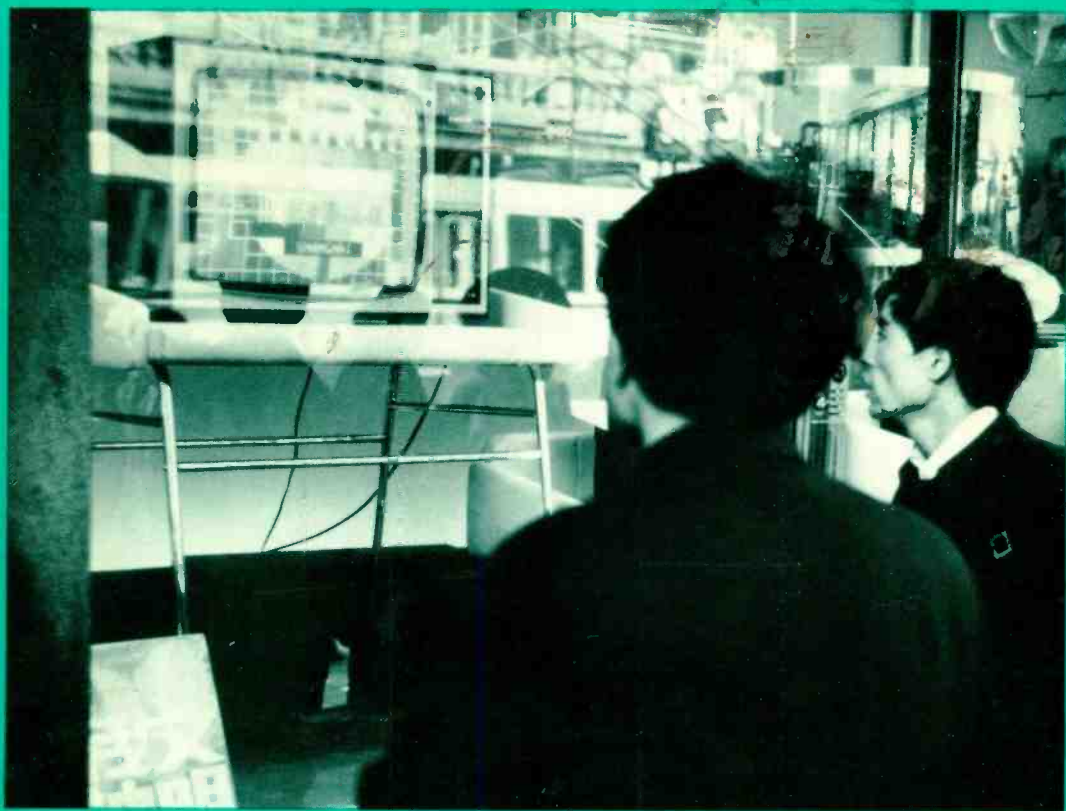


TELEVISION QUARTERLY



\$3.50
Volume XXI
Number III
1985

THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF TELEVISION ARTS AND SCIENCES



INSIDE CHINESE TELEVISION: Bernard S. Redmont
DIRECTING THE SUPER BOWL: Sandy Grossman
THE UNFAIR FAIRNESS DOCTRINE: Ed Hinshaw
TELEVISED TRIALS, YES AND NO: Judith L. Lindahl

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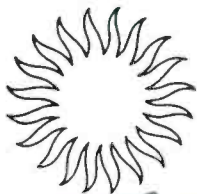
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INSIDE CHINESE TELEVISION: A NEW "GREAT LEAP FORWARD"

The Bamboo Curtain opens on Lollobrigida, U.S.-style commercials, investigative journalism, CBS' *60 Minutes*, and daily English lessons.

**BY BERNARD S.
REDMONT**

BEIJING

To a Westerner, few experiences can top the culture shock of discovering *The Lone Ranger* and his cry of "Hi Ho Silver!" dubbed into Mandarin on Chinese television.

After a period of near hibernation, Chinese TV has taken a Great Leap Forward. With the past as inevitable prologue, China is racing into the video future, expanding enormously, innovating beyond the guidelines of Deng Xiaoping's "four modernizations" program, transforming the life of the people, and opening its door to the world outside.

All this—and commercials, too.

Rooms in Chinese hotels, old and new, now come equipped with color TV.

In the teeming metropolis of Shanghai, virtually every home now has a TV set (91 out of 100 families at the end of 1983, according to *China Daily*).

In the countryside where peasants toil, sometimes barefoot, in the rice fields without even primitive machinery, TV antennas now sprout from farm house rooftops.

Years of isolation and ideological nationalism have given way to admiring images from the West. The watchword today is *cong yang*, or praise for Western ways.

Mao Tse-tung didn't think much of TV or its role in revolutionary China. Deng Xiaoping has given it the green light. Above all, Deng is encouraging East to meet West. Applied to TV, this means more imports, limited only by China's shortage of cash and foreign exchange.

A Western science fiction series like *The Man from Atlantis*, featuring an amphibious trouble-shooter, was a big Saturday night hit here, fascinating Chinese young and old. Actuality clips from Britain's *Visnews* and *UPITN*, as well as ABC and the Asian Broadcasting Union, liven up the once-stodgy news. In Beijing one day, we were startled to see a piece of *This Week with David Brinkley*, with a super crediting it as such, and a sequence attributed to KTUL-TV about floods in Tulsa.

Once films were shown only when approved by Mao's wife, Chiang Ching, mostly depicting strident "model revolutionary operas"; the list now includes *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, starring Gina Lollobrigida (in a clinging, low-cut red dress) and Anthony Quinn; *David Copperfield*, *Heidi*, *The Third Man*, *The Bicycle Thief*, *Oliver Twist*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The White Rose*. Charlie Chaplin's films were favorites in the past but haven't been seen lately.

On theatre screens and stages—but not yet on TV—audiences have seen *The Sound of Music*, *Death of a Salesman* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*.

TV stations acquire some foreign films free, particularly from Eastern Europe,

and generally want to pay only minimal rates. Nevertheless, imports come also from the U.S., France, Italy, Britain, India, the Soviet Union and especially Japan.

Chinese officials, while eager for American films, universally complain "Your prices are too high for us."

After a late start in 1958 in experimental black and white in Beijing, Chinese TV was further retarded by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, that decade of madness and bloody chaos from

Regional stations are now authorized to buy foreign programs on their own and to sign joint co-production agreements with foreigners.

the mid-60s to mid-70s, during which almost everything intellectual or entertaining became anathema. Provincial stations began operating only in 1971, and color came in 1973.

Now television blankets the vast nation. The national network, CCTV, reaches everywhere. By 1984, 52 stations were transmitting around the country, boosted by relays. Viewers in big cities like Beijing, Canton (Guangzhou) and Shanghai have a choice of three channels, and most others have two, national and local. Local TV stations in the provinces are encouraged to develop their own programming, style and commercials and to use regional language dialects.

Shanghai's third channel is the only UHF station in China. A fourth channel, also UHF, is planned for 1985. Shanghai's 205-meter-high TV tower is claimed to be the highest in China. The Shanghai TV center is newer and its set for news programs is classier than Beijing's.

No official I spoke with was sure how many Chinese now have access to TV. The best informed guess is over 400,000,000—almost half of the popula-

tion, although the number of sets is only 27,000,000, according to government statistics. Production is now close to 7,000,000 sets a year and booming. Sets are often owned by groups and communities, factories, schools and other institutions.

At the foot of the Purple Mountains, the Nanjing Radio Factory produces Panda brand electronic appliances, including satellite dishes, on a 24-hour-a-day, three-shift basis. A bustling assembly line there turns out handsome TV sets at prices ranging from \$200 for black-and-whites to \$500 and upward for color.

Given the average Chinese worker's wage of 60 yuan (\$30) a month, this means a hefty bite out of income. But demand outstrips supply. More than a hundred other TV factories are producing TV sets.

In 1983, nationwide production of washing machines rose 28 per cent and refrigerators rose 94 per cent, but color TVs jumped 236 per cent, according to the economic daily, *Jingji Ribao*. Shanghai manufactures six times more TV sets than refrigerators and washing machines combined.

Originally, the TV system's design and equipment came from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but after the split with Moscow, China began making and developing its own. Japan is now a major supplier, not only of TV sets but also studio equipment. China uses the 625-line West German PAL color system. Images are excellent.

CCTV studios, in a dusty and obsolete compound in central Beijing, use a combination of Ampex control room consoles, Textronix monitors, RCA prompters, Sony Betamax and Japanese NEC cameras. A new 20-story TV center is being built for 1986.

Demonstrating the importance now given to TV, the government created a Ministry of Television and Radio a few years ago. Regional stations are now authorized to buy foreign programs on their own and to sign joint co-production agreements with foreigners.

CCTV's Deputy Director, Chen Han Yuan, told me he hopes that "our friendly counterparts abroad realize our urgent need for programs. We hope more programs suitable for Chinese audiences will be available at reasonable prices. We appreciate help to upgrade our TV."

Deputy Minister, Ma Qingxiong, added: "Chinese people consider broadcasting an essential part of their lives. Audiences demand more quality, and that's important to us. We don't have enough equipment or qualified person-

There's even a regular program on Chinese cooking with a Chinese version of Julia Child.

nel; we need better management. But even with all our problems, people still praise what we do."

Programming currently is limited to 15 hours a day, but is expanding rapidly. It ranges from news and entertainment to cultural, sports, children's programs and educational material. Feature films, documentaries and opera are shown, along with cartoons and even soap operas.

One national channel concentrates on education on many levels. China uses the TV to teach foreign languages, mainly English, with some Japanese and French on the drawing board. TV lessons also cover the sciences, economics, agriculture and engineering. One program is called *Learn to Spell*. Millions take courses in the TV University, which transmits daily six hours a day and issues degrees through the Ministry of Education.

A tiny village in Henan Province, Liushuang, set up the first low-power mini-station in 1984 to tape and rebroadcast the TV college program of CCTV for students there. It also repeats news and economic information programs and, during festivals, organizes its own programs.

During the ten-year Cultural Revolu-

tion, the TV ran little but reruns of "model revolutionary operas" and propaganda lectures sponsored by the party. Educational programs, like the universities, were shut down.

A random sampling of programs in Beijing in 1984 included: *Across Our Motherland and Around the World*, documentaries on national and foreign themes; an animated film called *The Dragon-tooth Star*; Chinese, German and Japanese puppet and animated shows; *The Health of Old People*, and the American Dance Troupe of Brigham Young University.

Also: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Wonders of Gardens*, *Cultivating the Intelligence of Babies*, *Hygiene and Health (Preventing Bad Teeth)*, *Famous Paintings*, *Poetry Evening*, a TV play called *The Troublesome Age* and the French film, *Zorro*. A local station in Canton recently ran a one-hour special on Norman Rockwell.

There's even a regular program on Chinese cooking with a Chinese version of Julia Child, nonchalantly presiding over a disorderly kitchen with blackened pots and pans, and turning out a sophisticated gourmet version of Bean Curd Covered by Sunflowers, or Four-Perfumed Carp, baked with ginger and scallions. Some Westerners in Beijing found the program sometimes as unintentionally hilarious as they did Julia Child.

A feature on a factory nursery will alternate with one on a new computer that handles Chinese characters and an animated film called *The Mango with Legs*.

To an American observer, the level of production on Chinese television is uneven. It is sometimes excellent and sometimes rudimentary, reflecting the country's late start in developing modern technology and video know-how. Chinese TV executives frankly acknowledge they have great strides to make before their product will be up to western or U.S. levels.

The growth of TV has spawned a cor-

responding interest in video cassette recorders, even in outlying rural areas, where some farm families have acquired a small degree of affluence. An American reporter recently related how a group of peasants in Fujian province pooled resources to buy a dozen video recorders and a stock of blue-movie tapes. They then charged the equivalent of \$5 admission for each showing.

China plunged into the advertising age on TV in 1979, after a long and sometimes bitter political debate. One of my Chinese friends remarked, "There was a change of philosophy. We no longer consider commercials too capitalistic. People now like the livelier commercials." The move began at Beijing TV and was followed by the provinces—all eager for revenue from both local and foreign advertisers.

Florida millionaire John Parke Wright, a pioneer in U.S.-China trade, who manages Jardine, Matheson & Co.'s Beijing branch, helped to introduce big U.S. companies to China and is credited with helping to place the first advertising on Chinese TV and the first billboards in

Western marketers of consumer products are advertising on Chinese TV even though it may be a while before Chinese audiences will be able to buy them.

Beijing. Today, visitors are struck by the prevalence of Coca Cola ads and signs, rather than Mao statues or portraits, or Communist political slogans. Products like Polaroid, Kodak, Bic pens and Chivas Regal are available, but largely in tourist spots for hard currency, so the advertising market for such items is limited.

R. J. Reynolds Tobacco signed up with China in the summer of 1984 to make the first Chinese-American cigarette in Xiamen, but they won't be able to advertise

them on TV: China bans TV commercials for cigarettes and liquor. Nor can TV tout the taste of Dynasty brand wine, a joint vineyard venture by France and China.

Reynolds and China are exploring a possible future deal that may bring one of the company's other products into the one-billion-people market—Kentucky Fried Chicken. One day, we may see Chinese TV commercials for Colonel Sanders' finger-lickin' morsels, competing with Maxim's of Beijing (yes, the Parisian restaurant is already here!).

Western marketers of consumer products are advertising on Chinese TV even though it may be a while before Chinese audiences will be able to buy or afford them. They consider it an investment in good will and future sales potential.

Commercials seen these days are for Seiko and Citizen watches, Sony and Sanyo tape recorders, Toshiba refrigerators, a variety of TV sets, Kodak film, baby talcum powder, shampoos, hair grooming lotions, and even computers.

Initially devoted to heavy industry and heavy in technique, commercials now concentrate on consumer goods, and many are subtle and witty. There are, of course, ads for Chinese-made products as well as imports.

Japan's Toyota Automobile Co. once paid \$45,000 for a gigantic six-minute-50-second commercial, screened in mid-week during a visit to China by the Japanese Prime Minister.

Apart from such special occasions, commercials are kept short—usually 30 seconds. They are limited to five to ten minutes per day, and never clog programs but are presented, usually bunched, before or after. Shanghai TV's Deputy Director, Shi Min, commented: "Chinese viewers don't welcome interruptions."

CCTV's Deputy Director, Chen Han Yuan, and others consulted agreed that news is the most popular offering on the television.

The evening news at 7 p.m., repeated and updated at 9:10 p.m., has recently been augmented by a noontime news program, and a late-night newscast is

in the planning stage. About one-fourth of the newscasts is international.

Chen frankly conceded that viewers complain about "too much coverage" of political meetings and too much "talk," which he said can become "tiresome and boring."

TV producers are aware they need more actuality footage and on-scene reporting, but ascribe this defect to lack of funds, training and facilities. They don't have enough ENG equipment.

Radio Beijing now deploys foreign correspondents, but the TV is still without its own foreign service.

Anchors and announcers appear to be evenly divided between men and women and rotate to avoid any "star" system. Good looks seem to be important, but TV salaries are no bigger than the nationwide average for factory workers.

A resident American diplomat judged the news to be "fairly objective," with rarely any political diatribes, and news kept separate, for the most part, from editorial comment.

Western news agencies keep Chinese TV informed about the world because the New China News Agency, Xinhua, supplies news to TV and radio stations as well as newspapers, and it distributes the American AP and UPI world services, as well as Reuters and Agence France Presse.

National and local news tends to be long and often dull—with "socialist themes" dominant. Typical feature stories will cover, for instance, tree planting to stop erosion in Mongolia, a new high school being named after a Korean war hero who threw himself onto American guns, and China's volleyball team training for the Los Angeles Olympics.

The weather report, with temperature highs and lows from all major cities in China, includes Hong Kong and Taipei, considered a part of the nation. It's done straight with simple graphics, and no clowning personalities.

Lately, the U.S. Information Service has been helping out with high-quality news-oriented videotape, usually vignettes of American culture or current events, and

it gets on the evening news. Science and technology are also in demand. I saw, for example, items on the development of solar, and wind power. I watched one piece on a computerized "house of the future" in Connecticut that was surprisingly laudatory.

Observers who have studied the media of both Communist super-powers note that Chinese TV often overstates living standards in the United States while Soviet broadcasts emphasize negative developments.

Sportscasting is very popular, particularly soccer, volleyball, basketball, table tennis and athletics. Chen Han Yuan said that, "When the Chinese women's volleyball team won the world championship, live transmissions of the games emptied the streets."

CCTV execs regretfully comment that although Coca Cola billboards are seen in the sports stadiums during TV pickups, Coke pays the stadiums and not CCTV.

Sometimes Chinese TV enterprise reporting can go beyond that of audacious Americans. Not long ago, alert Chinese TV news crew members happened to be traveling on an overnight train from Yanzhou in Shandong Province to Nanjing when they heard that a woman was about to give birth in a sleeping car.

The next night, the evening news' anchor, Xi Chen, was able to report, "They immediately went to the car and filmed. At 10:30 p.m. a baby girl was born." The broadcast showed several uniformed officials attending to the unidentified woman as one cut the infant's umbilical cord.

News director Liu Li-Chong, of Canton (Guangzhou) TV, who looks and sounds as enterprising as any American top-ten market news exec, said his city has increased news coverage to eleven shows daily, apportioned among three channels.

Hooked on "investigative reporting," his station gave air time to Cantonese who complained about the bad tasting,

inadequate and unsafe water supply in the area. Within ten days, Liu recounted, the city authorities had located and corrected the problem, and gave credit to the TV exposé.

One day a local hospital administered the wrong medicine to a sick child, and nearly caused its death. The story was telecast, and within fifteen minutes two doctors arrived and changed the medication, saving the baby's life, Liu said.

In another case, a woman patient was dying for lack of type AB blood, a rarity in China. Broadcast on the evening news at 7:15 p.m., the item stimulated enough volunteers to donate their AB blood to save the woman.

Chinese TV, and the mass media generally, are changing their image from the stodgy policies of earlier times when disasters, crimes and other "negative" news reports were suppressed.

During and after the 1976 earthquake that wiped out most of the city of Tanshan, near Beijing, not a word was printed or aired, according to one survivor who had to live in a tent for weeks. "It's different now," she told me, "There was a disastrous flood in Sichuan in 1983, and we were all amazed to see reporters on the scene telling the story for TV."

In the summer of 1984, it had become routine to report even minor items like the theft of a bus by two schoolboys in Beijing, the drowning of eight swimmers, the collapse of a building crane with several casualties, the theft of fifteen cassette recorders by a Shanghai postal worker and the explosion of a peasant's TV in Liaoning Province when a lighting bolt hit the ungrounded set.

The media are now on guard against news hoaxes that, curiously, have periodically plagued China and damaged credibility—anything from alleged sightings of abominable hairy wild men in the woods of Hubei Province to bizarre tales of a man with two heads who had one lopped off so he could get a wife.

Last year, Chinese TV showed what purported to be a foot-long chunk of ice that fell "out of the sky" into a school playground in Changsha in the spring

of 1984 and was put into the refrigerator for scientific analysis. A few days later it was disclosed that the mysterious five-pound chunk of ice had fallen off a passing truck and had been tossed over the wall into the playground.

The Chinese are especially proud of their co-production of *Big Bird in China* which won an Emmy.

News directors are now stressing accuracy, double-checking stories, and quoting Deng Xiaoping's favorite maxim, "Seek the truth from facts."

China Central Television welcomes joint ventures, with U.S. networks or with individual stations. KGMB-TV, a CBS affiliate in Honolulu, took a chance co-producing a 90-minute documentary, *Beyond the Great Wall: Journey to the End of China*, and picked up a 1983 Peabody award for excellence in journalism, as well as other prizes. The documentary was recently sold to 270 PBS stations.

The Chinese accompanied the American crew to Xinjiang Province, where U.S. reporters rarely go, and didn't require any control screening of the videotape as shooting progressed. The Chinese split the profits with the producers. When the news special was first aired in 1982 on KGMB-TV, on Thursday night at 8:30 p.m., it beat the top-rated *Hill Street Blues*, attracting a 39 share.

Love Boat has also taken a look at China, and filmed an episode there. And Alex Haley of *Roots* fame recently went to Beijing as executive producer of a 12-hour TV mini-series called *The Last Emperor: The History of China*.

The Chinese are especially proud of their participation in the co-production of *Big Bird in China*, which won an Emmy. The *Sesame Street* characters came to China and acted out a story partly based on a Chinese legend, with the Monkey King as a key figure.

A remarkable deal, signed in the summer of 1984, will make Chinese TV a virtual affiliate of the CBS network.

The idea first germinated in 1982 when the Chinese approached CBS and asked to subscribe to the network news service. CBS vice president Joseph P. Bellon came to Beijing to discuss it, and to his surprise learned that the Chinese were enthusiastic about a great deal of the material in the program catalog he brought.

A Chinese delegation then made an exploratory sortie to New York. The group wanted to see *Khan!*, a not very successful action series about a private detective in San Francisco's Chinatown. They even screened *Muggable Mary: Street Cop*, which the CBS catalog calls "a revealing portrait of a policewoman trying to make it in the tough world of the New York City Police Department."

CBS vice president Arthur F. Kane later told a reporter, "That knocked us off our seats. We thought that they wanted educational and documentary programming." The Chinese explained they were looking into all interesting glimpses of U.S. institutions.

CBS execs went back to Beijing and got more requests from the Chinese: documentaries about wild animals, history, Latin America and Africa. They seemed to be especially interested in anything about Benjamin Franklin, who is thought of in China as a model revolutionary.

In the summer of 1983, CBS tentatively agreed with CCTV to supply 64 hours of CBS programming over a 12-month period. After a delay of a year, the deal was confirmed and announced last summer, to begin in December, 1984.

The programs range from selected segments of *60 Minutes* to four animated Dr. Seuss specials and football, hockey and basketball games.

The *60 Minutes* episodes include one on economic and social conditions in Vietnam, one on American gangsters, one on Chinese people in Singapore, and one on English gardening.

Selections from news programming

include a series on aviation history called *Air Power*, Walter Cronkite's science magazine series, *Universe*, a science documentary series, *21st Century*, and a 12-part series, *World War II*.

Sports programs include segments of New York Rangers ice hockey games, and an ice skating special, *Superskates*, plus National Collegiate Athletic Association football, and probably a Bowl game.

