the animator places a *cel* on the light table and traces the images cast by the film; the tracings are rephotographed, resulting in an animated film that duplicates live-action images.

royalty

A fee paid for the use of *copyrighted* material.

ruling class

Marx's term for the social class in control of a society's *means of production*; the class that controls the *means of production* controls the society overall.

saturation

In the context of television's image quality, the level of a color's purity (or the amount grayness mixed with the color). See *chrominance*.

scan line

A line of glowing *pixels* that makes up the television image. In the NTSC system used in the United States, there are 525 lines in the TV image. PAL, developed in Germany, and SECAM, from France, are 625-line systems.

scanning

See *pan-and-scan*.

scene (sequence)

The smallest piece of the narrative action; a single narrative event that occurs in continuous space over continuous time.

scientific method

An *empirical* approach that advocates developing research questions and hypotheses based on an established body of theoretical knowledge, investigating them with replicable methodology, and explaining the results in terms of its contribution to the established body of knowledge.

Scopitones

Produced in the 1960s, short films of performances by popular musicians presented on coin-operated machines akin to jukeboxes.

screen direction

From the camera's perspective, the direction in which a character is looking and/or an object is moving in a shot.

screenplay

A written description of a program, where the action and *dialogue* are described scene by scene. (Terms used to describe different types of scripts vary considerably within the television and film industries.)

screen time

The duration of a program, which is normally shorter than the time represented in the program's narrative (that is, its *story time*). For example, the story time of one soap opera episode is typically a day or two, but its screen time is less than 60 minutes.

segue

A transition from one sound to another.

selective use

In the study of television stars, a use of selected parts of the star's *polysemy* in a particular role.

self-reflexivity

The reference of a program back to itself or similar programs. In a *genre's* evolutionary pattern, the stage during which the genre turns inward and uses its own conventions for subject matter, often in the form of a parody.

semiotics

The science of signs, which breaks down all forms of communication into individual units of meaning. These are studied in terms of their singular characteristics as well as their interaction with other units of meaning in complex systems such as language.

sense memory

Technique of *method acting* in which the actor draws upon memories of physical sensations of an emotional event to generate *emotional memory*.

serial

A form of narrative television that presents daily/weekly episodes, with a multiple set of recurring characters and simultaneous story lines. Because each episode links to the next, narrative *closure* is rare.

series

A narrative form that presents weekly episodes, usually self-contained, with a defined set of recurring characters. A series program does not continue story lines from one episode to the next, as a *serial* program does.

set designer (scenic designer)

A person who builds or selects elements in constructing the setting of a television program.

sexual politics

In *feminist* studies, the power relationship between men and women.

shallow focus

A small *depth of field*, with just one plane (foreground, middleground, or background) in *focus*.

shallow space

A type of blocking associated with *multiple-camera, studio set* productions; due to the shallow sets, the actors mostly move side to side, rather than up and back.

shooting script

A written description of a program, wherein each scene is described shot by shot. (Terms used to describe different types of scripts vary considerably within the television and film industries.)

shot-counter shot (shot-reverse shot)

An editing principle of the *continuity system* that alternates shots, particularly in conversation scenes between two characters. It is a mainstay of the *180° rule* and the *continuity system*.

sign

In *semiotics*, the smallest unit of meaning—composed of a *signifier* and its *signified*.

signified

The meaning communicated by the *signifier*; can be an object, a concept, a visual field, and so on.

signifier

The physical aspect of a *sign*, such as ink on a page, chalk on a chalkboard, a blinking light, light emanating from a TV screen, etc.

signs of character

The various *signifiers*—viewer foreknowledge, character name, appearance, *objective correlatives*, *dialogue*, lighting, *videography* or *cinematography*, and action—that communicate the character to the viewer.

signs of performance

The actor's facial, gestural, corporeal, and vocal *signifiers* that contribute to the development of character.

simulcasts

Programs, particularly in the late 1940s and early 1950s, which are simultaneously broadcast on radio and television. The process was revived in the 1960s and 1970s to transmit stereo sound on FM radio that would accompany television visuals (for example, a concert broadcast).

single-camera production

A *mode of production* using one camera at a time, and the shots are done in the most economically efficient order. On television, the main mode used in creating prime-time dramas, made-for-tv movies, *music videos*, and commercials.

social actor

A "real" person as used in nonfiction television programs; a person "performing" according to social codes of behavior to represent him or herself to others.

soft focus

An entire image that is slightly out of *focus*.

soft light

A diffused light source, resulting in indistinct, blurred outlines and minimal shadows.

soft news

News stories that examine the personal realm, such as gossip, scandal, and "human interest stories."

sound bite

In a news *package*, a short piece of audio that was recorded on location.

sound editor

Technician who, in *post-production*, manipulates a program's soundtrack.

Soundies

Produced in the 1940s, short films of performances by popular musicians presented on coin-operated machines akin to jukeboxes.

sound stage

A large room designed for filming or videotaping programs. Sets are arranged on the stage in a variety of ways, depending mostly upon the presence/absence of a studio audience.

stand-up

A feature of a television news *package*, in which the reporter stands before a site significant to the story to narrate it.

star image

A representation of an actor fabricated through the *media texts* of *promotion*, *publicity*, television programs, and criticism.