Two of CBS' most successful shows are *Dallas* and *Falcon Crest*, but the network couldn't offer them because it doesn't own syndication rights. In fact, the Chinese probably wouldn't be interested. The Director of CCTV, Wang Feng, said, "Our purpose in signing the agreement is to promote understanding between the Chinese and American people."

The contract will not prevent China from negotiating with other U.S. networks for programs. The plan has a unique provision for CBS to sell about \$3,000,000 in advertising time to American and foreign sponsors. CBS will offer ten multinational advertisers a total of 320 minutes a year, at \$300,000 per advertiser. China and CBS would split the proceeds in half.

The CBS programs will be shown for an hour at 8 p.m. Fridays, immediately after the evening news, and for a half-hour on alternate Sundays, following the regular English-language lesson. The CBS shows will be dubbed into Chinese Mandarin.

American networks had supplied the Chinese with individual items of TV film before, but never regular programming and never with U.S. capitalistic commercials included. For the Chinese, short of cash and foreign exchange, the beauty of the deal was that it would not cost them a cent.

Commercials will be sold—five to eight minutes an hour—to large American corporations or European firms. The idea is to attract those multinationals with plans to invest in China that are concerned with developing an image there. Some may take short spots, others three-to-five minute "informercials."

Recently, the Chinese authorities have

also formed a joint venture with two U.S. companies to produce and distribute television commercials and documentaries to be aired in China.

The Chinese government is conducting a nationwide drive to teach English to its people . . . The keynote of the campaign is English on TV and radio.

The commercials involve American products as well as institutional "image" advertising of American manufacturers.

The venture is called China/USA Communications and Television Commercial Co. It will hold all rights to market advertising time on Chinese TV for advertisers in the United States, Canada and South America.

The American firms in the joint venture are Las Palmas Productions, Inc., a TV commercial and special effects company in Los Angeles, and Videocom Inc., a TV commercial producer in Dedham, Mass. The Chinese partners are China Television Service, a part of China's Ministry of Television and Radio, and I.T. & Co. of Beijing, which produces films.

As part of its modernization effort, the Chinese government is conducting a nationwide drive to teach English to its people, starting in the third grade. The keystone of the campaign is English on TV and radio, and the jewel in the crown is the BBC's witty and effective *Follow Me*. With an estimated 20,000,000 viewers, it has proved to be one of the most popular programs on Chinese TV—fun even for American visitors. It's on every day at 6:30 p.m. just before the evening news.

On Sundays at 2 p.m., it's *English on Sunday: Anna Karenina*, from the BBC.

Hard-liners initially criticized Anna as immoral and socially decadent but that didn't stop the program.

Incidentally, the Chinese don't jam the Voice of America, the BBC or even the Voice of Free China (Taiwan), and the VOA maintains a resident correspondent in Beijing whose name was well known to many Chinese I met in the hinterlands.

The censorship picture is mixed. Violence is not a taboo, but it's largely symbolic and skips any blood and gore. The Chinese take an essentially Victorian attitude to sex and nudity. A Japanese TV drama on the life of a prostitute, *Looking Forward to Returning Home*, was carefully expurgated "to cut the sexier bits and the pornography," according to a Chinese acquaintance, "but it still created controversy."

Religion is no problem, although when shown, it's generally not in a particularly sympathetic light. Minority groups are sometimes viewed neutrally in Buddhist or Islamic settings, and on the news, visiting Japanese are seen to worship at a shrine. The Lollobrigida film of Victor Hugo's novel showed religious scenes in Notre Dame Cathedral.

TV dramas are supposed to have social and politically ethical content. Even situation comedies have a moral to their story lines.

Discussion programs on social problems like marriage and divorce are just beginning, although they're standard subjects for soap opera. Birth control and the national policy of no more than one child per family "have no difficulty getting on the air." Physicians as well as non-professionals have gone on TV to demonstrate and promote birth control methods and devices.

Much ado was made in May, 1984, when Chinese TV edited and trimmed one of President's Reagan's addresses during his official visit. Reagan delivered two major speeches, and administration officials had indicated they'd be broadcast in full on Chinese TV.

In these speeches, Reagan made a strong ideological pitch for democracy, free enterprise and religious faith, and spoke of the threat of Soviet expansionism.

A taped version of the speech in Beijing was broadcast with Chinese voice-over but portions were deleted. The speech in Shanghai was broadcast live and in full, but without Chinese translation.

The headlined reports of "censorship" were denied by both sides. Reagan said there never had been any negotiation about carrying his remarks "word for word" on Chinese TV, but he regretted the editing. He joked that the American media did it all the time. The Chinese indicated their government didn't want to let the leader of one country publicly attack another country while in China.

The Chinese pointed to their otherwise full coverage of the visit, much of it on the news and on "golden time" after the news, with extra features on Reagan's rise from his birth in Illinois through his Hollywood days and into politics and the White House.

It's true that live daytime special events are not Chinese TV's forte. CCTV broadcast an advanced mathematics lesson during the Reagan arrival ceremony.

Guangdong authorities made attempts to get viewers to take down their UHF antennas which pulled in programs from across the borders.

The latest television station in China is unique: it's in the new border city of Shenzhen, a prosperous "special economic zone" just twenty miles from Hong Kong, created to attract foreign capital and technology. Shenzhen TV's Deputy Director, Chen Xuebiao, remarked to *The New York Times'* Chris Wren that "because our audience can push the button and change channels to get Hong Kong television, we have to try to make our

programs better."

Hong Kong has two free-and-easy English-language channels, and they feature American crime and comedy series, dubbed into Cantonese, lightly-clad disco dancers, violent kung-fu films and *Charlie's Angels*. What's more, the news is zippier and more complete.

Shenzhen's competing station began transmitting in January, 1984, as an attempt to strengthen the quality of Chinese TV in an ideologically acceptable way, especially for the Cantonese-speaking population of Guangdong Province in southeastern China, which is so close to Hong Kong and Macao, and thus more open to Western influences.

At one point in 1982, the Guangdong authorities made attempts to get viewers to pull down their fishbone-shaped UHF antennas which pulled in programs from across the border. But in Canton (Guangzhou), they're up again now, and in Shenzhen, you can get Hong Kong TV without UHF antennas.

Although it's a new city, Shenzhen already has 70,000 TV sets for its 200,000 population, one of the densest ratios in China. Many families own three-story houses with stereo systems, refrigerators and color TVs, sometimes two per family.

Shenzhen's programmers say they are deliberately striving for livelier fare, "not as solemn as the stations in the rest of China," and intentionally borrow ideas from nearby Hong Kong. Newscasters wear western garb and talk more conversationally.

Now operating out of a former garage with a staff of 120, Shenzhen plans to build in the next three years a spacious new TV center with state-of-the-art equipment from the U.S. and Japan, at a cost of \$10,000,000.

Chinese Television gets most of its talent and staff from among the graduates of a school known as the Beijing Broadcasting Institute. Founded in 1959, a year after the TV system was inaugurated, the BBI is the only institute

of its kind in China. It expects to set up branches in other cities soon.

The Institute currently has over 1,000 undergraduates and graduate students, and a faculty of 300; it functions like a miniature university with an expanding campus in the eastern suburbs of Beijing that includes liberal arts and science and engineering divisions, as well as departments of foreign languages, journalism, performing arts, announcing, television, radio and TV engineering and microwave transmission engineering. Students also take courses in physical education, international relations, Chinese language and literature and, of course, the theory of Marxism-Leninism. English is a required course.

Labs are available for basic research, as well as studios, closed-circuit television, video recorders, tape recorders and editing decks. Students take internships at TV and radio stations as part of their program. Undergrads stay four years, graduate students two, and science and engineering graduates, three. The Institute's prospectus says students "should be able to understand themselves and solve problems . . . must be physically strong and have high morals." All over China, Iran into proud and knowledgeable alumni of the BBI in key positions on radio and TV stations.

BBI directors say they keep in close touch with the country's broadcasting network and "consequently the graduates have good employment opportunities." The growth of TV has created an urgent need for trained specialists. Given the huge population, vast territory and current modernization program, the Institute expects to have close to 3,000 students by the end of this decade.

Other sources of news personnel come from the Journalism Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Journalism Department of the People's University of Beijing, and the Journalism Department of Fudan University in Shanghai.

Historically, Chinese media had their origins in the West. The first modern newspapers in China were produced by

Americans, Britons and West Europeans. The Chinese film industry was heavily influenced by Hollywood, and one of the original Chinese radio stations in Shanghai in the early Thirties was operated and managed by an American.

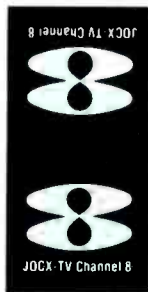
When the Chinese Communists took over 35 years ago, a bamboo curtain virtually cordoned off the nation. The new China, however, is undergoing sweeping changes that amount to another revolution. The People's Republic of China is determined to develop its industry and agriculture, improve services, expand trade and try new and pragmatic forms of social organization.

China, correspondingly, is working energetically and creatively to catch up in the field of communication, and seeks to make the fullest use of modern media technology, while putting its own identity and style on television.

As China launches itself into the satellite age and joins the world television revolution, the sky seems to be no limit.

Premier Zhao Ziyang keeps repeating, "China has opened its door and will never close it again." ■

Bernard S. Redmont, Dean of the College of Communication at Boston University, has previously written *Television Quarterly* articles on TV in Hungary, the Soviet Union, France and Italy. He was formerly a correspondent for CBS News in Paris and Moscow.



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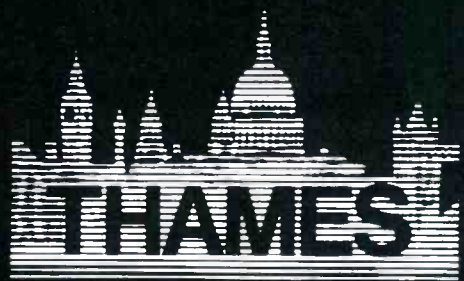
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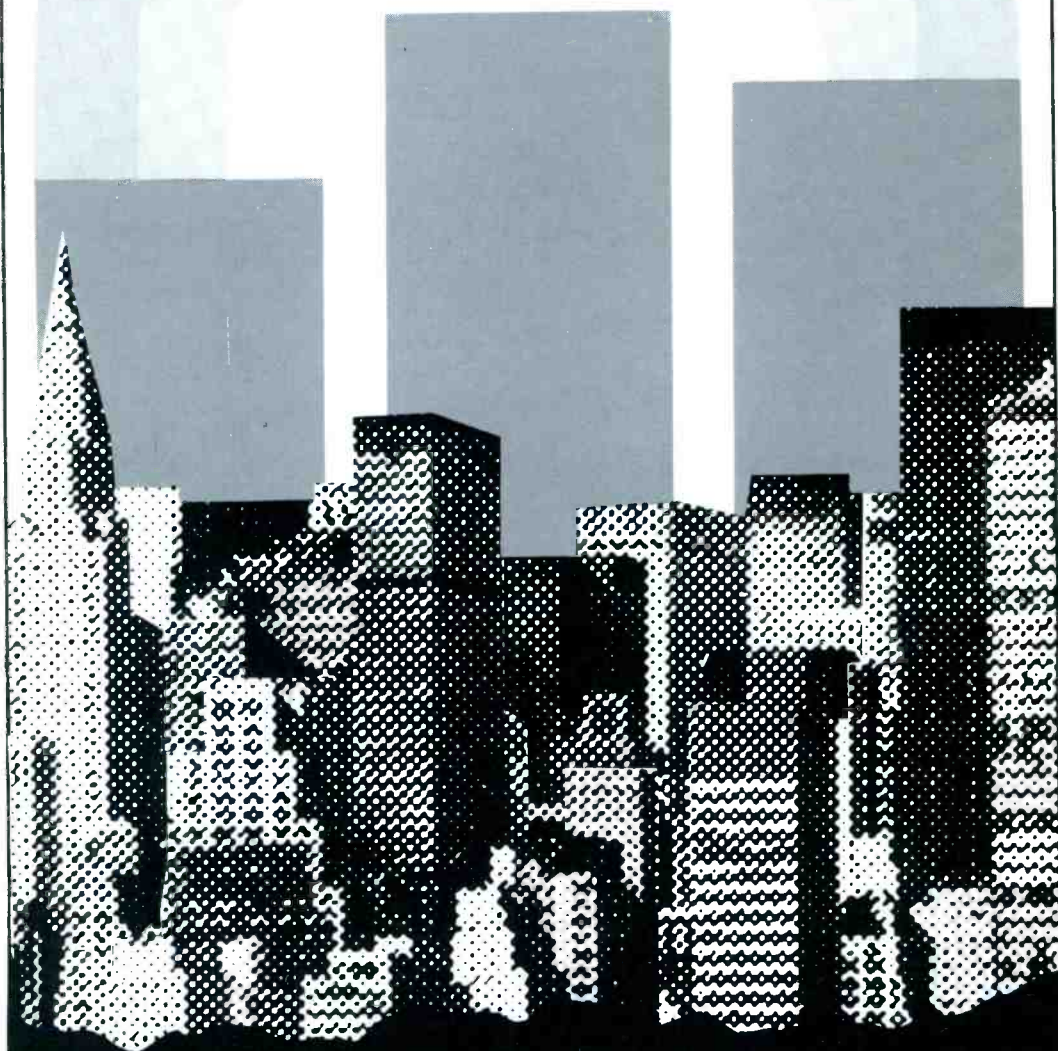
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TELEVISION IN THE COURTROOM: THE DEBATE CONTINUES

The sensational New Bedford rape case was covered by CNN. One of the defense attorneys offers her views on TV's role in that trial and others.

BY JUDITH L. LINDAHL

Should television be allowed in the courtroom? Or does the camera tip the scales of justice unacceptably by influencing the course of a trial? The experience of the New Bedford rape case suggests that the answer to *both* questions is yes, and that the debate on televised trials is more complex than has been recognized.

The announcement that CNN would televise the Big Dan's Tavern rape trial live to a national audience did not cause immediate concern. The debate on cameras in the courtroom was, after all, an old one, and seemed to have been resolved in favor of the public's right to be informed. Massachusetts, like other jurisdictions, had studied the question and established guidelines. The Supreme Judicial Court—the commonwealth's highest—had decided that the trial judge had sufficient power to preserve the decorum of the trial and to insure its fair conduct. And the judge in this case had ruled that the victim could not be photographed.

But despite our precautions, the camera did have a significant impact on the trial. The jurors actually discussed the operation of the camera; the telecast exposed witnesses to the testimony of others, and the prospect of a national television appearance affected the participants.

From the point of view of the defense, this impact was profoundly negative; if

we had prevailed, there would have been no live television coverage. It does not require a legal education, however, to recognize that the right to a fair trial is in conflict with the right to a free press; and the court is not prepared to ban cameras. What the Big Dan's trial revealed was the court and the media each must acquire a more sophisticated understanding of the other's operation.

A graphic illustration of our failure on this score involved the disclosure of the victim's identity. The judge had ruled that she could not be filmed or photographed, and the press declined to publish her name in the interest of protecting her privacy. No one considered that live TV coverage of the testimony would defeat the entire plan; the judge himself immediately regretted this oversight. The solution—a seven-second delay to allow the name to be bleeped from the televised coverage—is obvious in retrospect.

The media have long argued that since the public has a right to attend trials, the press—as the public's source of information—cannot be excluded. A trial, after all, is a drama—a *public* event whose participants are meant to be aware that they are on view. But a trial is a rather special kind of drama, without a director or a script, which is, although spontaneous, rather strictly controlled by the rules of evidence.

These rules, which often appear to be arcane and illogical to the layman, are in fact firmly based on an understanding of human nature. While the public as

spectators may witness the process, the entire trial is directed to the jury. Indeed, the jury represents the public in the trial. When the camera actually affects testimony the jurors hear and their deliberations concerning it, the harm is a public harm.

What happens when a witness suspends his testimony at the end of the trial day, then returns home to watch tapes of his performance?

In arguing against televising criminal trials it is noted that: The operation of the camera will distract the witnesses and jurors; the lawyers will grandstand for the camera rather than attend to the trial; TV producers will televise only the most dramatic clips, distorting the evidence both for the public and the jurors. To the extent that we anticipated these negative effects in the New Bedford case, the judge, the lawyers and the press were quite successful in minimizing them. The live camera was stationary, and required to operate throughout most of the trial so that the jury would not be affected by a cameraman's decision about what was "important" testimony.

But the jurors were aware that the victim was not filmed. The judge agreed with the defense argument that his decision to allow or reject the filming of the victim might imply his personal belief that she had indeed been raped. Yet the question of whether or not a rape had occurred was the very fact the jurors were to decide.

The judge therefore delayed his ruling until after the jurors had been locked up. As one juror revealed, the panel was aware and discussed among themselves the fact that the CNN camera was capped and unmanned during the victim's testimony. Although sequestering the jury prevented their being influenced by selected news clips, capping the camera was too obvious a comment in this case.

Creative solutions for protecting a witness without commenting to the jury can be devised. What seems intractable is the problem of insuring that the testimony of each witness the jurors hear is spontaneous and unaffected by previous testimony.

What happens when, as in the Big Dan's trial, each potential witness comes from a community which is saturated by radio and television broadcasts of the live testimony? And what happens when a witness suspends his testimony at the end of the trial day, then returns home to family and friends to watch tapes of his performance? Both the defense and prosecution found that the willingness of witnesses to forthrightly answer questions varied from day to day. Few of the lawyers found altogether believable the claim that the witnesses had not paid any attention to the trial on television.

One of the oldest objections to cameras in court is its implicit invitation to mug: The lawyers, and perhaps the witnesses, would play to the camera, rather than to the jury. At least for the lawyers, this argument proved false. The sole exception occurred out of the presence of the jury, during an exchange of charges between a defense attorney and an assistant district attorney. The judge indicated that the D.A. had won his point; certain observers suspected that the D.A.'s persistence in denouncing his opponent was directed at the evening news. During the trial itself, however, every lawyer acted in character and from experience.

TV coverage helped expose the human ambiguity of what occurred in the tavern that night.

But lawyers are by training accustomed to public performance. Indeed, trial lawyers revel in legal combat and are not known to shy away from the camera. For the witnesses, however, the

prospect of testifying on national television can be a serious deterrent. And this affects not just *what* the jury hears from a witness, but whether the witness appears at all.

Each of us can imagine a situation in which we become a witness to an event, quite by accident. It is our duty as citizens to come forward with that evidence and most of us are willing to do so in the practical anonymity of the ordinary case. Would we decline to do so if the publicity guaranteed that a spouse would realize we had not really gone to Bingo that night? or that the neighbors would gossip about our drinking habits? that our children would be taunted in school? or that our prospective employer might decide his business did not need our brand of notoriety?

Two witnesses in New Bedford—apart from the complainant—did request that the judge protect their identities from television cameras. But he denied both requests, and both witnesses did testify. A third witness was so intimidated by the potential publicity that his testimony was virtually useless.

So, what can be learned from the Big Dan's case? For one thing, TV coverage helped expose the human ambiguity of what occurred in the tavern that night. The initial story of hours of repeated attacks to the cheers of onlookers, in all its inhuman and degrading detail, was substantially false, as the TV audience discovered. Yet, CNN's courtroom presence may have affected the "truth" as it was found by the jury and thus affected the verdict itself. Such a grave possibility requires sensitivity and serious reflection by both the media and the judicial system. ■

Judith L. Lindahl was a defense attorney in the Big Dan's Tavern case, which was covered live by the Cable News Network. This article appeared originally in ON CABLE magazine © 1984 by ON CABLE Publications, Inc.

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COMEDIANS, WRITERS AND OTHER FUNNYMEN

Star comics in a variety format, not more sitcoms, will give TV a needed boost. A producer's notes on the past, and hopes for the future.

BY HOWARD G. BARNES

Recently, I read Sid Caesar's book, *Where Have I Been?* This marvelous, nostalgic recounting of *Your Show of Shows*, a landmark of broadcast comedy, cued a concatenation of memories of writers and performers with whom I had worked over the years. With that came echoes of the endless arguments over what is funny, what is good comedy and in fact what is comedy and where is it going?

Perception of comedy is highly subjective; it's no puzzle as to why there are such disparate theories. Everyone who has ever worked this form (or tried to) agrees: it's the toughest, most ephemeral and most unpredictable of all the entertainment arts. Even among its most skilled practitioners, there is scant agreement on theory, practice or style. Until the laughs from the audience roll in, there is little certainty; not for its purveyors, its analysts, nor its observers.

The writer says, "I clocked ten titters, twenty-four rolling laughs, four bellies and two show-stoppers. It was a good show."

The analyst (John Leonard in *New York Magazine*) intones, "American Television first of all cannibalizes popular culture, and then broadens and flattens all the jokes, thereby reducing the things about ourselves at which we are permitted to laugh."

The observer thinks, "That was funny?"

What's so funny about it?" Or, "Yeah, I remember that one, only it was funnier when Bob Hope did it."

Because of this uncertainty, much of the material that we see and hear today is derivative or a variation on established funny stuff. Which isn't to say that there have not been original, thinking, creative people in the field. Three great theoreticians (as well as practitioners) could have written text-books on broadcast comedy; they certainly had the track-records to justify it: Goodman Ace, Fred Allen and Abe Burroughs. If any one of them said it was funny, it was funny. They understood the structure of a funny situation as well as the rhythm and timing of a funny line. Just to prove it, listen to an air-check of a *Fred Allen Show*, or *Easy Aces* or *Duffy's Tavern*.

I had the privilege of working with Abe Burroughs on the radio version of *Duffy's Tavern*, when Abe was head-writer. He would look at a particular line in the script during rehearsal and ponder. "There's something wrong here", he would say. "The rhythm is off . . . we need another word with two more syllables to set up the punch." Then, he'd try several words to replace the offending one; finally, his instinct told him when he had the right one and the right rhythm and, Bam!, the punch-line paid off.

Sometimes, though, expertise is no guarantee; comedy is still a crapshoot. Several years ago, I made a feature picture in Australia called *Squeeze A Flower*. You probably never saw it unless you had a sleepless night and caught

it on the late-late show. It had all the elements: a reasonably funny script by Charles Isaacs; one of the pre-eminent pioneer television comedy directors, Marc Daniels; veteran comedy performers like the late Jack Albertson, Walter Chiari (the Italian Danny Kaye), and British funnyman, Dave Allen.

What happened is a familiar story: the crew killed itself laughing, scene by scene; the actors not on camera fell apart with laughter; even the projectionist at our screenings of dailies was rolling on the floor. Five of us, Albertson, Chiari, Allen, Daniels (when he wasn't doing his "homework") and I sat together night after night inventing "shtick," working out timing, changing routines—all to make it funnier the next day. Result: it bombed! The movie couldn't even get American theatrical distribution.

Yet, six men, with a staggering number of combined years in laugh-making, threw into the project everything they

The funnyman's roots are easily tracked back to vaudeville and the night club.

thought was good comedy. In our nightly sessions, after we finished work for the next day and the bottle came out and reminiscences became the rule, we talked about comedy; there was little agreement. Albertson, out of burlesque, had one set of theories; Chiari, from Italian vaudeville, had another; Allen out of the Irish, Australian and English clubs and television, yet another. At least Marc Daniels, the director, was able to hold this group together well enough to give the performances cohesiveness. In the end, we had a funny picture, we thought . . . but not enough other people agreed.

Theoretical arguments about comedy will continue as long as the form lives. Final definitions acceptable to everyone will probably never be articulated. It's inevitable, because unlike science or writing, painting or architecture, there

are no useful technical guidelines. Appreciation of comedy is highly individual despite our temporal and cultural conditioning. Even more incapable of definition is the practitioner . . . the comedian himself.

Whether or not it is *literally* true to each comic, the funnyman's roots are easily tracked back to American burlesque and its cousins, vaudeville and the night club. If you're old enough, and were liberated enough to attend such performances, you will recall the prototype "stand-ups" and twosome comics who told jokes or performed comedy patter while doing some other physical feat. Apart from those members of the audiences whose prurience took them to see the strippers, many came to see the baggy-panted "Sliding Billy Watsons" or the juggling Fred Allens or the duos who gave birth to "Who was that lady I seen you with last night?" . . . the comics. Usually their jokes were corny, mildly risqué and quite familiar. They were the progenitors of Red Skelton, Milton Berle, Henny Youngman, Bob Hope, Phil Silvers, Danny Thomas and the like. Even Johnny Carson, more contemporary, somewhat more sophisticated and yet more derivative, is still of this line of descent, as are the double acts like Abbott and Costello, Jack Benny and Rochester, Rowan and Martin and Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis.

When radio and later television sounded the death-knell for these earlier forms, most of the successful comics made the transition to broadcasting. For a long time, in both radio and television, Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Bob Hope, Eddie Cantor, Edgar Bergen, Abbott and Costello, Martin and Lewis, Rowan and Martin were the Kings of Comedy. Even demographers are not clear as to why their type of show began to fade away. Perhaps the formats wore out or the performers themselves couldn't handle the pace or the audiences became jaded or simply our entertainment culture metamorphosed. Whatever the

reason, the only consistently successful survivors of this type are Johnny Carson and Bob Hope, who I think continue because they are as much national institutions as they are comics.

Since the television networks have the most to gain, they should be pursuing an aggressive program to develop new comedians.

I believe that comedy with a star funnyman is not dead—just sleeping. The best of them always pulled good ratings. I think too little is being done toward developing new talent in this direction. The traditional training ground for comics, burlesque, vaudeville, night clubs and the borscht circuit, no longer exist. Neither the comedy workshops and “Comedy Taverns” that proliferate around the country, nor the string of “new comics” guesting with Johnny Carson and David Letterman seem to be replenishing the declining supply.

Since the television networks have the most to gain, they should be pursuing an aggressive program to find and develop new comedians. Apparently they feel there are no available replacements for a Jack Benny, a Fred Allen or a Bob Hope. They’re wrong; it takes time, money, imagination and effort. It’s investing against the long-time future, for which they seem to have little inclination. They have tried, it’s true; there was the *Tim Conway Show*, which in failing, seemed to justify the old bromide that you can’t make a Top Banana out of a Second. Don Rickles has given evidence that audacious insults aren’t enough equipment for hosting a comedy-variety show nor for success with a sitcom. Bob Newhart is a brilliant funnyman who could successfully fill the bill, but he and the network elected to go the sitcom route. Johnny Carson is an obvious answer, but how can he or the network make as much money with a once-a-weeker? There is a

great need for talented new and durable individuals to keep the comedy pot boiling.

As the Fred Allen-Jack Benny-Milton Berle type of show began its decline through death and attrition, a new and more sophisticated kind emerged, built around a single stellar performer with a supporting cast of lesser comic performers. The best of these were *Your Show of Shows* with Sid Caesar, the weekly *Danny Kaye Show* and *The Carol Burnett Show*. Not only did each show offer a multi-talented star (not a comic in the “stand-up” tradition) but each featured consistently good, hilarious comedy sketches performed by the star and supported by a group of “second bananas.” In each show there was the obligatory nod to the variety performer, but the meat of each show was the sketch employing wild, curious and unbelievably outlandish but funny characters. Genealogically, the TV comedy sketch also traces its origin to American burlesque.

It’s true that in Milton Berle’s *Texaco Theatre*, sketches were a regular part of each show. They were, however, a far cry from the sophistication of the later Caesar, Kaye and Burnett programs. The typical Berle sketch was zany, the premise unbelievable, and funnier if a line was blown, a prop failed to work, a door fell down or a wig or mustache fell off; invariably each sketch was “fun-in-the-studio” with the audience laughing at the production mishaps. With Caesar, Kaye or Burnett the sketch—more complex and more creative—was played for the integrity of the scene; the comedy came from the reality of the situation proposed and the manner in which the characters responded . . . not from seltzer bottles or pants falling down.

Of course, the characters were larger than life, and frequently bizarre. This form gave birth to the sketch players, specialists with rare talents, basically not comics or straight-men, but actors with sharp comedic talents. Such an elite group numbers, among others, Harvey

Korman, Howie Morris, Jack Albertson, Carl Reiner, Imogene Coca, Art Carney, Louis Nye, Nanette Fabray and Don Knotts.

This latter type of show, again for unfathomable reasons, seems to have disappeared. Look to the demographers for the reasons. My speculation leads to the conclusion, again, that the television industry is not developing the kind of lead comic such a show requires . . . new Danny Kayes, Burnetts and Caesars. In the absence of the atrophied traditional training grounds, the broadcast media are the only and best possibility. It's not only an economic opportunity for comedians, but a cultural necessity. A world without them would be a dull place indeed.

It was my good fortune to be associated with the weekly *Danny Kaye Show* when it was on CBS. As comedy, the show was an enrichment for America. His singular imprimatur was stamped on every moment of each show. Danny was an interesting person with whom to work and for me a great learning experience.

To be a good player of comedy sketches, first, one must be a good actor.

He is not, by any standard, a "comic"; yet, actually, in the field of comedy, he's unique. First, he's highly intelligent; because of this, without extensive education, he's managed to amass an incredible fund of general information. There are few subjects upon which he can't discourse knowledgeably. In addition, he's educated himself in specific fields far beyond the comprehension of most performers. How many stars can you recall who have passed, and with very high marks, the FAA's devilishly difficult commercial pilot's written and oral exams as well as flight tests? Or how many are there who can take up golf after forty, and then, never having

touched a club before, be able within a year consistently to score competitively with the PGA greats? Or how many, with no previous musical education, can successfully and seriously conduct a symphony orchestra?

What's more, Danny understands himself, as a performer; he has infallible judgment and instinct for what will work for him and, even more importantly, what will not. At times, this led to heated arguments between Danny and the writers who felt they had written sure-fire funny material, but which Danny knew was not right for him.

Although Danny tells a joke well, he is not a gagster. His comedy comes, not from a joke, but from material built around him, and is not just from the lines he uses but from the physical Kaye as well—from what he does with his face, how he uses his marvelously graceful physique and how he plays his voice as an instrument. This is true when he does a "stand-up in one," sings his zany and uniquely "Danny" patter songs, or plays sketches.

There is no better sketch player in the business (although Sid Caesar and Carol Burnett run a close second). To be a good player of comedy sketches, first, one must be a good actor. And Kaye is a superb actor; plus he has the malleable face, limber body and a kit full of dialects. Plus that great asset in comedy . . . TIMING.

Two of Danny's favorite guests on the show (whom we booked repeatedly because of his preference) were Imogene Coca and Art Carney. Danny loved to work in sketches with them because they are both good actors and have fail-safe timing which meshes well with his own. Those sketches were comedy clinics.

Conversely, I remember one guest performer who was a good actor, but with no sense of comedy whatsoever. After dress-rehearsal, Danny came fuming into his dressing room. His complaint was that he couldn't make the sketch work; the actor was mugging, stepping out of character, giving dramatic values to the lines and in trying to be funny was not

funny at all, all of which threw Kaye's timing off. There was a lot of re-writing between dress rehearsal and the air-show.

With the exception of the occasional variety "special" with comedy inserts or Bob Hope's periodic trips down Memory Lane, the surviving form of comedy in television today is the situation comedy. The sitcom continues with some strength. Like the hydra, some branches get lopped off or die from atrophy, but its main body seems continually to thrive; not so curiously, its ancestry also leads back to burlesque by way of the comedy sketch and radio. Its theory is simple, and to some, boring; establish a fixed group, a "family" of performers, seen week after week, whose relationships to each other are predictably unvarying, and the characteristics of each (and therefore their habits of response) are pre-established, and create story situations endemic to the group which are easily within reach of the audience's common experience.

There are narrow parameters within which the creators must work. Needless to say, much of the situation comedy material is repetitive, derivative, or variations on previously successful material. There seems to be a shibboleth in television today that says in essence, "If it was successful once, why not use it again?"

For the continuance of good, effective comedy in television, one commodity not in short supply is the writer. There is an abundance of both experienced and up-and-coming ones. Find a good comic and there will be good writers available for him. For a good sitcom idea many can step in and deliver professionalism. I'm convinced that the many failures in this form are less the fault of bad writing than of poor concepts that won't fly.

As the nature of comedy in television has changed, so has the task of the writer. In the days of pre-eminent comics like Milton Berle, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Red Skelton, it was the personality of the performer that dictated the material. The

writer used to shape his work to the performing persona of his star. These days the comedian is more an actor whose comedy and personality are created by the material the writer designs for the character: Alan Alda, Robert Guillaume, John Ritter, Carroll O'Connor. . . . In the gray area between are the geniuses of Danny Kaye, Carol Burnett and their second-bananas, Harvey Korman and Tim Conway, who are personalities on their own, but who are continually molded by the writers and the material they create for them.

Who are these warriors in the classic battle between man and the blank white page staring back from the typewriter? In the early years of TV, there were two kinds: the gag-writers, some of whom started by sliding slips of paper with their output under the dressing room door to an Eddie Cantor, a Milton Berle, or a Henny Youngman; if lucky and accepted they were slipped fifty bucks for the effort. If they were even luckier and persistent, eventually they achieved writing staff status for a Jack Benny or a Bob Hope; the other kind wrote comedies for the stage or situation comedies for radio. Today's writers are college graduates, Ph.D.'s, lawyers, doctors, advertising copy writers and former journalists.

Regardless of their origins, they have—and had—one necessary ingredient in common: they *think* funny. Some of them operate from an instinctive birth-right like a Mel Brooks or a Sheldon Keller. Others are more intellectual and analytic like a Larry Gelbart, a Carl Reiner or a Mel Tolkin. And yet others are adapters who get their impetus from living in the climate of comedy and knowing what to do when exposed to it.

The best example of a contemporary writer who creates situations and characters, who analyses and designs humor, is Larry Gelbart, the most deserving inheritor of the mantle of Goodman Ace. Although Alan Alda was always there waiting to happen, Gelbart created him in *M*A*S*H*. Of course, Alda in his own right is superb, but what Gelbart gave

him to do and say in *M*A*S*H* created the performer as we know him today. Yet, few of us will ever know the agonies, doubts and diverse opinions on comedy that Gelbart and his co-writers went through to hammer out the successful format they finally achieved.

The best example of the *sturm und drang* of comedy writing I know was the *Danny Kaye Show*. Presiding over this was Perry Lafferty, a wise-cracking but organized producer. His discipline was a necessary ingredient to control the chaos of the writers' bullpen. The talented inhabitants were (not all at the same time) Mel Tolkin, Sheldon Keller, Herbie Baker, Ernie Chambers, Gary Belkin, Sol Ilson, Larry Tucker, Paul Mazursky, Bernie Rothman, Ron Friedman, Pat McCormick and for a short time, Larry Gelbart. All giants in the comedy-writing world!

No more disparate and wildly creative a group ever existed in television. As many individuals as there were, so were there as many differing theories about comedy. Assignments for writing different parts of the show were designed for individuals or teams according to their respective specialties: sketches, stand-up monologues, special music and lyrics, intros, et cetera. When the material for the next show was ready in "rough," all the writers, the producer and Danny Kaye assembled for an analysis and acceptance or rejection.

This was when each writer tried to "sell" his bit to the rest, and when the comedic diversities came to light. The air would be purple with "It stinks." Or "Maybe," or "If you would move this here and . . ." The cacophony was the product of creatively divergent views as to what was funny. Consensus laughter was rare, but when it happened, the spot was sure to go in the show. It was on this anvil that each show was eventually hammered out. The fact that this worked was a tribute to Perry Lafferty and Danny Kaye, whose final voices welded the diversities into a funny show. But until the

audience laughed it was, with all the expertise, a gamble.

Well, then . . . Comedy is tough to define, to create, to continue to infuse with new performing blood, and to sustain the variety of forms necessary to keep it fresh. Is this a yearning for "the good old days"? Certainly not. It is a plea for an effort to return to *excellence*. From George Burns, Jack Benny, Sid Caesar, Danny Kaye and Carol Burnett to Mary Tyler Moore, Bob Newhart and *M*A*S*H* to *Three's Company*, *Silver Spoons* and *Gimme A Break* is a poor curve on my graph.

"You can lead the public to where you want it to go, but only a short step at a time ahead of where it wants to go."

Finding and developing new talent is expensive and tedious. Developing new forms is challenging and expensive. Lack of creative talent is not the drawback. What it requires is desire and hard work. It takes the same amount of work, by the way, to be good as to be bad.

Speaking of "bad," I remember producing a certain comedy show a few years ago. The late Lew Derman was one of the writers. In one of our all-night writing agonies Lew and I had an argument over a joke (not an unusual situation in comedy-writing). He wound his "sell" with this zinger: "It's a chair gag! You've got to use it."

"A chair gag?" I asked, playing straight-man like all good producers do when confronted with outrageous statements from writers.

"Yeah," he said. "It's so funny, the theatre audience will tear their chairs out of the floor and beat each other over their heads."

Needless to say, it wasn't *that* funny, nor was the show. The intent was high-minded, the labor was long and tedious, the creative talent experienced and dedicated, but somehow we missed.

Sure, comedy is the most precarious amusement form; it always has been. But there have always been good people who have done it successfully. They set themselves high standards and labored continuously to achieve them. Must we conclude that today they are less gifted? I don't believe that. Or is it that the public is less susceptible to good comedy? I don't think so.

Years ago, when I wanted to instigate a particular programming change at CBS, I had an argument with Frank Stanton. He ended it by saying, "You can lead the public to where you want it to go, but only a short step at a time ahead of where it wants to go."

The implication was clear and I believe correct. Stanton's statement to me, at the time, was intended negatively to inhibit a change I was proposing. But what about the positive connotations of Stanton's challenge? Why not lead the public *uphill* a step at a time?

Anyone who has been around the broadcasting business long enough will have had some historic perception of the evolutionary changes in programming, some toward more sophistication, others toward a debasing sameness directed to the lowest levels of common appeal. Comedy seems to be running in the latter direction.

Many will remember the last days of network radio before the television juggernaut swept it away. At that time, radio comedy (with a few notable exceptions) had developed to a derivative sameness much like television comedy today (again with a few notable exceptions). I've often wondered where network radio would have gone had not television come along to end its agony.

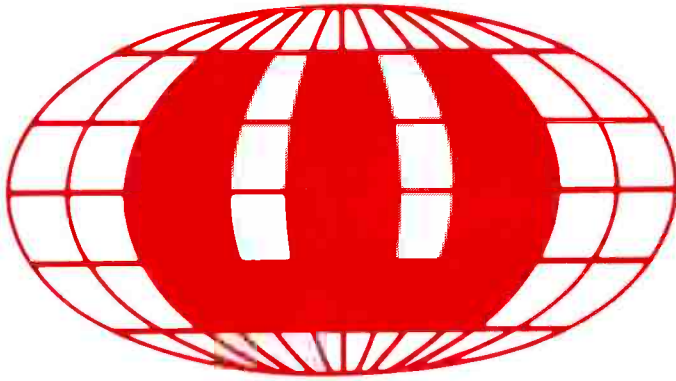
Perhaps we can learn from English television. Some of their most successful shows run in ten to twelve week bursts or less; then, they take a long hiatus and return for another limited series of weeks. Certainly this doesn't burn out the comedian or his writers the way we do with our year-in-year-out nine-month sea-

sons. However, I doubt a short season would satisfy American audience appetites.

Perhaps cable television, which has not yet begun to wallow in the programming strictures of conventional TV, will venture into broader forms of comedy development, find and nurture new comics, and give the creators a chance to expand their horizons. Currently, most cable comedy is rehash from film, or one-man concerts; I hope that as their programming budgets increase, so will their creativity.

Wherever, by whomever and in whatever form, a determinedly creative renaissance in television comedy is sorely needed. Presently, it's like the legendary Dodo bird which flew around and around in ever decreasing concentric circles, eventually eating its own tail and, finally having devoured itself, disappeared completely. ■

Howard G. Barnes has been a radio and TV director and producer, Vice President in programming at CBS, Executive Vice President of Group W Films, and Executive Producer of twenty-three feature films.



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LIFE WITH THE FAIRNESS DOCTRINE

BY ED HINSHAW

It's no big deal, they say. It's really a sound journalistic policy, they say. All it requires of you is what you should require of yourselves, they say. It's sensible public policy for dealing with public airwaves, they say.

There were days, before I learned to live with the Fairness Doctrine, when I would have agreed thoroughly with what "they" say. The Doctrine is simple and straightforward. It requires broadcast license holders to carry programming which deals with controversial issues of public importance in the area served by the licensee and, additionally, to air contrasting viewpoints on the controversial issues.

There is an additional regulation within the Fairness Doctrine, known as the Personal Attack Rule. The rule is in effect during the broadcast discussion of a controversial issue, although newscasts are exempt. If, in the course of the discussion, an attack is made on the honesty, character or similar qualities of an individual (or group), the broadcast licensee is required to notify the individual attacked, provide a copy of a script, summary or tape of the attack and offer an opportunity for an on-air reply.

Fairness is sound policy for any journalism organization which aims to secure public confidence based on credibility; fairness is useful policy for any journalism organization which seeks larger and more varied audiences. It is

a respected journalistic tradition for dealing with the public, critics and advertisers.

The Fairness Doctrine is lousy regulation and lousy law. It can be used to harass, intimidate, threaten and degrade even the most civic-minded, public-supportive and conscientious broadcasters. Despite a ruling from the Supreme Court of the United States, it clearly violates the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States: "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press . . ." (emphasis added). The Federal Communications Commission, a creature of Congress, and Congress itself have made the Fairness Doctrine regulation and law. And, the Fairness Doctrine can be used by citizens, regulators and even public officials to circumvent—or attempt to circumvent—the clear intent of the First Amendment.

There are some painful stories in the public record, demonstrating how broadcast regulations can be manipulated for political purposes. The *Red Lion* case, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Fairness Doctrine is not a violation of the First Amendment, grew from an attempt to get conservative commentators off the air during the 1964 Goldwater-Johnson presidential campaign. The history of the case is described in Fred Friendly's book, *The Good Guys, the Bad Guys and the First Amendment*. The attempt was at least partially successful. Some broadcasters reduced the amount of air time devoted

to the discussion of campaign-related issues.

WHAR, in Clarksburg, West Virginia, learned about the underside of the Fairness Doctrine when then-Representative Patsy Mink of Hawaii and others got the FCC to determine that strip-mining was a controversial issue in Clarksburg, despite the station's determination, apparently based on the mandated "ascertainment of community problems, needs and interests," that strip-mining was not locally controversial. The case raised the specter of the government (through the FCC) telling broadcasters what they must cover in their news and public affairs program.

Chilling Free Discussion

Those cases, and some others, raised national attention because the broadcasters lost. My employer, WTMJ, Inc., in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has been involved in a Fairness Doctrine and Personal Attack Rule case since the spring of 1981—a case that has not been widely reported.

We've won the case at every level. But it has cost us significant amounts of staff and management time and thousands of dollars in legal fees. As we see it, the case clearly demonstrates the chilling effect the Doctrine and Rule could have on the free discussion of significant public issues.

Some background first. WTMJ, Inc. is a subsidiary of The Journal Company, an employee-owned communications corporation. Among the Company's other enterprises are *The Milwaukee Journal* and the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Milwaukee's afternoon and morning newspapers.

Henry W. Maier is Mayor of the City of Milwaukee. He was first elected to that post in 1960 and has become the longest-tenured large-city chief executive in the country. In 1984 he was reelected to a four-year term. Throughout his years as the city's chief executive, he has battled with the *Journal*. On several occasions, he has levelled his verbal guns at the

entire Journal Company, calling it "The Monopoly" or "The Media Octopus." In the earlier days, Mayor Maier was careful to exclude what he called "the broadcast arm" of the company from his consistent criticism.

That exclusion ended and our case began in 1981 when WTMJ, Inc., which operates WTMJ-TV, WTMJ Radio and WKTI, broadcast on all three stations a series of editorials dealing with municipal garbage problems and labor relations issues related to the city's fire and police departments.

The WTMJ stations are in their twenty-second year of broadcasting editorials. Editorial positions and policies are determined by a management group, and the editorials are fully independent from the editorials of the newspapers of the Journal Company. I write the editorials, which are cleared by the President of WTMJ, Inc., Mike McCormick. The editorials and replies are aired six times a week on each of our three stations. In addition, in several time periods, the stations air excerpts from letters from listeners and viewers about public issues. Each editorial is followed on the air by an announcement which invites opposing viewpoints.