Steadicam

Registered trademark for a spring-balanced camera mount that attaches to a *camera operator's* body, which produces smooth camera movement without the use of a *dolly*.

stereotype

A conventionalized character type that is demeaning to a particular social group.

storyboard

A written description of a program consisting of small drawings of individual shots. When used in animation, this series of sketches precisely outlines the progression of the entire cartoon.

story time

The amount of time that transpires within a program's narrative. See *screen time*.

stripped syndication

A programming strategy in which syndicated shows are scheduled Monday through Friday in the same time slot.

structured polysemy

The organization and emphasis/deemphasis of meanings within television's *polysemy*.

studio set

Three-walled, ceilingless set erected on a *sound stage*; this type of set is usually shallow, normally wider than deep, and rectangular rather than square.

subject

In contemporary psychoanalysis, the human psyche—formed chiefly through the Oedipus complex. In contemporary Marxism, an individual viewed as a psychological construct who enters the ideological world, and must be considered in relationship to this ideology.

subjective shot

A shot wherein the camera is positioned as if it were inside a character's head, looking out of his or her eyes.

subtitling

The process in which the dialogue of a film or television program is printed at the bottom of the screen as it is spoken. Subtitling is often used for foreign-language films. In television it is also used on conventional programs as closed captions for viewers with impaired hearing.

subtractive color

The process wherein, as white light passes through a piece of film, yellow, magenta, and cyan colors are filtered out, leaving the many colors of the spectrum.

superstructure

In Marxist terms, a society's ideological constructs, which grow out of its economic *base*.

sweetening

In *post-production*, the addition by sound technicians of applause and laughter to those of the studio audience.

switcher

A technical device that allows a director to change between various video cameras and other sources during a production.

symbolic sign (symbol)

In *semiotics*, a *sign* in which the *signifier* and the *signified* are connected solely through cultural convention. For example, Christianity (*signified*) by a cross (*signifier*) or Judaism (*signified*) by a Star of David (*signifier*).

sync (or synch)

The synchronization of sound and image. See *lip sync*.

syntagm

In *semiotics*, a first-level ordering of signs—e.g., in narrative television, an individual *scene*. The sequence of scenes is their *syntagmatic structure*.

syntagmatic structure

In *semiotics*, the manner in which *signs* are linearly and/or temporally organized. (The batting lineup in baseball is in syntagmatic order.) See *paradigmatic structure* for further explanation.

take

A single shot, lasting from the starting to the stopping of the camera.

teasers

On television news, brief announcements of upcoming stories used to maintain viewer attention.

Technicolor

A color film process used mostly from the late 1930s to the 1950s.

telephoto lens

A lens whose long *focal length* creates a narrow but magnified view of an object or person.

Telescriptions

Produced by Louis Snader in the 1950s, short films of musical performances that were marketed to television stations for use in variety shows or as filler material.

television apparatus

The combined work of all of the factions (bankers, media corporations, directors, scriptwriters) that create television programs, and the viewing experience itself—including the psychological mechanisms at work during TV viewing.

television criticism

Nonempirical, analytical methods (e.g., *auteur theory*, *genre study*, *semiotics*, and *feminism*) employed to understand systems of meaning on television. The term is also used in the popular press to refer to evaluative reviewing of television.

televisual

Characteristic of television.

text

In *semiotics*, any systematic ordering of signs. In television criticism in particular, a segment of the televisual *flow*, such as an individual program, a commercial, a newscast, even an entire evening's viewing.

theatrical film

Films originally designed to be shown in theaters, as opposed to made-for-TV films.

three-point lighting

An *aesthetic* convention in which an actor or object is lit from three sources or points of light of varying intensity. There is one main source of illumination (*key light*), one source filling shadows (*fill light*), and one source backlighting the actors (*back light*).

three-shot

The framing of three characters in a medium shot.

tilting

The action of rotating the camera up and down, on a horizontal axis in a stationary body. *Tilt* also refers to the resulting vertical movements in the image.

timbre (tone)

The tonal quality of any sound, such as a note or voice.

track

An area along the length of recording tape (like the lanes on a highway) in a *multitrack tape recorder* on which speech, music, or sound effects are individually recorded.

tracking

Any sideways or forward/backward movement of the camera *dolly*—sometimes on actual tracks; more commonly used in film production than television, which relies instead on the terms *dolly* and *tracking*.

treatment

A written description of a program, containing only a basic outline of the action; the first stage of the scriptwriting process.

trucking

In television studio production, the action of rolling the entire camera left or right, on a wheeled camera support (*dolly*).

two-shot

The framing of two characters in a medium shot.

typesetting

When the *star image* perfectly fits the character he or she portrays.

unidirectional microphone

A microphone that picks up sound from a specific direction.

uses-and-gratifications

A research method that sees viewers as active users, and attempts to chart the way that viewers employ television. This method quantifies how television fulfills viewers' emotional or intellectual needs.

vaudeville

A bygone form of theater and *antinaturalistic* performance style in which the actor reminds the viewer that the character is not a real person, often by directly addressing the viewer.

verisimilitude

The impression of truth or reality.

videographer

The person overseeing all aspects of the video image—including lighting and the operation of the camera.

videography

The process of making a video image; the characteristics of the video image.

volume

How loud a sound is. One of three main characteristics of television sound. See *pitch* and *timbre*.

wide angle lens

A lens whose *focal length* generally provides a wide view of a scene and increases the *illusion of depth*, so that some objects seem to be far apart from one another.

widescreen

An *aspect ratio* wider than television's standard of 1.33:1 (that is, 4:3). In the cinema, common variations of widescreen are *masked* (1.85:1) and *anamorphic* (2.35:1).

wipe

A special effect used as a transition device between scenes, in which a line moves across the screen, apparently erasing one shot as the next replaces it.

zoom in/zoom out

A function of the *zoom lens* wherein the *focal length* is varied from *wide angle* to *telephoto* (zoom in), thereby magnifying the object as the angle of view is narrowed—or vice versa (zoom out).

zoom lens

A lens with a variable *focal length*, allowing the operator to shift immediately and continuously from *wide angle* to *telephoto* (or vice versa) without switching lenses.



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