Regular viewers and listeners are accustomed to the replies and guest opinions the stations broadcast frequently. Copies of daily editorials are mailed to those closely involved in the issues discussed, with special attention given to those we believe likely to disagree. Weekly mailings are also sent to more than two hundred opinion leaders in the Milwaukee area.

The Mayor's Complaint

The 1981 editorials which brought us before the FCC and the federal appeals court were sharply critical of municipal unions (among the mayor's political power bases), some city officials and Mayor Maier himself. The editorials infuriated the mayor. He made that clear in two news conferences during that period which were broadcast live by

WTMJ-TV and were excerpted in newscasts on WTMJ and WKTI. And Mayor Maier went further.

Using the taxpayer-supported legal resources of the Milwaukee City Attorney's office, he prepared a Fairness Doctrine and Personal Attack Rule complaint for filing with the Federal Communications Commission. Prior to filing, he informed WTMJ, Inc. of his intent, but did not attempt to negotiate response time on the air beyond the already-aired news conferences. The complaint was dated June 3, 1981. In it, the mayor first indicated the remedy he sought was an unedited half-hour on the air at a time of his choosing. Again, there was no effort for direct contact with us to negotiate a reply.

Shortly thereafter, on August 18th, the FCC staff determined the complaint was not sufficient to seek a response from WTMJ. Mayor Maier, the staff found, had not demonstrated his complaint dealt with a controversial issue of public importance, the threshold necessary to invoke the Fairness Doctrine.

On September 16, 1981, Mayor Maier filed an amended complaint, also prepared by the Milwaukee City Attorney's staff. It included several affidavits from city officials saying the issues discussed in the editorials were controversial and important to the public. The Commission staff reviewed the complaint and asked WTMJ, Inc. for a response.

We assembled memos collected in our files. We reviewed and logged the content of newscasts aired during the period covered by the complaint. We outlined the normal procedures we use for informing the public of our editorial positions and seeking responses.

In consultation with our Washington attorneys (the firm we use for FCC matters), we prepared a written response to the complaint. It was filed with the Commission on December 15, 1981. We argued there was no personal attack in any of the editorials cited in the mayor's complaint. Further, we argued that if the FCC found there had been a personal attack, we had already done all the

Personal Attack Rule requires, anyway. Moreover, we provided information demonstrating the mayor's point of view had been aired on our stations in newscasts and in the live news conferences called by Mayor Maier. We agreed the issues discussed in the editorials were controversial and of public importance.

Then, we waited. It was not a tense delay. We were fully confident we had followed both the letter and the spirit of the Fairness Doctrine. We were certain that we had not invoked the Personal Attack Rule, although our editorial mailing practices, in our opinion, meet the notification requirements set out in the Rule. As a matter of policy, we seek to provide the greatest possible and practical number of replies.

The three-year delay, however, was not without some concern for us—as it would be for any broadcaster facing a challenge before the FCC. The Commission sometimes reacts in unpredictable ways. Fred Friendly learned that. WHAR learned it, too.

On July 29, 1982, the mayor's complaint was rejected by the FCC staff. The staff found there was no personal attack on the mayor, and that we had aired contrasting viewpoints on the controversial issues discussed in our editorials. The staff also found that Mayor Maier was aware of our willingness to provide him with an opportunity to reply to the editorials. He had, in fact, told one of our news reporters that he was aware he could reply, but that he wanted to do so only on his own terms. Yet, the matter was far from complete.

Enter the Courts

One month later, Mayor Maier exercised his opportunity to appeal the staff decision to the full Commission. After again consulting with our Washington lawyers, we filed a brief on September 15th in opposition to the mayor's application for review by the full FCC.

On February 17, 1983, the FCC issued a Memorandum Opinion and Order denying Mayor Maier's application for

review and upholding the decision of the staff.

On April 22, 1983, the mayor filed a petition for review of the FCC decision before the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago. The battle now was between the mayor and the FCC, but WTMJ, Inc. participated as an intervenor because a court decision against the Commission could have had a direct effect on us.

Briefs were filed by the FCC and the mayor. WTMJ, Inc. agreed with the FCC brief. Oral arguments before a three-judge panel were held in Chicago on November 10, 1983.

The Seventh Circuit decided on May 4, 1984 that the FCC had behaved appropriately and affirmed the FCC's decision. Interestingly, the greater space in the Court's opinion was devoted to a discussion of whether the mayor had legal standing to bring the FCC's decision before the Appeals Court. Less than two weeks later, the mayor petitioned the Seventh Circuit for a rehearing of his appeal, with a suggestion that the rehearing be before the full Court.

On June 7, the panel which had decided the case refused a rehearing, and the Court reported none of the active judges of the Seventh Circuit voted for a hearing by the full Court.

That may well be the end of it. In the spring city election of 1984, the City Attorney who had agreed to represent Mayor Maier was defeated by a member of the City Attorney's staff. The new City Attorney has said he will not represent the mayor any further in this matter. He says his decision has nothing to do with the merits of the case, but is based on the inappropriateness of a public law agency representing a public official on a private matter. (We have been told, incidentally, that Mayor Maier approached private lawyers before filing his original complaint and was turned down for private representation because he had "no case.")

Our legal fees have totaled \$17,000.

We estimate our management and staff time for assembling facts and documentation at roughly two person-months. The City Attorney's office, which has not kept precise records of time spent on the case, estimates the effort involved "several hundred hours" of attorneys' time. We have not made an effort to discover what the case cost the federal government.

The FCC staff, the full Commission and the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals found that WTMJ, Inc. did what the Fairness Doctrine and the Personal Attack Rule require of broadcast licensees. Yet, the Doctrine and the Rule have forced us through a lengthy, irritating and costly experience. In our opinion, Mayor Maier undertook his complaint, at least in part, in an effort to intimidate us and to foreclose any further criticism of his administration of the city. If that was his goal, he was doomed to fail. Throughout the process, we have continued to criticize when we found him in error and to praise him when he earned it. We have also aired several editorials specifically inviting him to reply in the same air times in which we broadcast our editorials.

What is most bothersome about this case is that others like it may intimidate broadcasters who are less experienced in FCC regulation, who are less well prepared to withstand the financial cost, who are less civic-minded or who believe less strongly in the obligation of licensees to participate in the debate over public issues. This case would not have happened if we had said precisely the same things in print as were said on the air. There is no Federal Newspaper Commission, no newspaper Fairness Doctrine, no print Personal Attack Rule. There are, to be sure, the individual protections of libel and slander law. Those were not invoked in this matter. We suspect it was because there was no case and because the mayor might have been open to a countersuit. There is no such right in the FCC process.

Congress and the FCC created the Fairness Doctrine in an effort to guarantee there would be discussion of controversial issues on radio and television

and to ensure contrasting viewpoints on those issues would be broadcast. Far too frequently what happens in practice is that stations ignore the most important local issues—the ones over which passions run high—and deal with the minor controversies in a minimal effort to meet the legal and regulatory requirements for relicensing. The Fairness Doctrine, in fact, frequently stifles debate because some broadcasters fear regulatory trouble and costs. In short, the case can strongly be made that there would be more significant and robust debate on the air if the Doctrine did not exist.

I write here of television and radio stations which deal with ideas and news events. There is not much significant programming about controversial issues, including contrasting viewpoints, on movie channels, or on rock or smooth music radio stations; those audiences, it has been demonstrated, simply tune away by choice when ideas are discussed. My argument deals with stations which have sought and earned audiences for news and public affairs programs. It is on those stations that audiences expect, even demand, ideas and discussion.

If there were no Fairness Doctrine and no Personal Attack Rule, some argue, licensees could run roughshod over the public debates, ignoring opinions with which they disagree and recklessly promoting their own special interests. If commercial broadcasting were not commercial, that claim might earn some credibility.

But, American broadcasting—except for the separately regulated publicly supported stations—is commercial. Licensees' commercial successes are tied almost absolutely to the size of their audiences. Larger audiences generate larger advertising revenues. Smaller audiences produce smaller or no profits. Therefore, it is not in the commercial interest of any broadcaster to drive portions of the audience away. That is the risk of broadcasting only one point of view. Sooner or later, those in the audience who hold differing points of view

will see (as opposed to perceive) the bias and will go elsewhere to find opinions with which they agree. Smaller audience: smaller profits.

A story has circulated about the chief executive of a television station in one of the larger markets. He is reported to have wanted each station break call letter identification to be followed, visually and aurally, with the tagline ". . . a conservative Republican station." His staff, aghast, pleaded with him to withdraw the suggestion or order. They pointed out that the station's service area is substantially Democratic and that, even among local Republicans, conservatives are a small minority. The staff argued, successfully, that the station break could drive away immense segments of the station's audience.

Finances and Fairness

Some might claim the financial argument for fairness in programming is an argument for the airing of no opinions. The claim ignores the well demonstrated fact that controversy is attractive to audiences. It is the bland station which audiences ignore.

The licensee who ignores public controversy and fairness, as differentiated from the Fairness Doctrine, foolishly risks the loss of audience and the loss of revenue. The economic marketplace of broadcasting, thus, is the most effective regulator. I believe the marketplace has had far greater influence in support of fairness than any governmental rule, regulation or law.

Fairness (the Doctrine), if the financial argument is sound, is far from the best way to assure fairness (the practice). To the contrary, the Doctrine has been used in ways which produce less fairness, less public debate. Consider what Fred Friendly found about the *Red Lion* case. Consider what WHAR learned about what somebody else found to be controversial in the station's home town. Consider the possibility that the mayor of Milwaukee wanted to suppress criticism.

Consider, too, the intimidation of cost.

If Fairness Doctrine compliance costs money, as it sometimes does for responsible broadcasters, timid broadcasters may simply avoid controversial issues. When that happens, the cause of fairness suffers. Debate is replaced by ignorance. Can we tolerate Fairness promoting ignorance?

What I am arguing with these suggestions is that the chilling effects of the Fairness Doctrine play a greater part in the decisions of some broadcasters to avoid the controversial than the requirement of the Fairness Doctrine that licensees must carry programs about controversial issues. Some prefer to duck than to stand tall.

Finally, there is the Constitution: "Congress shall make no law . . ." In an interview with Eric Sevareid of CBS in 1972, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas suggested a loose interpretation of "no" can be costly in money and time. Douglas, who was noted for writing opinions quickly and briefly, believed the First Amendment required an absolute ban on all restrictions on free expression. He told Sevareid "(o)ther members of the Court over the years have said that when the Constitution says Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech or press, it really means Congress may make some laws abridging freedom of speech and press. Now, if you go off on that tangent, then it takes you a long time to make your decision. You have to do an awful lot of research. You work 18 hours a day, and write 58-page opinions."

While the spirit and sense of fairness at the heart of American journalism, regulated Fairness is, by its nature, harmful to our journalism. Only luck has prevented the damage from being severe. With the Fairness Doctrine in effect, the risk continues.

I find significance in the fact that those who have used the Fairness Doctrine in an effort to further their own points of view in the cases described here have been connected closely or directly with

government. They were campaign workers, lawmakers and elected officials. The American system of government is designed to protect the people from the government. The ways in which the Fairness Doctrine and the Personal Attack Rule have been manipulated by some have, at least partially, perverted that protection.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in July of 1984, declared unconstitutional a ban on editorials by stations which receive federal funds—public stations. In a footnote, Justice William Brennan wrote "(a)s we recognized in *Red Lion*, however, were it to be shown by the Commission that the Fairness Doctrine 'has the effect of reducing, rather than enhancing' speech, we would then be forced to reconsider the constitutional basis of our decision in that case." If that footnote is an invitation to the FCC to challenge the Fairness Doctrine before the Court, the Commission's RSVP should read "YES." ■

Ed Hinshaw is Manager of Public Affairs for WTMJ, Inc., Milwaukee. He is responsible for editorials, community affairs, documentaries and special projects. Hinshaw is past president of the National Broadcast Editorial Association, and a founding member of the Board of Trustees of the First Amendment Congress.

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DALLAS IN DORKING

Do British viewers want to see more American programs? A New Zealand researcher sums up his study of UK prejudices and attitudes towards shows imported from the USA.

**BY GEOFFREY
LEALAND**

Three years of living and studying in the United States, from 1980 to 1983, changed my attitude to things American in significant ways. I departed for Ohio in the autumn of 1980, taking with me as part of my cultural baggage a distaste for American television programmes. I disliked them in their own right and as representatives of imported culture that seemed to be alien to New Zealand. I left a country where there was widespread criticism of American television imports, for a part of America that was America writ small and where virtually the only television available was American in manufacture and in nature.

It took a little time but before a year had passed I had reassessed and, in some cases, rejected my previous inclinations. On a personal level I had begun to enjoy much of what I saw on American television, and on an intellectual level I began to appreciate why it was so successful. I even preferred to watch the commercial networks (especially NBC) rather than the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), even though the latter was probably closer to my former tastes. Commercial television was lively and interesting and available all day and most of the night; the local PBS affiliate had limited transmission hours and seemed stodgy and self-consciously

"good."

I had been brought up in a television world, in New Zealand, where "public service" ideals of broadcasting (largely inherited from British models) dominated television scheduling. My American experience shifted me away from an unquestioning compliance with such aims, to a less guilty appreciation of the entertainment strengths of television programming. I continued to balk against accepting some of the excesses of American television, especially those contributions of the fringes of the mainstream (such as daytime gameshows), but with thirteen cable channels at my disposal I felt that I had been freed from the tyranny of the television scheduler.

This turnaround in my attitude led to a desire to examine why American television was obviously a friend to the great majority of Americans but a foe to many non-Americans. I began a study (which grew into a doctoral dissertation) of the American contribution to New Zealand television schedules. The results of this study, which included original questionnaire material, largely confirmed my contentions, especially the belief that American television imports tended to reinforce existing prejudices and attitudes towards the United States, rather than modifying or reversing them.

Hostile Attitudes

In the summer of 1983 I travelled on to Britain, where I re-encountered hostile

attitudes to American television imports among newspaper critics, broadcasting trade unions, and broadcasting executives. I arrived at a time when the catchphrase "wall-to-wall *Dallas*" was in wide circulation and rapidly became interested in its implications, especially when it was used as a call-to-arms to defend established systems against the encroachment of new media alternatives.

I was curious as to why so many American imports were treated with scorn and derision when they seemed to be a valid and valuable contribution to the entertainment mix of both the BBC and ITV.

Such unacknowledged contradictions seemed to characterise much of the debate about the impending cable invasion. Most of the discussion was taking place over the heads of the viewers and in nearly every case the means of transmission of the new media dominated any discussion of the content of their schedules. Nowhere did there seem to be an investigation as to whether the British viewer would welcome a different diet of television programmes, except for a general assumption that they would welcome more "American trash."

This seemed to underestimate the discriminatory powers of the British viewer and I felt compelled to initiate a study of their views by examining their treatment of American imports in the past and through some direct inquiry. Through the generosity of the IBA and the Broadcasting Research Unit I was able to do this.

Generally speaking my study concluded that the British audience does view American imports selectively. After dealing with the broader debate about the international flow of American television programmes, the study focuses on the British experience, including an examination of the rationale and operation of the quota system. Then follows an investigation of the performance of a mixed sample of American imports, utilising measures of audience size and appreciation to illustrate their diverse histories. Made-for-TV movies and mini-series imported from the United States are

treated similarly.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Success and failure (in terms of audience following and appreciation) were found in the sample. Successes could be attributed to the universal appeal of some programmes and their ability to repeat effectively or renew dependable formulas; failure of programmes to attract audiences could usually be attributed to their cultural inappropriateness or their inability to sustain flexibility.

The strengths and weaknesses of most American television programmes lie in their ability to renew or extend their central formulas; a relationship between invention and convention that produces entertaining television. If there is sufficient imagination and variation within the set formula the audience is likely to remain with a show throughout its season. The results in the study show that this is a characteristic of British viewers, as it is of Americans.

There also seems to be an "exhaustion point" where an American programme no longer maintains a strong appeal and audience numbers begin to drop away. This is especially true of programmes which are characterised by a rigid format and a limited set of character behaviours, such as *The Dukes of Hazard*. The most popular American programmes are those that have no real domestic equivalents, especially those high-gloss productions like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. The attractions of such programmes run as a counter-balance to other American imports which have been rejected by the audience for their "foreignness" or "inferiority." In some cases different ways of life and different values attract, in other cases they repel.

General Satisfaction

The results of the study support the contention that American television imports have something new to offer the British viewer, or something that cannot be found in domestic productions. There

does not appear to be a large audience out there eager to see more American material on their screens. However, there is a fairly general satisfaction with the present levels. As in other countries, imported offerings are most often passed over in favour of locally produced material. In Britain, domestic productions like *Coronation Street* and *Crossroads* dominate weekly, monthly, and annual lists of rated programmes with only two or three American imports appearing in top-ten lists.

Given this evidence, the report concludes that the established patterns of viewing behaviour in Britain are unlikely to change much in the coming years, despite the advent of cable television. Cable channels offering recent films which are unavailable through conventional channels may draw some viewers away but it is difficult to see reruns of *Charlie's Angels* doing the same. Rather than "wall-to-wall *Dallas*" replacing the customary British television fare, "kerb-to-kerb *Coronation Street*" will continue to prevail. ■

This article appeared originally in a recent issue of *Independent Broadcasting*, the publication of the IBA, The Independent Broadcasting Authority, in Great Britain. The research for the report described here was conducted under the auspices of the Broadcasting Research Unit with the assistance of a special grant from the IBA. Copies of the report can be obtained from the IBA's Broadcasting Research Unit, 127 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H0EA. Dorking, by the way, is a town near London which is said to be more or less typical of England—sort of a British "Peoria".

“ QUOTE UNQUOTE ”

Sitcoms and Trivia

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—David Marc, *The Atlantic Monthly*

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"SO WHO'S COMPLAINING?" —NEGATIVE FEEDBACK AND LOCAL TELEVISION

A new survey probes the nature of direct audience complaints and how various stations take care of them.

**BY RALPH L. SMITH
AND SURAJ KAPOOR**

Once upon a time in the land of show business, the manager of a neighborhood movie theatre used to wait in the lobby after a new film opened and be available for the comments and complaints of his customers. But by the very nature of the broadcasting business, which has ratings but no box offices and even in a small market serves many neighborhoods, the manager of a television station stands far removed from his customers, those multitudes of unseen viewers, and is not easily available for complaints.

The professional critics, of course, sound off about their dislikes, and the organized pressure groups widely publicize their beefs, but what do ordinary viewers do when they don't like what they see? Information about direct audience feedback at local television stations remains fairly private; it's an aspect of TV station activity that deserves examination, particularly negative feedback.

What kinds of complaints are received from viewers? How are they handled? Are they written or phoned? Are they ever made in person? What are the effects on station programming? After all, in a broadcasting system supposedly based on serving the public interest, when members of the public complain, all of

us have a stake in knowing about complaint procedures and their resolution.

Not long ago, we decided to query 150 station managers using an eleven-item questionnaire divided into three sections dealing with the nature, disposition, and impact of station complaints. One station was randomly selected from each of the 50 large-market areas of the country; one from each of the next 50 markets (medium size); and 50 more stations from the remaining 109 small markets. Although 78 of the 150 station managers replied (a satisfactory 52% rate of return), 63 represented medium and small-market stations. We can only speculate that small-market station managers are not as frequently sought out by researchers and therefore respond to questionnaires with a little more enthusiasm. Or it may be that paperwork of this sort is simply shunted aside by large-market stations. In any case, our description tends to reflect complaint activity at smaller stations. Perhaps this is why the volume of complaints received is modest. As one broadcaster said, "Most complainers talk to other people, not to the station." And another reminded us that "most people don't realize they can pick up their phone and call locally. They think everything is based in New York."

Well, let's see what the postman brings during a typical September to May television season. Interestingly, the large-market stations report the same small volume of letters of complaint per

season as do stations in the medium- and small-size markets—anywhere from none up to 100 letters. Over two-thirds of all TV station managers reported that this was the extent of the negative mail. Two stations, one in a large market and one in a small, did admit to receiving as many as 500 letters of complaint in a season. One wonders what they were up to. Even so, it appears that written complaints are not overwhelming.

Surprisingly, telephone calls follow a similar pattern: almost two-thirds of all station managers report 0–200 calls during a nine-month season. However, four large- and four medium-market stations mentioned receiving 601–800 complaint calls (only one small station received this many), and one large-market and two medium-market stations had as high as 801–1000 calls in a season. Apparently, irate dialers live in the larger markets.

One respondent detected loneliness rather than serious irritation as the reason for calling the station with a complaint. "Most that complain are retired/elderly who have nothing better to do during the day. A lot of time they just want to talk to someone." Understandably, station visits by viewers with complaints are less frequent than by writers and callers. In fact ten stations, seven of them small-market stations, reported having no such visits. Most managers actually had to confront viewers fewer than 20 times a season.

About the same frequency held true for published complaints by television critics. For example, eight stations, of whom five were in small markets, reported no published complaints. Sixty-nine stations reported negative press mentions up to ten times during a season. (But complaints about one large market station appeared in print over 40 times during the course of a season.)

Finally, if one discounts professional critics' complaints, which have high readership because of the popularity of TV columns, it is evident that stations conduct their broadcast service with comparatively little articulate, negative feedback from general viewers, regard-

less of market size. Each station transmits as much as twenty hours a day of programming to many thousands of television homes, and yet most of them receive no more than one letter of complaint every three or four days; nor does the ease of phoning prompt many more viewers to contact their station. A couple of complaint calls a day seem to be the norm, and certainly no more than two disgruntled viewers a month ever make the effort to visit a station.

Knowing the Market

Why such a comparatively complaint-free situation? The most popular response from among the 68 persons who chose to add notes to our survey form rationalized that virtue triumphs: that a good staff (17) and good programming (15) were responsible for the apparent viewer satisfaction. Others (8) claimed that the station's knowledge of the community was the reason.

For example, one manager commented, "We have been in the market 30 years and feel we know the market and keep on top of what our viewers want and don't want." A public television station manager said, "The light quantity of viewer complaints is attributable to the nature of our programming, and our up-scale, better-educated and informed audience."

Six station managers called particular attention to quality operations from their networks as being largely responsible for satisfied viewers. And, one station manager in a burst of euphoria for this happy state of affairs said of the audience, "They're on our side!" Only three suggested that public apathy might be a reason for seemingly satisfied customers.

Still, what of those who aren't on the station's side? We asked managers to identify in general terms those who complained and the frequency with which they complained. By far the largest number of complaints came from individuals. Two-thirds of the managers reported that between 80% and 90% of

the negative responses were from separate persons. The remaining ten percent were group complaints, and those groups were primarily local in nature. Only one small-market station manager responded that 80% of the complaints came from outside groups; eighteen stations had never had such feedback.

So much for the sources of complaints. Now, what do those who have the energy to complain dislike about what they see? Well, it is quite evident that entertainment programs were the chief offenders. Only three station managers mentioned no complaints in that category, while 11 stations pointed out that 40% of their complaints were about entertainment. Another eight checked 30%, seven 50%, and six checked 90%.

There seems to be little discernible pattern between station market size and entertainment complaints, with one exception: twelve out of the nineteen stations checking under 10% complaints were small stations, and only one was a large station.

Although news and public affairs might be expected to generate complaints because of the controversial nature of some of the material, almost two-thirds of the station managers reported very few complaints in that category! As a matter of fact, twelve stations had received no complaints about news and public affairs. Complaints about editorials, sports, and commercials were also few in number as reported by almost all station managers.

We then asked station managers to peruse fifteen possible reasons for program complaints and check what percentage of audience feedback dealt with a particular complaint. Supposed obscenity was the first category to be charted. Although 60 of the 78 stations indicated such material generated almost no complaints, one small market station listed 60% of its complaints as stemming from that cause, and another checked 90%. As might be expected, one half of the stations serving large, cosmopolitan areas reported no "obscenity" complaints.

Sex and Violence

Sexual content was a slightly more sensitive category. Only fifty stations said that they had almost no complaints about sex. Interestingly, stations checking a higher percentage than 10 were almost equally divided between large- and small-markets (six and seven stations respectively). But more of the large-market stations (five, or 33.3%), as with the so-called obscenity category, reported no complaints about sex, while only one (5%) of the medium-size stations had no complaints; nine (21.4%) of the small-market stations had no complaints.

Although TV is often criticized for its violence, in our study, however, fifty-four station managers reported almost no complaints on that score. Once again, the large-market stations (six, or 40%) reported no violence complaints, contrasted with four (19%) of the medium-market stations and ten (23.8%) of the small-market stations.

In summary, it appears that there are fewer complaints about obscenity and violence in programming than about sex. And it is certainly clear that complaints about all three types of content are less bothersome to large-market station managers than to managers of stations in the medium and small markets.

An interesting sidelight: Although the concern over violence is generally directed at entertainment programming, one medium-market station manager commented on negative viewer reaction to violence in the news. "Extremely violent death, injury, and crime news is difficult to cover without offending somebody."

The two aspects of news and public affairs programming which we assumed might generate sizeable complaints are unfairness and inaccuracy. But on the whole they appear to be only a minor problem at stations in every market size. For example, 67 of the stations reported that complaints about unfair content were almost nonexistent, and 68 reported a

similar low concern over inaccuracies. Only two stations, one in a large market and one in a small, listed 30% of their complaints as a concern for fairness.

Another possible source of complaints might be a station's inclusion of programs insensitive to women and minority groups. However, this was not a matter of widespread concern, at least among the stations we surveyed. Thirty-six stations (46.2%) listed no complaints in this category, and another thirty-five (44.9%) told us such concerns comprised under 10% of all complaints.

Surprisingly, audience complacency even extended to three common charges against television commercials: too many, too loud, in poor taste. Despite perceptions of general viewer irritation with commercials, an inspection of the three sub-categories revealed that on average about 80% of the stations had almost no complaints at all. However, three large-market stations said that 50% of their complaints dealt with some aspect of commercial announcements.

What about audience reaction to station talent? Negative feedback about specific, on-camera individuals was not a problem for 55 stations, while 22 mentioned that somewhat over 10% of the complaints were about on-air personnel. However, three small-market stations checked that anywhere from 50% to 70% of their complaints expressed viewer dissatisfaction with particular broadcasters. One station manager said, "Most of our complaints deal with on-air news personnel and their appearance."

Changing Schedules Problem

Direct viewer complaints about the nature and quality of television programs were significantly less frequent than viewer agitation over elements of program scheduling. Said one station manager, "The big complaint is about schedule changes—the disruption of routine viewing particularly of sports and soaps."

Program preemptions and cancellations were particularly bothersome at

medium market stations. Thirteen managers indicated that 20% of their complaints concerned these irritants. Three large-market stations emphasized that 30% of their complaints involved cancelled shows. "Special programs such as Presidential appearances, space shots, etc., which interrupt regular programming, especially soaps, bring angry phone complaints for about 10 minutes." And, of course, as one station manager reminded us, "Heavy complaints always come with fall program changes."

The traditional industry defense that television must be giving viewers what they want is reflected in the figures about complaints about subject matter gaps, and other deficiencies in television programming. Regardless of station size, 95% of all stations reported that less than 10% of their complaints dealt with such issues. Interestingly, large-market station audiences seemed the most satisfied, since 60% of those stations had no complaints at all by contrast with 36% of the medium size stations and 39% of the small stations.

One station manager characterized this evidence of majority audience sovereignty with this assertion: "TV is the world's purest democracy, in that we cater to the majority. What the public wants is what is broadcast."

If this kind of managerial complacency were typical, most complainers would probably receive short shrift. To assess the seriousness with which station personnel take complaints, managers were asked to group the complaints on the basis of their validity and on the emotional intensity with which they were voiced. Over half the station managers said that less than 10% of the complaints received could be classified as "crackpot" or "frivolous." But they also felt that 10% to 30% of the complaints, however valid, were insignificant. Again, well over half the managers reported that very few complaints were angry or denunciatory. In fact, half of them characterized most of the complaints as polite and reasonable. All in all, television station

complaint departments would appear to be operating with respect for the critical viewer.

"Go right to the top" seems to be appropriate advice for viewers who want to complain, since the largest number of station managers (20, or 25.6%) indicated that is exactly where 90% of the complaints arrive. At fifteen stations, department heads receive the bulk of complaints, while ten stations have a special office for handling complaints. Producers, directors, talent and legal departments receive very few of the complaints.

Results of Complaints

No matter at whose desk the complaints arrived, seldom were they ignored. A written response was the most frequent method for handling complaints, particularly at large stations. On the other hand, the few phone calls were apt to be made by persons in the medium and small markets. As might be expected, almost half the stations revealed that complaints never resulted in a face-to-face meeting, especially at large-market stations. Even if meetings materialized, they concerned less than 10% of the total number of complaints received. Seldom were responses to complaints made over the air: forty stations checked "never" and thirty-two checked "under 10%" of the time.

Finally, very few complaints were referred to networks, sponsors, and production companies, although nine stations (six in small markets) made referrals 20% of the time and seven (five in small markets) 90% of the time. As one manager said, "99% of our complaints are about network programs. We simply forward them."

When the buck finally stops we might ask, "What exactly do viewer complaints to local TV stations achieve?"

Respondents were asked to check the number of times certain actions were taken over three seasons (1980-1983) directly as the result of complaints. Only one large market station indicated it had

dropped a show during the three years. Nine medium stations (45% of their group) had dropped from one to six. Three small stations (7% of their group) had made from one to two such changes. It appears that stations in the medium markets are much more likely to take the drastic step of cancelling a program if viewers complain.

Internal tinkering with a local program was an even less popular station response to complaints, as indicated by the fact that 60 stations had never attempted to change elements of a show. The largest group of those that had tried to make changes were small-market stations, twelve of which reported having made anywhere from two to ninety-nine revisions within a program during three seasons.

An interesting pattern is apparent in the changing of program broadcast time in response to criticism. Forty-eight (61.5%) of all the stations we surveyed had made no time changes, but eleven (16%) of the small-market stations had made several such shifts over a three season period. The activity was even greater at medium-size stations, with 14 (66%) of their group having made schedule changes. Only three (20%) of the large market stations made any time shifts. Apparently, a stable schedule is more characteristic of a large-market station.

There was relatively little tampering with on-air personnel; 70 (89.7%) of all stations listed none. One large station, however, admitted making 33 changes of personnel in 3 seasons, one medium station made 10, and six small stations made ten each.

Commercial announcements which drew viewer complaints were dropped with somewhat less frequency than programs. Three large-market stations did so only once, and one large station cancelled offending commercials fifteen times in three seasons. Four medium-size stations took similar action anywhere from two to five times. However, again the chief center of activity was

among the small-market stations, where thirteen dropped offending commercials from one to four times over the three seasons.

As might be expected, complaints rarely resulted in concrete program changes. The usual response: soothing communications from station personnel intended to get critical viewers to understand station procedures, programming operations and attendant problems.

The large-market station managers, in particular, told us that viewer complaints were apt to change programming very little. The medium- and small-market station managers were more inclined to believe that program changes could be brought about by audience complaints. To a direct question about the effect of viewer complaints on programming, no large station checked "much" or "very much" and one third of them checked "very little." Five medium stations, and five small stations checked "much," and three small stations even checked "very much," while only 13.6% and 22% of these latter groups checked "very little." As we have seen, program changes do occur more frequently at small-market stations.

The major fact of TV life reflected in our survey is that, with few exceptions, television stations—whatever the size of their markets—receive comparatively infrequent complaints from viewers; these are generally handled cleanly and with dispatch, primarily by correspondence; and that seems to end the matter. Those changes that are made in local programming usually are the result of ratings; general managers may read complaining mail from the audience, but what they study is Nielsen and Arbitron!

Because the responses to this survey came primarily from the small-market stations, definite conclusions cannot be drawn about comparative viewer concerns in each size market. However, it came as no surprise that small- and medium-market stations reported propor-

tionately more complaints about "obscenity," sex and violence in programs than broadcasters in the large markets.

Also not unexpected was our finding that viewers complained more about cancellations and schedule shifts of favorite programs than about specific program content, production elements or on-the-air personalities. Audiences, after all, select their programs from what is offered and ignore the rest, usually complaining only when their viewing routines are interfered with by a time shift, pre-emption, or cancellation. The overall tendency of television audiences to accommodate themselves to what is available also probably explains why station managers report few complaints about subject matter or types of programming that are missing from the schedule.

Certainly, the concept that local stations operate under the tension of constant direct negative feedback from their audience is not borne out by this study. Complaint offices are not busy, and frequent or frantic changes generated by viewer dissatisfaction are not the norm; perhaps the networks are the main targets of audience complaints, and a study of their complaints could be productive.

On the whole, the local station segment of the television industry, if not immune to audience complaints, apparently is not badgered by them. It may be that the limited negative viewer input into station programming is effective simply as a reminder to broadcasters that, although public acceptance is widely acknowledged, it cannot be taken for granted, that the service is a trust which exacts some responsibility from the trustee.

If we may be permitted a complaint of our own, addressed to station owners and operators, it is that more of them should schedule a regular "letters to the station" program. The letters column of newspapers are among their best-read features; the same is true of magazines. As our survey indicated, few stations re-

ply on the air to complaints.

It has been reported elsewhere that those few stations which do provide their viewers with a regular outlet for audience response to programs—pro and con—have found them to be very popular, especially when this feature is handled by the station manager or other key executive. Apparently, such programs can be a valuable device for enriching audience involvement with a station. A manager who puts on a regular "letters" program may find to his surprise that he has an unexpected ratings winner. ■

Ralph L. Smith is a professor of communication at Illinois State University. His special interest is studying the relevance of the press ombudsman idea for the broadcast media. Suraj Kapoor, an associate professor of communication at the same university, is currently involved in cross-cultural research on the use of American mass media by foreign students in this country.

R E P L A Y

Writing for the Star

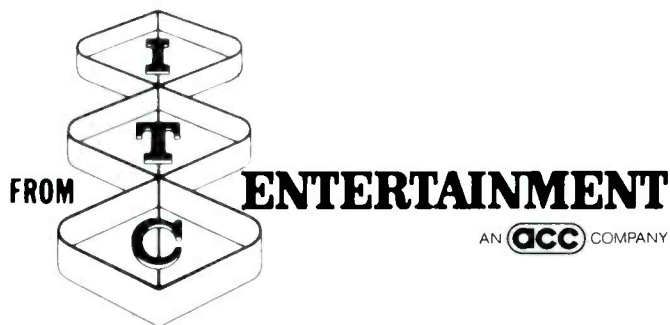
"In the early days of television, cynics now say, people would watch anything that moved. Sometimes that's all they got. We did try to elevate the level of the humor and make the sketches 'relevant'. But it was soon apparent that we were operating under the Big Time Rule: Man proposes, the Star disposes.

"Mr. Television, who invented the hour variety show and was a household word long before Spiro Agnew, had a high sense of mission. That is, he knew every camera angle, every writers' angle, every upstaging trick and every sly device we were employing to lift the humor above the cretin level. He disliked subtlety. Also wit, whimsey and the off-beat joke. Topicality made him edgy. His argument was that while he appreciated such jests they were far over the heads of the audience. As he put it, 'The peoples won't get it.'

"If obliged to cast an eye back over the Golden Years, I'd prefer not to remember the jokes the writers proposed and the star disposed. . . In the three years we wrote for Mr. Television, our brains were not only picked but washed and hung out to dry."

—Goodman Ace,
Television Quarterly, Fall 1972.

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THE NBC TELEVISION STATIONS

WHAT TELEVISION IN THE USA TAUGHT ME

A critique of American television by the new head of BBC1 as he returns to London after three years in Hollywood. He's glad to come home.

BY MICHAEL GRADE

The familiar voice on the telephone from Fleet Street was politely persistent. "Yeah, Mike, leaving aside the question of money, can I say you earned a million dollars a year poolside in, er, LA? You know, round figures sound good . . . (silence) . . . and you'll be earning what did you say at the the Beeb? (more silence poolside) say, er, what about a hundred grand? Come on, Mike, I don't want to get it wrong. . . ."

On and on, thick and fast, figures and questions were bowled at me that day in June when the BBC press office released the information that Grade was joining the Corporation. It was the usual stimulating, knockabout fun.

There was one question that day, however, that still haunts me. It was a question I was unable to offer any answer to, not even a platitude: "What did you learn in America?" Simple, direct, but one I was not prepared for. I knew I would have to find the answer, if only to justify nearly three years of my life spent in the rich killing fields of US television.

When the telephone stopped ringing, I found some time to think before crossing the pond to Television Centre and the challenges of BBC1. At first all I could come up with were negative, cynical thoughts as I recalled with a smug grin all the absurdities of life on the US network beat.

I cannot, of course, resist quoting some

gems from this year's crop, or should it be crock? First, from a network development executive who offered this reason for turning down an idea for a movie of the week about a gripping untold episode from the Great War: "We did World War One and it didn't work." Or how about this summary of CBS's programming strategy for the coming season from one of their creative people? "Women are in this year." They *will* be pleased.

My favourite line of the year is actual dialogue from the NBC mini-series *Lace*, based on the novel by Shirley Conran, in which the young heroine is required by the plot (and the writers) to utter in all seriousness: "Okay, which one of you bitches is my mother?"

Some humor in Hollywood behind the scenes is intentional. NBC finished last season way behind ABC and CBS for the umpteenth time. At a press conference recently, Grant Tinker, the web's head honcho (as *Variety* would describe him), was asked if he stood behind his program chief Brandon Tartikoff. "Yes," replied Tinker unhesitatingly, "as far behind as possible!"

NBC may be languishing in third place, but neither CBS nor ABC has much to be proud of in terms of the quality of its output. It is generally as mindless and trival as usual, with too few exceptions. New shows are derivative, predictable ("We have to have the hero in jeopardy by the second act") and, what is worse, controlled and driven by network executives with immense power.

The majority of them cannot compete

in an argument with a writer, director, producer or actor since they lack both the vocabulary and the perspective, so they fall back on the mumbo-jumbo jargon of research, concept testing, TVQ (an allegedly outlawed formula for as-

My American mentor Norman Lear, a producer-writer, has done more than almost anyone in the US to protect the right of the artist to speak to the audience.

sessing performers' acceptability to viewers—a blacklist if you ask me), ratings, demographics, and yet more research. Make no mistake, the lives of America's creative television community are in these people's hands.

The rewards for success are nevertheless gratifyingly obscene, the pressure to comply irresistible, the competition for the favor of a network order fierce, and the result inevitably second-rate, bland and too often insulting. That is why the mini-series is such a successful form. By its scheduling over a few nights, by its length, by its serial nature and by the diversity of subjects chosen, it alone retains an ability to surprise viewers numbed by the endless regurgitation of formula television.

Signs are that even this form is beginning to be dogged by research and glib rules of the network thumb: "It's gotta be a best-selling book," or "It's gotta be American history," or "It's gotta have a sweeping canvas!"

Ralph Schoenstein, a very distinguished American humorist, has described US television as a world in which the audience now speaks to the artist instead of the other way round. He projected a logical extension of research mania (i.e., pre-determining audience taste before "creating") into other art forms. He imagined himself in the queue for a performance of *Swan Lake* and

being asked before he went in how much he responded to the concept of swans, or if he would prefer ducks!

My American mentor, Norman Lear, a producer-writer (a "hyphenate" in local slang), has done more than almost anyone in the US to protect the right of the artist to speak to the audience. His style was to create brilliant, provocative comedies using social concerns, politics, religion and any current social issues as the fabric for plots. You always know a Lear show—it's always about something, it always has a point of view, a concern. Single-handed, he almost compensated for the lack of documentaries and contemporary drama on television. His kind of television sitcom needs nurturing. Sadly, the networks are not in a nurturing mood.

In a recent Op-Ed piece in the *New York Times*, Norman wrote about this "bottom line" mentality: "America is suffering," he wrote, "from an unhealthy emphasis on success as measured by The Numbers. It insists upon evaluating the world through ratings and lists, matrices and polls, the bottom line, winners and losers. . . ."

"The name of the game for the networks is: 'How do I win Tuesday night at 8 o'clock?' When the only criterion for airing the show is how it may rate against the competition in the short term, it isn't good for network business in the long term. And so, despite the threat of audience erosion from the new technolo-

America has taught me that more channels can equal less choice.

gies, we see the networks scrambling—not to innovate, but to imitate, because innovation requires risk-taking, and risk-taking is antithetical to winning in the short term.

"The average network programming executive is trapped. Imagine yourself in this job: You walk into your office and a warm Xerox copy of last night's over-

night ratings is on your desk. You didn't win a single time period. Now your first appointment of the day is with tomorrow's Rod Serling or Paddy Chayevsky, who has a fresh, innovative idea. You are in no condition to hear a new idea. What you must have, and quickly, is a new version of something that is working on one of the other networks.

"TV must, of course, pay attention to business and prosper economically. But when it overlooks the human essence, that spirit that defies the market place and its economic calculus of motives, it does so at its own peril."

I have seen what can happen in the under-regulated free competing market place of US broadcasting, where the voice of the dramatist is *never* heard (and this at a time when regional theatre is flourishing all over the country), where the *raison d'être* of a news program is not to offer news and insight, but just to win the time slot and where, even if you offered them, say, Ben Kingsley in a film by Tom Stoppard and directed by Roland Joffe, these three would have to be "approved" and the story concept tested.

America has taught me that more channels can equal *less* choice.

But television is too valuable and too important in our daily lives to be in the hands of anyone but those committed to putting programs and the people who make them *first*. Only in this way is the audience served.

That is what I learned in America. I'm glad I went. I'm glad to be coming home. ■

Michael Grade, the new head of BBC1, spent three years in the United States as an executive of Embassy television. This article is adapted from an essay he wrote for the 1984 Edinburgh International Television Festival, and is used by permission of the organizers of that festival.

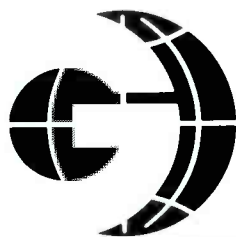
“ QUOTE UNQUOTE ”

Educational Renewal

"Television has been a source of both fascination and concern since its introduction, and the length of time children spend viewing it has increased with every decade. A growing body of research has confirmed earlier speculation about the role of television in stimulating aggressive behavior and turning children away from reading. While heavy television viewing may not be a serious problem for children with a diverse and supportive out-of-school life, the greatest overuse of television by children is by children from the lowest-income households.

"For them it may add yet another element to the arsenal of disadvantages they face. The converse, television's educational potential, which has been demonstrated so vividly in the Corporate-initiated Sesame Street, remain largely unfulfilled. In the context of the nation's interest in educational renewal, this frontier should be explored with greater vigor than ever before."

—David A. Hamburg, Annual Report, Carnegie Corporation of New York.



GANNETT
BROADCASTING GROUP

Arizona

Phoenix/KPNX-TV

Colorado

Denver/KUSA-TV

Georgia

Atlanta/WXIA-TV

Massachusetts

Boston/WLVI-TV

Minnesota

Minneapolis-St. Paul/WTCN-TV

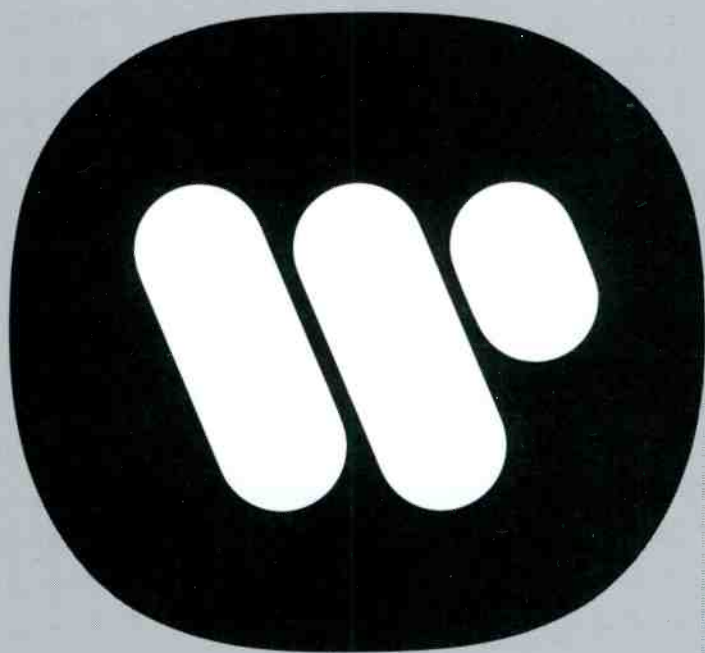
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IT HAPPENED IN PORTLAND

Local talent dreamed about producing a television movie in their hometown. The zany saga of how they finally made it.

BY LARRY COLTON

I was definitely a rookie, without experience in the big leagues of television—or for that matter, the minors—so when I first started telling people in my hometown of Portland, Oregon, about my idea of producing a TV movie on our home grounds, naturally, they all told me I was nuts. As a novice, I even dared to hope that one of the local network affiliates would preempt a couple of hours of prime time to show my movie. A guy can dream, can't he?

But nine months later, after a lot of toil, tears and sweat by myself and associated friends and colleagues, the dream did come true. On December 14, 1983, a date that will live in my memory, if not Portland's, KOIN-TV, the CBS affiliate in Portland, preempted a network movie to broadcast *Pillars of Portland*, a local independently-produced movie, using Portland actors, technicians and financing. It was a movie by, for and about Portlanders.

I was the writer and co-producer of that production, and I'll have to admit it wasn't a television smash, or a potential national Emmy winner. Maybe it wasn't even *My Mother The Car*. But damn it, we were on the right track in terms of tapping the potential of local programming.

"It may have been a television first for a network affiliate," commented *The Wall Street Journal* in a feature article headlined "Station in Oregon Takes Risks To

Put Local Program on Air." Said the *Journal*: "It was a very nervy thing to have done." As a friend of mine at KOIN-TV told me when he read the article, "They're telling us!"

"It's a major accomplishment that the movie was even made," wrote *The Oregonian* television columnist. Artistically, the film didn't receive any press kudos.

More than a year has passed now since *Pillars of Portland* aired. The reviews have already started to turn yellow, and I've been working on new scripts. But the good and bad memories remain. For a time, I felt like the rookie pitcher who has led his team all the way to the World Series, only to bomb out in the big game. You hang your head when you go to the locker room, knowing none of the people in the stands made it as far as you did . . . but it hurts.

Here is what happened. During the winter of 1983, I was approached about making "Pillars of Portland," a satirical newspaper column, into an independently produced TV series. Using fictional local characters, my column was a satirical look at Portland life, sort of a Northwest version of California's *The Serial*, which began as a Marin County newspaper column and wound up as a motion picture.

Evelyn Hamilton, our producer, although she had not much experience in television production, believed there was a gold mine to be had in local dramatic programming. I had no experience in

screenwriting or production, but my column did have an established following.

Hamilton put up \$12,000 to start us out, and found a director, Tom Chamberlin, who also believed in the concept. He had over ten years of film experience, mostly in educational, documentary and industrial films. The three of us, like three naive freshmen on our way to our first school dance, formed an independent production company, and started doing whatever it is that indies are supposed to do.

We weren't really sure what we were trying to produce. A movie? A weekly series? A soap opera? A sitcom? We were betting that the dream and the talent would be enough.

Business savvy was not one of our assets; our naive strategy was simply to sell a station on the potential, and let them tell us what they wanted.

Chamberlin scouted the local theatres, looking for the best actors in town. The auditions were improvisational. Forty-five actors tried out for ten roles. After a cast had been assembled, we tackled the next urgent problem—or at least I did. At this point, there was no script.

I spent a week at my typewriter, staying up late into the night, night after night, cranking out approximately 25 scenes, unrelated vignettes, to serve as the basis for a kind of pilot.

Next, with a rented Sony camera, we went to work, shooting scenes on location, all over town; the idea was to provide a very Portland look to the production. Scenes were shot at the library, a college, airport, unemployment office, city hall.

Production lasted eight days—and so did our \$12,000. After the actors, crew and equipment had been paid for, there wasn't anything left either for further filming or to complete editing. Rick Wise, former major league baseball player who had become a friend when I had been a pro ballplayer, came to our rescue and invested an additional \$5000 to become a limited partner.

Skeptics told us we didn't have a dirty

logger's chance in hell of getting a local station to buy our film. At the time, we weren't thinking about getting an affiliate to preempt prime time. If necessary,

**Did we want barter? . . .
"Barter", I asked.
"What's that?"**

we would have been willing to settle for Sunday morning, or the hours after the late-late show.

When the tapes finally had been edited down to about 40 minutes, I got another assignment: to take the rough assembly tape around to the local stations to see if anybody would buy, or even nibble.

My experience in sales was the same as it was in screen-writing—zero. Normally, I'm a jeans and sweater kind of guy, but for the sales pitch I was advised to wear a more impressive outfit. I didn't have any three-piece Madison Avenue suits, but I did manage to come up with a blue corduroy jacket, a pair of grey flannel slacks, a faded oxford button-down, and a ten-year-old rep tie.

The first station we went to was KOIN, the CBS affiliate. For 40 minutes the general manager, station manager and program director sat stonefaced across the room, watching our tape. Nervously, I watched their reaction.

"It's good," said one of them as soon as the tape ended. "But it needs more sex."

"No problem," I assured them. "We can add it."

They liked what they had seen. Steve Currie, the program director and a past president of the National Association of Television Program Executives, apparently saw the same potential we did. "The directing, writing and camerawork are all good," he said. "And the acting is very good. We have the promise of something unique and very good here."

He asked what kind of a deal we were looking for . . . did we want to barter? "Barter?" I asked. "What's that?"

It didn't take Currie long to realize this wasn't MGM/UA he was dealing with. He offered us \$2,000 to make it into four half-hour episodes. He was toying with the idea of bumping *Hee Haw* at 7 p.m. on Saturday evening.

I was encouraged, but I took the tape to the other stations in town, hoping to stimulate some competitive bidding. The NBC affiliate said No Thanks, after seeing five minutes of our tape.

The ABC affiliate wouldn't even let us in the front door. At KPTV, an independent Chris Craft station, they offered us \$10,000 to make it into two hour-long shows. We tentatively passed on that deal.

Negotiations were new turf to everyone. By the end of a couple of weeks of tossing proposals back and forth, Portland executives were getting tired of my corduroy jacket and rep tie. Finally, an agreement was reached with KOIN. Instead of bumping *Hee Haw*, they agreed to preempt two hours of prime time. They wanted a movie!

Instead of the \$2,000 that they had originally offered, the bidding had taken it up to \$24,000 (\$12,000 in advance, \$12,000 on completion). They would also provide production assistance and one Ikegami camera and the sound equipment, as well as post-production help in editing and promotion.

In return, they received rights of script approval, first refusal, exclusivity and three showings. The contract also gave them sole rights to serve as our agent in any attempt at syndication, with a 25% cut of the net profit.

Currie had no pretenses about *Pillars* making an immediate one-shot windfall for KOIN. "We're not looking to make any money on the first effort," he said. "It's a high risk gamble. Any real payoff for this kind of a venture has to come in syndication."

A December air date was tentatively set, six months away. Currie took a deep breath and crossed his fingers. The actors took a deep breath and ran to the

bank. By Portland standards, this was bigger than *Ben Hur*.

I switched to my jeans and sweater and went back to the typewriter. With only six months left to produce a two-hour movie, there wasn't any time to waste, especially because we didn't have a shooting script. For the next month, I hammered away, pouring down coffee and pumping out new or revised scenes, and more of them. The phone would frequently ring in the middle of the night—an anxious director eager to start the production.

Only four weeks had been allocated for writing the full screenplay—another major mistake. Less than 35 days after the signing of the contract with KOIN, filming began. The corrections were hardly dry on my first draft. The plot to tie all those vignettes together was mostly missing.

Of course, if only we had known then what we know now . . .

Pre-production planning was bush-league. In the rush to shoot, budgeting and scheduling, location arrangements and other logistics were handled with a blithe "We'll deal with it when we get to it" attitude. The business side of our operation was strictly amateur, and KOIN voiced concern on several occasions. For the most part, they were remarkably patient and even sympathetic. Since they were not the line producers, there wasn't much they could do but try to keep their hopes high.

From the very start of shooting, my own patience was severely tested. For instance, on the first morning, my phone rang. It was an actor. He had been given the wrong location—did I know where he was supposed to be? When he finally showed up, the camera broke down. The whole day had to be scrapped. It turned out to be one of our better days.

Scheduling conflicts arose. An actor might only be able to get off his/her regular job on Tuesday but that might be the day the cameraman had to be in court. Once, the crew showed up at a restau-

rant location, unloaded all the equipment only to find out nobody had called to arrange it. Another scene at a high school had to be cancelled; somebody

About halfway through production, our \$12,000 ran out.

forgot to get permission from the school district.

Needless to say, anxiety ran high. The up-front money from KOIN was going fast.

The storyline involved about ten people, all members of a therapy group. Each character was intended to spoof a local stereotype: the unemployed logger, the high-rolling lumber baron, the restless housewife, the uptight businessman, the single mother. Originally, the decision was to introduce all of the characters and their problems in the first movie; we figured this was just the pilot, and the public would scream for more.

Local celebrities were used as extras or in cameo roles. A city commissioner sat in the background in a restaurant scene. A popular disc jockey had a walk-on in a computer shop scene. The owner of a bakery and a bank president played themselves.

Two days were spent filming on location at Rajneeshpuram, the controversial Oregon religious cult. The scene involved the lumber baron, about to go bankrupt because of the bad economy, trying to sell the guru a couple million dollars worth of plywood; the deal fell through.

About halfway through production our \$12,000 ran out. It had all gone for wages for the actors and crew. My phone rang again; there was no money left to even buy video tape.

Back came my "salesman's" corduroy coat and old tie. I went to the Portland business community for support and they responded. In ten days, with the help of

Melissa Marsland, the publicist for the project, we were able to raise \$40,000 for continued production.

We persuaded our contributors that we would film one of the remaining short scenes either at their place of business, or with their product prominently in view. We also allowed them a credit at the end of our movie.

Getting the support of the business community meant that we could pay the actors again and buy tape, but it also meant scenes had to be changed.

A lovers' tryst, originally supposed to take place outdoors in a wooded park, was rewritten to take place in the Safeway frozen food section. A business meeting scene was changed to take place around a swimming pool so several women in Jantzen bathing suits could stroll by in the background. The scene between the blackmailer and his rich victim, first written to take place in a seedy bar, was switched to the posh lounge of the Sheraton. A love scene in front of a cozy fireplace was moved to a noisy bakery with loaves of Franz bread chugging down the conveyor belt in the background.

Because an airdate had been set and was rapidly approaching, we had to go into post-production before we finished production. KOIN assigned an editor to work fulltime on the project. They squeezed us into the editing schedule whenever possible, and that usually meant late at nights and on weekends. The director made the editing decisions, and the KOIN technician did the hands-on work.

The station launched a fullscale promotional campaign for the show two weeks before the airdate. They put together 12 promotional spots, running two or three an hour. They printed a couple thousand large, color posters and distributed them all over town, and ran full-page ads in the TV sections of the newspapers. They booked actors on radio and TV talk shows. Publicity releases poured out daily. They even hosted a large party at a swank restaurant, inviting all the real pillars of the community to come

and mingle with the actors. If the show was going to flop, it wouldn't be from lack of promotion.

The station's sales department aggressively sold the program. "The response was very positive," said Loren Neuharth, the sales manager. "It was very close to a sellout." The fee for a 30-second spot was comparable (\$1,600) to what the station normally charges for a spot in the network movie.

Our movie wasn't in the can until 24 hours before airing. When I sat down to watch the complete film for the first time the night before broadcast, the fatal flaws jumped off the screen. It lacked a clear vision; there were too many characters. Unfortunately, the thin thread that tied the characters together—group therapy—had been completely cut.

Well, *Pillars of Portland* did get on the air, replacing a prime time network movie on the schedule. According to the ratings, our movie did pretty well, coming up with a respectable 23 share, outdrawing *Facts of Life*, *Family Ties* and *St. Elsewhere* on the NBC affiliate and running slightly behind a *Fall Guy* special on the ABC station.

Financially for KOIN, according to Steve Currie, the station's program director, "We did a little better than break even on our investment."

I guess that's not bad for one local station's pioneering effort in dramatic programming. And, of course, there were many intangibles the station received in the form of goodwill, community response, and station prestige.

Pillars also put some money into circulation in our town. The entire *Pillars of Portland* project from start to finish, not including the \$50,000 or so KOIN provided in overhead and equipment, cost \$81,000. Most of that \$81,000 went directly to the actors and the crew. Obviously, by Hollywood standards, that's chicken feed. But it showed what is possible.

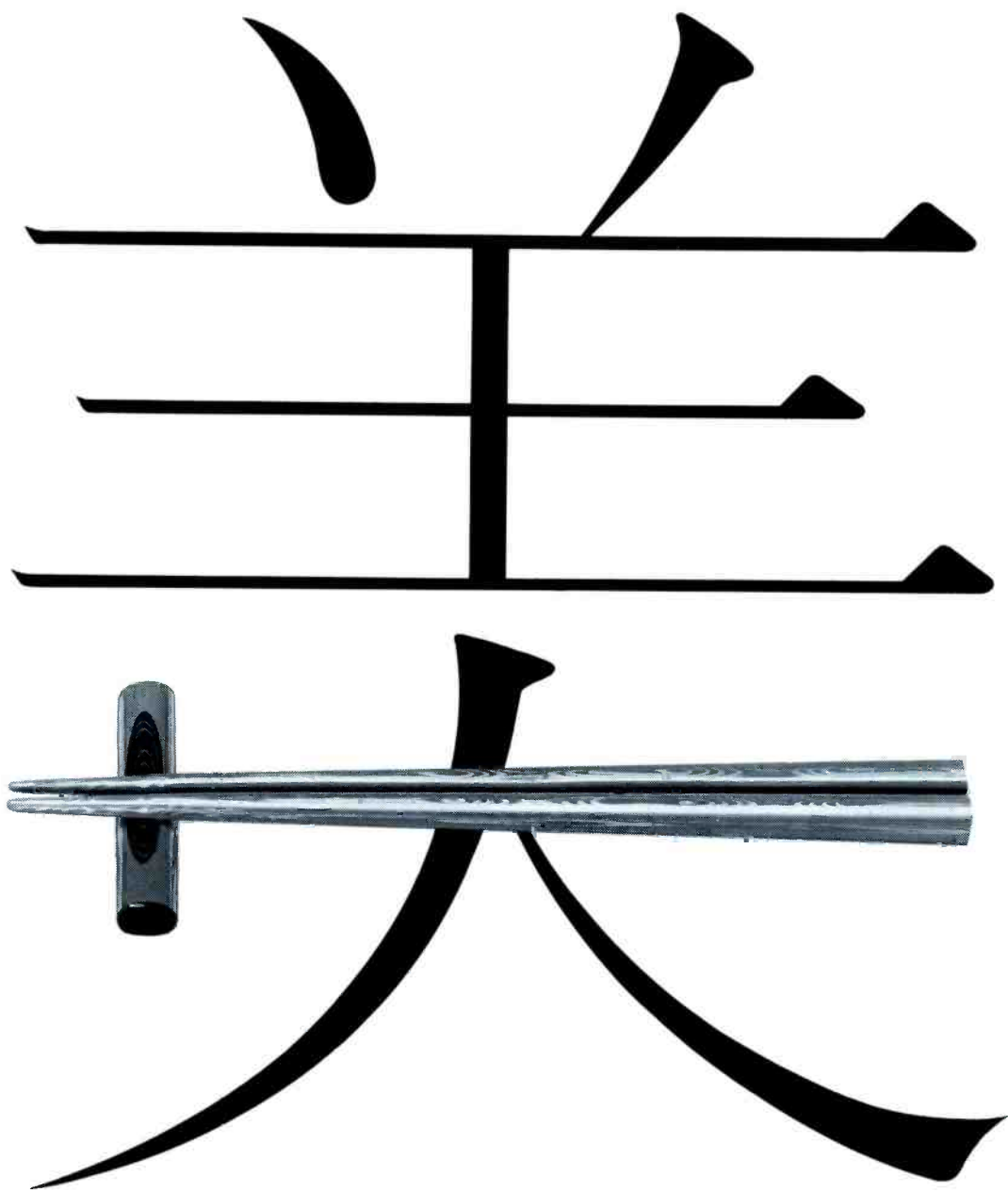
I'm still a dreamer. I like to hope that someday a regular network series will

come out of Portland, Oregon, or Portland, Maine . . . or even Peoria. ■

Freelance writer Larry Colton's credits include *Sports Illustrated*, *Northwest Magazine*, and columns for *The Oregonian* and *Willamette Week*. He has also taught High School and played professional baseball. He graduated from San Diego in the Pacific Coast League to the Philadelphia Phillies for a brief stint as a pitcher, until sidelined by an injury. He still plays ball, but now it's strictly local softball.



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THE ART OF TV DIRECTING: CALLING THE SHOTS AT THE SUPER BOWL

SANDY GROSSMAN INTERVIEWED BY JACK KUNEY

One of the last great stands of true live television is on the football field. For the director, as well as the crew, it calls for skill of a high order and for a rare degree of coolness under pressure. It also takes remarkable planning and leadership. How it's all done, in the booth and on the field, is revealed in this exclusive interview for Television Quarterly, with Sandy Grossman, who for many years has directed the NFL games for CBS Sports, as well as the biggest of the big games, the Super Bowl. Here, he discusses the problems and pleasures of his job with a fellow director, Jack Kuneey.

KUNEY: *Sandy, you studied television at college?*

GROSSMAN: I went to the University of Alabama with the thought of being an announcer. At that point, I started thinking about other things. After graduating and serving in the Army for two years, I came to New York and got a job as a production assistant at WCBS-TV, where I worked for several years. Then, CBS Sports needed somebody to fill in on college football for six months so I switched to the network and I've been there ever since.

What was your fill-in job with CBS Sports?

GROSSMAN: A production assistant. . . . Right before the football season was over, Frank Tarkanian, the director, needed an A.D. on a remote he was doing. In those days, Sports never had its own associate directors, they would always use program department A.D.'s. I said, "Frank, I can do that!" He said, "Do you have a Union card?" I said, "Sure, I do." He said, "OK, you're on."

Well, it turned out that Frank and the producer had an argument on the remote, and the producer left before the show was finished, so I wound up involved in post production. Frank didn't want to let me go until after the show had aired, and the show kept getting postponed. Soon it was almost summer, and I became a permanent part of the operation.

And you began directing?

GROSSMAN: No, I didn't direct for a long time. It was '63 when I first came to Sports and it was at least five years later that I began directing.

Do you remember your first directing job?

GROSSMAN: Well, they wanted to see whether I could direct, so they gave me the second period of a hockey game to do. At the end of the first period, the director just got up, and I sat down and called the shots for the second period. Unfortunately, when I came back to New York, nobody had seen it. Obviously, I

hadn't screwed up. So I started doing the pre-game show and then, the following year I got a chance to direct some football.

You remember your first game?

GROSSMAN: It was one of those times when you say to yourself, "I've been talking about doing this all these years. Can I really do it?" I was lucky; we had a great game. It was unbelievable. I remember Frank Gifford was doing the telecast, the New York Giants vs. the Minnesota Vikings—an overtime, terrific game. To this day, I wonder how I was able to do it. Anyway, it worked out well and Gifford came back and told my boss what a great job I did. That was my first game, and I've been building on it ever since.

Did you participate in sports in college?

GROSSMAN: I was always a sports fan, but not much more. To this day, I think that's helped me more than anything; I still direct from the standpoint of the fan.

You see things from the fan's perspective?

GROSSMAN: I think so. I could jam a lot of "X's and O's" down viewers' throats, but they might not want to see that. I try to be selective about what I show. I tell people that I give them maybe 90 or 95 percent of what they want to see, and maybe five or ten percent of what they don't want to see.

When you say "X's and O's" you mean the technical side of the game?

GROSSMAN: Yes. . .being very complex. . ."He did a zig-out. . .watch the trap, or the pull. . ." et cetera. By reacting as a fan, I can visually show some of those things, without getting so technical that you lose your audience.

Do you only direct football?

GROSSMAN: Football and basketball. Between the two sports, I'm tied up from the middle of August, until almost the second week in June of the next year.

Give me a breakdown of just what it takes to do an NFL game. How much preparation is entailed? When do you begin your work? When do you arrive at the site of the game? When does the crew arrive? When does your talent show up? Your color guys? Your play-by-play?

GROSSMAN: OK. Lets assume you're on a regular week-to-week basis, directing a normal game, not a Super Bowl.

Do you do a game every week?

GROSSMAN: Yes, I do. But let's back up a bit. Let's say that it's ten days before the game. I will have already checked with my people here in New York and gone over who my crew will be. On Monday morning of game week, I'll talk to the producer and review what we're going to be doing. Next, I go to work on the details. That's mostly a lot of phone work; I find out who was injured the week before, who's going to play and who's not in shape, the condition of the field, and so on. By Thursday it's time to finalize whatever details remain incomplete. On Friday, we go out to the remote site—normally our trucks arrive the same day, and they will have already started their initial set-up: powering up, putting the cameras in position. We also meet with the PR people.

On Saturday, we'd probably go to the home team practice, which is about eleven o'clock in the morning. The visiting team doesn't get in until maybe four or five o'clock in the afternoon and rarely practices on the site. We will talk to the coach first, maybe get an assistant coach to brief us. At the end of the practice, we'll go into a film session.

Summerall and Madden and myself, plus the producer, will screen game films of both teams from the preceding Sunday to see what they did the week before. Madden will point out things he notices that might translate into "isolation" shots for the next day. Anyway, we look at film for a couple of hours. Then we go back to the hotel and set up a meeting with the other team's coach. Somehow, we also manage to squeeze in a production meeting. Finally, we all

go to dinner together, and over the meal wrap up everything we're planning to do.

On Sunday, if it's a one o'clock game, I'm on the remote site by 9 A.M. At that point, I'll probably have a camera meeting, spend about an hour with the cameramen, go over what each camera will be covering and what my isolation cameras are going to be doing. Next I go up in the booth, check the pictures and make sure there are no problems. I take special care to make sure communications with all the technicians and the production people check out. Then, we break for lunch. The talent will be there, and we fill them in. Next, we go over all the graphics—show everyone what we've prepared. Finally, we talk through the on-camera opening, get ready with the top of the show—maybe even pre-record it.

You obviously do a lot of homework. Have you ever gone into a situation where you had no preparation and had to wing it?

GROSSMAN: Sure, but nobody else would know it. There are certain similarities with all NFL teams, and you learn what those similarities are. You get to know the strengths and weaknesses of the players—also certain tendencies of the teams and players. For example, you keep in mind certain key defensive players that you're going to get some good replays on. And you go with it.

So your game plan changes with each broadcast?

GROSSMAN: With each game, and with each set of announcers. You try to work with the strengths of different announcers. I do the kind of replays that John Madden likes, and when I work with somebody else, I can't give them John Madden replays. I have to give them something else that helps them.

What kind of replays does John Madden like?

GROSSMAN: Well, John loves the ones where the guys are grovelling in the pits.

It's the kind of excitement he brings to the game: "Look at those guys, my God, they're biting, they're kicking, they're punching, I love it." That's his kind of thing. He can also talk about the finer aspects of the game, but he excites the viewers when he gets carried away with some of those replays—especially when guys are really bashing each other. The one replay he never wants to see is a receiver going down ten yards with nobody on either side of him, who just turns around and catches the ball. John says, "I won't even talk over that. Next time I see that kind of boring replay, all you'll hear from me is heavy breathing."

Who's in the normal cast of characters that covers a football game?

GROSSMAN: We usually have two announcers. One does play-by-play, the other is an analyst. Play-by-play, in the case of Summerall and Madden, is Pat Summerall. Even though he's an ex-player, and an ex-analyst, he does the play-by-play from the snap of the ball to the moment it's down. He's the reporter; he describes what's happening on the field. John Madden is the analyst and color man, he brings in all the other aspects of the game: why a play worked, why it didn't work, all the color. But it's the blend of these two, since Pat was also an analyst, that brings a lot of information to the telecast, and makes their coverage so good.

What do you specifically look for with Summerall? Mainly following the details of the game?

GROSSMAN: Pretty much. Pat is on his own, he knows what has to be done. What I will do is leave him sometimes on shot I take. I will hit the key and say, "Hey, a shot of Youngblood". . . "A shot of Landry". . . or whatever I'm going to take, just so he'll know that this is the shot that's coming up. Usually, that triggers some kind of response, something he's got in his head he might want to talk about.

Do you have a basic rhythm,

a basic pattern for the game?

GROSSMAN: Oh, sure, I have a pattern of who's following what, but I'll vary where the camera cuts on different plays. I don't want it to get so that somebody sitting at home can just predict every cut. There used to be a theory in early television, which they got from the movies, that the cuts had to go from wide to medium to tight. Well, that sort of formula shooting is all out the window now. Going from very wide to very tight can be just as dramatic, and maybe have a greater effect on what's going on than those traditional three stages.

Dynamic cutting?

GROSSMAN: Right. It's very exciting to cut from a wide stadium shot to a tight shot of somebody. To me, anything that you can put up on that screen that informs the viewer without driving him crazy, works.

Each individual viewer will see it differently. Some say, "Hey, show me all twenty-two guys all the time." Well, that doesn't work; showing them all once in a while will work. You try to cater to different segments of your audience. Some understand the game better than others.

How many cameras do you have in the stadium?

GROSSMAN: In a regular game, anywhere from five to seven.

Do you give these cameramen shot lists of any kind?

GROSSMAN: I give them isolation shot lists and also break down what I expect from each of them.

Can you be more specific?

GROSSMAN: Let's say it's a normal six-camera game. You have a camera on the left 20-yard line, the 50-yard line, the right 20. In the high end zone there'll be a fourth camera; a golf cart on the sideline will hold the fifth camera, and maybe a hand-held camera will be number six. The hand-held cameras can work anywhere. My instructions might be for any

one of the cameras along the sideline—call them One, Two, Three—depending on where they are on the field, doing the play-by-play.

I look at the field and I say, OK, Camera One, you're play-by-play. That immediately triggers off some other responses: Camera Two knows, because I've already briefed him, that he gets the far-side receiver, meaning the one on the far side of the field. And Camera Three gets either the near side receiver or a defense isolation which I would call. If Camera Two is doing the play-by-play, Camera One shoots the far side receiver, and Three takes the near side receiver or defense. It changes with every situation on the field.

So what you have essentially is a three-camera show working the game.

GROSSMAN: Right! And whenever I call on Camera One, the others fall in place.

Can you go back a step and just explain the nature of the equipment that you have supporting you in the booth? How many video recorders, for example?

GROSSMAN: It varies. It could be three, it could be four, it could be five. It could be more. The more available "iso" devices you have, the more sophisticated you can get with replays.

Who makes the decisions to air those replays? Is there an assistant director in charge?

GROSSMAN: An assistant director has nothing to do with any of that.

You make all of those decisions?

GROSSMAN: Most of them.

Isn't that like patting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time?

GROSSMAN: It isn't really, because what happens is that certain actions on the field trigger certain other responses. I will give my cameraman and my videotape operators a sheet that says what we're going to do in certain routine situations. Also what we do in goal-line situations, punting situations, kick-offs,

and goal-line stands.

The process triggers off responses in everybody. It's up to me to make sure that they're all doing what they're supposed to be doing. Of course I will also do a lot of winging within that structure. I tell the crew before the game, this is just where I'm starting from. We'll jump off from there depending on what other things happen on the field. I like to throw shots in that are just nice to look at. Not everything has to have a high meaning. I think it's just a kind of fun way to look at the game.

I was going to ask you that—if you do any "beauty" shots?

GROSSMAN: Sure.

Well, it all sounds terribly complicated to me. Isn't this a great drain personally on you? I suppose it helps when you and your crew are so experienced.

GROSSMAN: Well, you don't always have the same cameramen every week. There are periods when I have different people every week.

Do you do all your own spotting, or does someone else spot for you?

GROSSMAN: No, I do all my own.

Are you the only man in communication with the cameras on the field?

GROSSMAN: Yes, I am.

Is there an A.D. with you in the booth?

GROSSMAN: The Assistant Director does most of his communicating with the stage managers and with the studio for commercials. It gets too confusing with another voice in there besides mine. Mine has to be the only voice when it comes to talking to the cameramen and the announcers.

How much do you count on your cameramen to get shots for you?

GROSSMAN: I tell my Number One, Two and Three cameramen that from whistle to whistle, from the time play starts until it stops, they must do exactly what I tell them. Once the whistle is blown, I want

them to stay on those basic huddles; the other cameramen can hunt. If they hear the announcers talking about something, they go get that shot. I don't want to have to yell at them.

I've had cameramen who, when I said "Get me the defensive huddle," wound up on the offensive huddle. I've had people on camera that just didn't know the game, and I've had to talk them through every shot. You have the good and the bad, but you still have to make your game look right just the same—no matter who you've got out there.

How much input do you have in determining which cameramen are assigned to you?

GROSSMAN: When it comes to the play-offs, I handle my own crew, and I combine the East Coast and the West Coast. I do the same for the Super Bowl. You just can't use people you don't know when you get into a situation where you're using twenty-four cameras and maybe twelve "isofeeds" for replays. The guys have to understand your system. You just can't break them in at the last minute.

Twenty-four cameras! That's amazing.

GROSSMAN: All the cameras and VTR's have different functions. Maybe Camera Three in a normal game would have four or five different functions; in the Super Bowl, he'll have less. Each camera can be so much more exact—more specific on what it's going to get. With the Super Bowl system, the same play you could only shoot one way before, when you had the normal complement of cameras, can now be shown with several different kinds of isolation or angles.

How much color do you try and get?

GROSSMAN: Coming out of a commercial you may want to get that pretty skyline, or some kind of dramatic shot and make a nice move to it. There's a lot of things you like to shoot, often depending on just how creative your cameramen are. You can talk them through just so many shots; you can't talk them through good taste all the time.

Are there any esthetic principles that you apply or is it just a question of eyeballing something?

GROSSMAN: You know, sometimes a camera will shoot between the legs of an official, to the kickoff team. Well, to me, that's interesting to look at, or it might be worthless. Nobody in the stands is watching from that aspect, but if I think it is esthetically pleasing I go with it. It's not something you want to do every time there's a kickoff, but once in a while it's a nice thing to throw in. You know . . . storm clouds coming over the stands, well, it's important, because it could be a weather problem coming up, affecting the game. But it's also very pretty to look at. . . A sunset in San Diego, in an evening game, also beautiful to look at. . . A full moon . . . who knows why, but I think it adds something.

I still remember vividly a shot of yours I once saw. I don't know what the game was, but a black defensive lineman, when his team was on offense, was kneeling at the sideline leaning on his helmet, and you had your hand-held camera take a shot of the game over his shoulder. It was a most effective picture, and when the game was finished, I checked the credits and saw your name. Do you usually have time to set up something like that?

GROSSMAN: Well, thank you, but I don't always have time to do that sort of thing. A creative cameraman can feed you a shot like that once in a while. Not all directors are looking for those kinds of shots, but I encourage them

I got knocked by one critic for Super Bowl XIV—which I happened to win an Emmy for. He said that some of my shots looked more like a football movie than a football telecast. Well, I thought, what's wrong with that?

The Super Bowl I did in Detroit in '83, even the player introductions were exciting as hell. I got great tight closeups. You could see the guys' faces, eyes, you could see the drama in it. Then you saw the reactions to their teammates. I had the mike right on the camera, and you

could hear them talk to each other on the field. It was an electric moment—it was terrific. I got permission from one of the teams to have an unmanned camera in the locker room, so when John Madden said that when he was in a locker room before a Super Bowl, he just couldn't wait to bust out of there, as he felt like the walls were closing in—at that moment, I cut to a shot in the locker room with the players sitting there, holding their helmets, tensely awaiting the start of the game. I mean, you could just see it happening!

These are the things that you've got to take a chance with, if you want to convey the total impact of the game. And you can't just get it by pointing cameras. You've got to really think it through, You've got to feel what the emotions of the moment are.

In other words, you have two game plans: one is a highly technical plan which involves the actual coverage of the game, and the other involves that emotional charge you yourself get out of the game, and want the audience to share.

GROSSMAN: Correct . . . I also like to have fun and share that with the viewers at home. For example, I've been criticized because in a championship game in San Francisco, I showed those whacky fans who came to the stadium in costumes and painted faces. It was part of the crowd, part of the electricity, so I cut to them. If a spectator in the stands is free to look at anything he wants, including the cheerleaders, including the nuts, I also want to give that aspect of the game to the television viewers. That way, I think they really get a better feel of what's going on out there.

But, Sandy, isn't it possible to overdo the light stuff? I mean is it necessary to shoot the pretty girls in the stands? Is it necessary to shoot the Dallas Cowgirls?

GROSSMAN: Well, you have to understand, in football, there's at least twenty seconds in between every play, and there are lots of things that you can show:

coaches, huddles, players . . . There's plenty of room for everything. I guess there are some people in the viewing audience who don't even want to see the crowd. But I think that it takes a little bit of everything to make a whole telecast, and I think the pretty girls are very important to that total picture.

There's a small segment of the audience that says, "I love when you show those Dallas cheerleaders." It's important to them; it makes their Sunday afternoon more enjoyable. By the same token, one of the exciting shots in the Detroit Super Bowl was a woman who must have been eighty years old, wearing a San Francisco 49'ers sweatshirt, holding up one of those souvenir fingers saying "number one". And she was a real fan—not a crazy.

Or take the NBA Championship last year, when I had pandemonium on the floor—people standing up, screaming, yelling, carrying on. I dissolved to a little kid sleeping. You know, it kind of put everything into perspective. Things like that are going on all the time at most sporting events, and if you're sitting at home, you want to see them.

You said that you got some hate mail on the Dallas Cowgirls?

GROSSMAN: A guy wrote to me, and it was obvious that he was a religious fanatic. At the time there was a big exposé on about how some of the girls from one of the other teams had posed for *Playboy*. And he wrote, how dare you show them; they're nothing but whores and sluts, . . . And he went on and on.

I rarely answer that kind of mail, but this time I did. I wrote "I have two daughters, and I would never put something on the air that I would not allow my own children to watch. In fact, they can't wait to see the Dallas cheerleaders. They think they're beautiful, and they love watching them. I appreciate your letter, but I really don't think it's indicative of a lot of people's feelings." Well, I got a letter back: "I don't care about you or your snotty daughters, and I have

some people who'd like to change your face around."

That's a no-win situation.

GROSSMAN: I do talk to the cameras about the *kind* of crowd that they get. There are certain people constantly trying to mug the camera. You see them in every arena. You'll see the guy with the multicolored hair, the guy with the obscene T-shirt—the kooks. There's one woman who sends me pictures and letters and shows up at every game. She could be a sporting event all by herself. She calls herself "Miss Body Beautiful," and I avoid her like the plague; I won't put her on camera.

You talked about the rhythm of the game. Do you have time in the middle of a game, as chaotic as it may be, to relax as the game develops?

GROSSMAN: I rarely find time to relax. When I'm on one shot, I'm working on the next one. I'm talking as much as the announcers are during the game, constantly readying shots and talking cameramen into shots and going with what's happening on the field. I don't really want to relax. You want to keep that certain high that you go into a game with.

I hadn't been to a Giants game in about eight years, and my son got me a couple of tickets last year, and I was surprised at the game—things that should have been obvious to me. I've worked in television all my life, and it never occurred to me that there would be a pause on the field when the Stage Manager's cueing a commercial.

GROSSMAN: Sure, I've sat in the stand myself and I've said, "Damn those television guys!"

Has television changed the game much?

GROSSMAN: I don't think so. They might have put more commercials in over the years; but look, we're paying for the rights. If the NFL were to say, we'll cut those rights in half, you cut back on the commercials, we could do it. But they're

not going to do it, so we can't do it. It's the price you pay for watching the game at home, free.

But all I'm suggesting is that there might be subtle changes going on in the game that come as a direct result of television, and in basketball too. I mean the "grandstanding," for example, that takes place. The little dances in the end zone—you never saw anyone spiking a football in the end zone ten years ago.

GROSSMAN: You're right, to some extent. It's the younger players. The kind of kids that are playing now are different. I mean we used to have guys before this who were the good old farm boys. The guys now are all show biz. They're just a different breed. In general, they're more outgoing. In the old days, you had athletes that couldn't even talk. Now, all of them get through college. They're all talking; they're all doing things better. And not just in public appearances—the calibre of the athletes has improved every year. They're running faster, and jumping higher. The linemen are running as fast as the backs used to run.

Where is all of this going? Will CBS Sports coverage change in the future? Will television sports change?

GROSSMAN: There's no way I can answer that. Who knows what tomorrow's going to bring? Just like nobody, twenty years ago, could foresee what the instant replay would do to television sports.

Look at the lenses we're using now. With low light, they get more close-ups and tighter close-ups every year. Equipment is getting smaller, and the lenses more powerful. We're getting places that we couldn't get before. And there are tremendous technical advances still going on.

One last question. You're at the top of your field right now. Do you want to stay in sports, or are there other things you'd like to be doing in the next three or four years?

GROSSMAN: Well, I'd like to do a Miss America Pageant, the Oscars, the Em-

mys. There are lots of events like that, that seem to be just geared for a sports director. I've also got a good feel for music, and I'd like to do some directing in the music field. But I like what I'm doing now. You have to ask yourself: Do I want to go from the top of one field to the middle or the bottom of another? It's a major step and I'm not sure if I want to take that chance. ■

Jack Kuney, a veteran television director and producer, is an Associate Professor in the radio/TV department at Brooklyn College, and a frequent contributor to TVQ. This interview is one of ten he has done with outstanding directors, each a specialist in a different field of programming.

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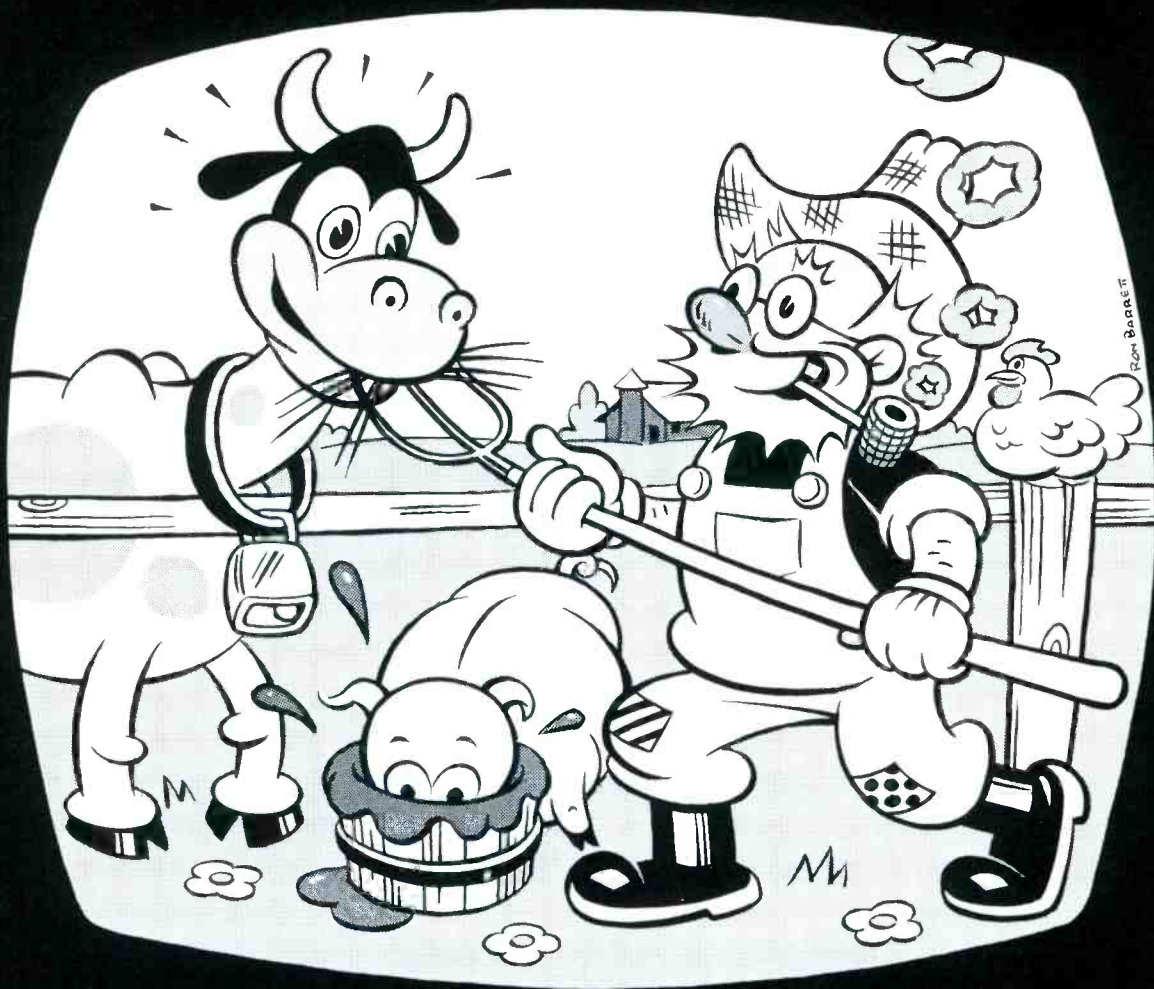
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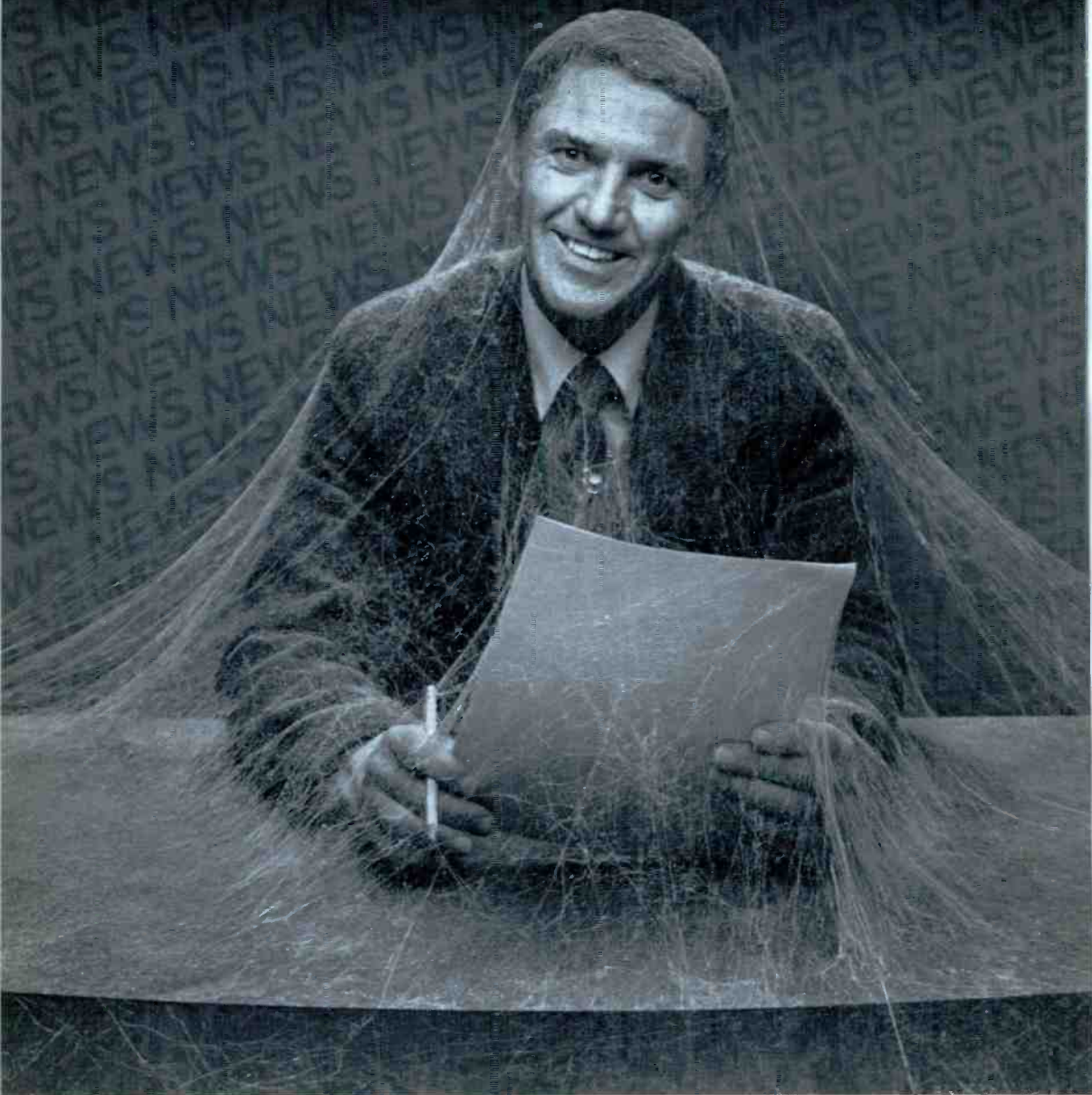


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REVIEW AND COMMENT

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS/MIKE WALLACE'S OWN STORY

by Mike Wallace and Gary Paul Gates

New York: William Morrow & Co.,
\$17.95

BY MARIE TORRE

"**D**o you know," said the unexpectedly cheerful matron who accompanied me to jail, "there are more reporters and photographers for you here today than there were for Frank Costello?"

A dubious compliment, I thought, but probably true. It was the first time that an American reporter was to serve time for refusing to reveal a news source. The networks, local television stations, newspapers and news services were all represented as I was taken from Manhattan's Federal Court House to Jersey City's Hudson County Jail to begin a 10-day sentence for refusing to name the CBS executive who had given me the information for a *New York Herald Tribune* column I had written about what was to be Judy Garland's first CBS television special.

Some of the reporters tried to get into the jail as I went in, but all were denied entrance. All but one, it turned out. About

Marie Torre went from newspapers to television and has been a TV reporter, producer and anchor.

half an hour after I had been moved into the smallest of three dormitories in the women's section of the jail, WNEW-TV's Mike Wallace suddenly appeared on the scene.

"How'd you get in, Mike?" I asked, genuinely surprised to see him. He wouldn't say. Instead, his shrewd eyes surveyed the room for signs of special privilege which he felt might have been extended to me (and wouldn't that make a juicy addenda to my jail story!). It was a cold January day, and the old radiator in the room emitted not only noisy heat but also the asphyxiating smell of fresh paint.

"Did they paint the place just for you?" Mike asked suspiciously, on the trail of an exposé. I did not know whether the paint had been applied in anticipation of my visit, but I would have preferred no paint. The smell was foul, and there was no place else to go. Mike continued his probe. To no avail. There was really nothing to uncover—but that happens sometimes in our news pursuits.

Nevertheless, even though the reality of jail preoccupied me, I was impressed by the fact the Mike Wallace, then a relative newcomer to TV news, was the only reporter in the crowd to see me in what was to be my home for the next ten days.

In the intervening years, through the same kind of persistence, diligence and enterprise, Wallace has continued to be "the only reporter in the crowd" for many a story—and successfully. Now, his status as the nation's premier television correspondent is so entrenched that when

he turned 65, CBS did something it didn't do even for Walter Cronkite: it made an exception to its policy on retirement so that Wallace could remain as the senior correspondent on *60 Minutes*.

Thus, a book of Mike Wallace's memoirs is something to anticipate, if only for the behind-the-scenes view of his many assignments in the Middle East, his interviews with the famous and infamous, and his early adventures in television controversy with the pioneering *Night Beat* program, where he developed the tone and style that were to become his trademarks.

Wallace doesn't disappoint us with his anecdotal accounts of those past events and insights into what happened at the interviews, offering the reader what might be called informal history. He lets us in on the unforeseen incidents that were part of his interviews with world leaders like the Ayatollah Khomeini, Menachim Begin, Anwar Sadat, the Shah of Iran, and here at home, top people in politics and the arts, from U.S. presidents to Vladimir Horowitz and Johnny Carson.

Wallace reveals the idiosyncracies of the famous and infamous and the problems they presented before, during and after the interviews with them. He also supplies salient excerpts of actual dialogue from the interviews, which helps increase our understanding of his subjects.

Still, with all its intriguing bits and pieces, *Close Encounters* could have been a better book. The main problem is that Wallace tells us only half the story; the other half is written by Gary Paul Gates: each writes alternating chapters, so that the narrative changes between first and third person throughout the book. It's a distracting device for the reader, who with every chapter unconsciously feels a need to shift gears.

Why did Wallace choose to write his story this way? I can only guess that the format provided him with an easy way out of issues and subjects he did not want

to deal with, not to mention the embarrassment of self-praise. And there's a lot of that here, although only in Gates' chapters. When not quoting endorsements for Wallace from colleagues ("We've all learned from Mike, no question of that," says Dan Rather), some of the Gates' chapters make Wallace sound as if he were the Superman of journalism. This, for example, about *60 Minutes*:

With Wallace and his team of producers leading the way the program evolved into a television descendant of the muckrakers, that vigorous breed of reformers who brought a rare combination of courage, diligence and moral passion to the craft of journalism back in the early 1900's. . .their (the Wallace team's) vigilance and probing served the best interests of the commonweal.

Probably Wallace would not have been able to say such a thing about himself without causing the reader to experience some distaste. But he obviously believes it, or he wouldn't have approved of Gates writing it, along with a few other matters for which Wallace obviously preferred to play ostrich.

As a result, the Gates chapters are not as interesting as Wallace's. The book comes alive when written in the first person; it bogs down in the third-person chapters—more because of the subject matter than Gates' writing ability. With a notable exception: there is intriguing candor in Gates' writing about relationships between Wallace and his colleagues and superiors at CBS News. No punches are pulled, for example, in accounts of open hostility between Wallace and Morley Safer. Wallace is said to have favored Safer as Harry Reasoner's replacement when the latter moved to ABC early in the seventies.

"But as time went on and it became more and more evident that Wallace was perceived as the star of *60 Minutes*," reports Gates, "an element of strain began to infect their relationship. Many years

later, in 1981, Wallace asked Safer to drop plans to do a story on Haiti because it might prove embarrassing to his wife's family, who live there and have real estate holdings there."

As a result, the friction between them became aggravated and "the two correspondents would go several months without speaking to each other—except in the line of duty." Eventually, they became friends.

There is an equally blunt account of Wallace's reaction to former CBS News president Van Gordon Sauter when he announced an in-house investigation of charges against *The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception* in the Gen. William C. Westmoreland case, after a *TV Guide* article charged irregularities in the CBS Reports documentary, for which Wallace was the narrator.

"Conspicuous by its absence was a statement of support for the documentary," writes Gates, adding that by "making a big deal in public about the internal investigation he ordered, Sauter transformed a minor irritation—the *TV Guide* article—into a major cause célèbre, which, in turn, helped provoke the acrimonious libel suit that followed."

Through Gates, Wallace presents spirited and convincing arguments against the Westmoreland charges, facing the criticisms head on and, in a couple of instances, admitting regrets about production decisions made for the documentary. Otherwise, Wallace stands fully behind the Vietnam program.*

Letting Gates handle internal problems at CBS gives Wallace an out of sorts. Wallace is not as meticulous, however, on the subject of reportorial objectivity. One reads in the Wallace chapters such allegiances to impartiality as "I was a reporter, nothing more" and "None of this has anything at all to do with my professional responsibility."

* The CBS/Westmoreland case was still in court at the time this magazine went to press.

But then Gates devotes much space to Wallace's opinions on a number of fronts. Vietnam, for example: "He had come to Vietnam as a hawk." . . . "By 1967, he had come to regard Vietnam as a tragic waste of lives and resources." The Middle East: "He was staunchly pro-Israel." Richard M. Nixon: "They did regard me—quite accurately—as one of the few reporters who did not carry a grudge against Nixon and who was, if fact, generally sympathetic to him."

Strangely enough, Wallace exhibits pride over the fact that he had "never succumbed to the Kennedy mystique" and yet he makes no attempt to hide the fact that he was, in his own words, an "apologist" for Nixon. During Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign, he even went so far as to arrange for the candidate to make a speech at a small CBS News luncheon. Wallace evidently wanted some of his skeptical colleagues, among them Eric Sevareid, Roger Mudd and Dan Rather, to see "the new Nixon" in person and judge for themselves. Journalistic objectivity?

All this is pointed out not in criticism but to focus on the improbability of reporting that is totally free of bias. Until news jobs are given to unfeeling robots, there really can be no such thing. For, as humans, we nurture certain built-in attitudes and prejudices about people, places and philosophies, and these do have a way of influencing news reports in print and in TV. Our biases also become apparent in the placement of stories, how much time or space is allotted to them, how we tell the stories and the parts we leave out.

So when Mike Wallace proclaims his objectivity, he is saying something all journalists profess to have, but never really achieve in its purest form—and not because of any plan or conspiracy but because of limitations, some of which are inherent in the media, others which are forced upon us. But I do find myself agreeing with Wallace in his explanation as to why TV news often must

approach its material in its own way:

There's no denying that we go after the most articulate, the most persuasive, the most villainous and the most heroic figures we can find to people our stories. For we have learned, through trial and error over the years, that the most effective way to deal with complex subjects—like chemical warfare, the insanity plea, new economic theories or the question of safety in nuclear power plants—is to place them in the context of graphic and compelling stories, stories told engrossingly by the participants, the people who have first-hand knowledge of the tale we're telling. If that's showbiz, then so be it."

The unprecedented success of *60 Minutes* is the most convincing argument for Wallace's position. More than any other news magazine show in TV history, *60 Minutes* has consistently delivered features that are purebred products of electronic journalism. It has been the only program of its kind to rid itself of traditions and conventions imposed by the print media. Television cannot—and should not—attempt to cover a story the way *The New York Times* does; it's not *The New York Times*. Television news needs a style of its own, and *60 Minutes* has done more than others to build an identity.

Although sometimes, in its zeal *60 Minutes* has relied on controversial procedures, such as the ambush or confrontation journalism, engrossing television does result from confronting an unsuspecting miscreant with evidence of his illegal activities. And Mike Wallace did this better than anyone else. But public opinion has discouraged further resorting to the practice of ambush interviews, and I'm glad. There is something innately cruel about it.

In perspective, Mike Wallace stands out as television's own, and his achievements demonstrate that it's not necessary to have started in what used to be

called the newspaper game. He's a product of the electronic media, and all those early years of knocking around radio and TV, the minor leagues to majors, have developed special skills that make him uniquely a television reporter.

It's curious: a newspaperman who starts out as a gofer (they used to call them copyboys) somehow is still considered—by newspapermen—to have had a glamorous and useful background. Because the youthful Wallace began as an announcer, quizmaster, and jack-of-all-broadcasting-trades, some critics have put him down. The prejudices of oldline newspaper guys and journalism pros die hard.

Until recently, TV reporters and editors usually were expected to have had newspaper training. (Anchor people . . . well, that's another story.) Now TV has demonstrated that it can grow its own, and a young generation of talented TV news men and women finally is coming into its own. As kids, they grew up with the medium, and they are at home with it; the best of them, few as they still may be, are beginning to develop journalism that is focused not only on skill with words, but with sight and sound.

I wish Mike had given us more about the old days when he was learning his craft in Chicago and later New York, when two scrappy independent Manhattan stations, WNEW-TV and WNTA-TV, built exciting local news programs around Wallace that, for their time, were far ahead of the stodgy local news shows of the network affiliates. More remembrance of things past in TV's neglected early history would give his book some needed lightness. Perhaps it could have softened the tough Mike Wallace image. But obviously that's not what he wants.

Asked what he would like to choose for an epitaph, Wallace once said he could think of no finer tribute for the kind of work he's tried to do than to have it said about him: "Tough—but fair." ■

BLACKS AND WHITE TV: AFRO-AMERICANS IN TELEVISION SINCE 1948

by J. Fred MacDonald

Nelson-Hall, Chicago

\$11.95 paperback, \$23.95 hardcover

BY MARY ANN WATSON

More than two decades after television journalism forced the civil rights movement on to our national agenda, many black Americans claim the television industry has turned its back on minority progress. While the visibility of black characters has improved, image continues to be troublesome. Content analysis of prime time television indicates that even the 1980's blacks are most likely to appear on TV in roles subservient to white characters.

Programming which attempts to reflect honestly the richness and uniqueness of the black experience in America is virtually non-existent. It is surely a crisis situation for black performers and scriptwriters. But the misfortune is one we all share. The absence of positive role models, black men and women who succeed in the world because of their own intelligence and resourcefulness, hurts just as deeply as the presence of age-old stereotypes.

Why has the television industry ignored its potential to promote racial understanding through the power of entertainment? It's a long, sad story, and J. Fred MacDonald tells it well in *Blacks and White TV: Afro-Americans in Television since 1948*.

Since television history is rarely written by historians, this book is special. MacDonald, a professor of history, examines the relationship of the race and the medium in a political as well as a social context.

Mary Ann Watson is on the faculty of the Department of Communication at the University of Michigan.

The book is divided into three major sections. The first entitled "The Promise Denied", covers the period from the introduction of television in the late 1940's through the late 1950's, a time when many black performers appeared on television because it had such a voracious appetite for talent. There were hopes that Americans would develop color-blindness as a result.

The popular variety show format like Ed Sullivan's *Toast of the Town* was an important outlet for black entertainers. The liberal spirit of post-war America contributed to a greater acceptance of black musicians, dancers, and singers across the country. Dramatic portrayals of blacks, however, continued to spring from a tradition of prejudice.

Mammies and butlers were already familiar figures in other forms of popular entertainment, from which television borrowed heavily. The Negro domestic became a key character in the situation comedy genre. MacDonald offers detailed descriptions of the programs he cites as examples, such as the classic maid show *Beulah*. The inclusion of actual dialogue and photographs helps the reader better understand the true nature of these programs.

MacDonald's assessment of the *Amos'n'Andy* controversy takes an interesting turn. He summarizes the NAACP objections, yet he points out the show's redeeming features. Many episodes involved family loyalty, and characters often expressed genuine affection for each other. In the annual Christmas show, for example, Andy works as a department store Santa to earn the money to buy his goddaughter a beautiful black doll. Such display of emotion, MacDonald writes, "was never part of the minstrel show tradition".

The dozens of live studio dramas produced by the networks each month in the mid-1950's could have been the most natural and effective vehicle for stories based on minority themes. It was in drama, however, that the pressure not to offend Southern sensibilities was most keenly felt. MacDonald reviews the

disgraceful ways in which the networks accommodated the sponsors' fears of consumer boycotts. One black actor was told by an advertising executive representing Pillsbury, for example, that the company would be hurt if its product became known as "nigger flour".

The second section of *Blacks and White TV* covers the period from the late 1950's through 1970—an era of tremendous change in racial attitudes. As program production costs escalated and the structure of television sponsorship changed, advertisers wielded less power over program content. The medium was slowly beginning to challenge, rather than contribute, to Southern traditions.

In the early 1960's the growing economic power of black consumers coupled with the Kennedy administration's demands for an end to the "vast wasteland", created the right climate for dramatic series to incorporate stories built around black issues. MacDonald notes the 1963-64 season stands out in this regard. *Ben Casey*, *The Defenders*, and *Mr. Novak* were among the many series to include at least one racial story. And the epitome of this period's socially relevant series was *East Side/West Side* starring George C. Scott and Cicely Tyson. MacDonald, whose research was clearly extensive, provides episode titles, guest performers and a brief plot synopsis for each illustrative show.

By the second half of the 1960's, entertainment television was regularly reflecting the cultural changes brought about by the civil rights movement. No longer limited to guest appearances or servant roles, black performers were lead players in dozens of prime time series. *I Spy*, co-starring Bill Cosby and Robert Culp, premiered in 1965 and began what MacDonald calls the "Golden Age" for blacks in American television. But it was not to be long lived.

The five year period from 1965 through 1970 was a traumatic time in American history. MacDonald is at his best evaluating the medium's performance during this era. He is as analytical as he is descriptive.

Black portrayals, of course, were not flawless during the "Golden Age". White writers created middle class blacks, such as the title character in the controversial series *Julia*. MacDonald offers insightful criticism of these series. He also relates the themes of several shows to the growing fear of black militancy in American culture.

However imperfect the attempts to encourage social reform were in the late 1960's, television held the best promise for success. But, according to MacDonald, Nixon's election to the presidency in 1968 began to reverse the trend. An anti-black backlash gained validity in the phrase "The Silent Majority".

The book's final chapter, "The Age of the New Minstrelsy, 1970—Present," is provocative and depressing. Spiro Agnew's infamous attack on the mass media had an intimidating effect on entertainment television as well as TV news. Social drama lost its appeal to program producers. Comedy dominated prime time.

Flip Wilson found enormous success with self-deprecating humor and a repertoire of characters based on demeaning stereotypes, and MacDonald writes about this development with respect for Wilson's talents, but sadness over the way he chose to use them. For some, it became "a mark of fashionable outspokenness" to deliver bigoted slurs. "Wilson reached back to an earlier time," the author says, "and reviewed many of the pejorative clichés associated with a less sensitive time in American history".

With *All in the Family* Norman Lear and Bud Yorkin created a comedic formula in the early 1970's that generated more employment and exposure for black performers. But *The Jeffersons*, *Sanford and Son*, and *Good Times*, in MacDonald's view, did not represent true progress. "Here was the coon character," he contends, "that rascalish, loud, pushy and conniving stereotype."

Many hoped the *Roots* phenomenon of 1977 would signal a change in direction for blacks on television. The impressive mini-series was not a catalyst for a new

"Golden Age", however. It was an exception, whose success likely stemmed from the fact it was well-produced soap opera, rather than a desire to educate ourselves about the history of slavery. MacDonald examines the story lines of both *Roots* and *Roots: The Next Generations* and concludes they were designed to be "unthreatening to white audiences".

As the 1970's came to a close, prejudicial stereotypes flourished on commercial television, from the ever-smiling black bartender on *The Love Boat* to the wheeler-dealer child-deserting father on *Baby, I'm Back*. MacDonald gives several examples of the networks' lack of willingness to stand by impressive programs which featured blacks in positive roles. Most notably among these was *Paris*, starring James Earl Jones as Woody Paris, a police captain and university instructor. CBS cancelled the series, produced by MTM Enterprises, after only eleven episodes.

At the moment, the prospect for a new "Golden Age" looks very bleak. Today's most popular TV blacks are those with the appeal of side show attractions—the freakish Mr. T, the impish Emmanuel Lewis, and the enormous, boisterous Nell Carter.

MacDonald closes his book with a half-hearted look to the future. Perhaps, he hopes, new video technology will change things for the better. Perhaps greater minority involvement in broadcast management will. Perhaps.

Blacks and White TV is an important contribution to the study of our national video heritage—a heritage which has enriched and inspired at the same time it has caused pain. Commercial television's lack of initiative in promoting racial equality is a tragic aspect of contemporary American life.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA/A GUIDE TO TRENDS IN BROADCASTING AND NEWER TECHNOLOGIES 1920-1983

by Christopher H. Sterling

*Praeger, New York: \$34.95 hardcover,
\$17.95 paperback*

BY RONALD SIMON

Numbers have been a mainstay of the broadcasting industry since the days of the crystal set. Whether expressing markets, advertising rates, or average daily use, statistical information has been compiled by an array of industry concerns, federal agencies and private researchers. Christopher H. Sterling has collected more than 150 numerical tables with short interpretations in his formidable new reference work, *Electronic Media/A Guide to Trends in Broadcasting and Newer Technologies 1920-1983*. The numbers offer valuable insights into the evolution of media ownership and economics as well as the changing landscape of programming developments and audience patterns.

Sterling is director of the center for Telecommunications Studies at George Washington University. This new work is a revision of *Mass Media: The Aspen Institute Guide to Communication Industry Trends*, published in 1978.

Sterling has expanded the section on pay systems and included a new chapter on regulation. Sterling has also updated charts on the growth, ownership, training, audience characteristics and international trade of the electronic media.

One of the major trends documented is the tremendous concentration of group ownership in commercial television. During the early sixties less than 50 percent of the stations were group controlled. As fewer new stations were

Ronald Simon is curator of the Museum of Broadcasting.

established and the sales of older channels increased, the figure now approaches 75 percent. A more recent phenomenon is communication companies whose reach extends to other media. Presently, there are over 15 firms who are leaders in two or more media. Ironically, Sterling's book is published by a division of CBS Inc.

The tables also belie commonly accepted notions. The precipitous decline of S.A.T. scores among high school students has been attributed to excessive television watching throughout childhood. According to the Nielsen Television Index, there has been a steady decline of children watching television for the last 30 years. In five of six day-parts, there is less than half the children viewership than there was in 1955. In fact, the major increase has been men watching television prior to prime-time.

Sterling warns that efforts in collecting information may be hampered in the future. Government cutbacks have made federal agencies less active as data gatherers and compilers. Deregulation has also caused the gathering of less concrete information for the new delivery systems such as cable and pay television, than the older services. Let us hope that Sterling's admirable service may be updated in another five years.

SUPERTUBE: THE RISE OF TV SPORTS

by Ron Powers

Coward-McCann, New York.

\$16.95

BY DAVE BERKMAN

There have been three outstanding books about television: Erik Barnouw's *Image Empire* for its scholarship, insights and definitiveness; Les Brown's *Television: The Business Behind the Box* for its significance and timeli-

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ness beyond the specific events with which it deals; and Ron Powers' *The Newscasters* for its cogency, and the resulting, positive impact it had on the problem it described.

That first of Powers' two books to examine an area of TV programming, was important because it was so accurate in the critical judgements it rendered of its subject, the state of television news—especially at the local level. Many embarrassed TV news directors suddenly recalled that the "news" in their job titles was at least equal in importance to the "TV," and there resulted an almost immediate—if eventually only temporary—deceleration in the 'happy talk' and other cosmetic debasements of television news.

In *Supertube*, Powers appears to be completely caught up in what he perceives as the overwhelming awesomeness of the lash-up between television and sports, and the synergistic outcomes of that combination. The result is a preoccupation with creating a rhetoric which itself matches the scope and magnificence he imagines in the phenomenon he is describing. Everything else—especially judgement—seems to suffer.

Case in point: his description of how Roone Arledge took charge of the very first sports event he produced for ABC, a college football telecast in 1960:

It was as though Arledge stood at the control of some private spacecraft. . . . It was an otherworldly performance. . . . When it was over, every man in the ABC truck that day knew he had been looking at the future.

The only event which ever took place in a collegiate athletic setting to merit prose like this, was when Enrico Fermi created the first controlled, atomic chain reaction, in a laboratory located under the stands of the University of Chicago's Stagg Field, in 1942, and began the Atomic Age.

Just because CBS or NBC (and soon, ABC) in alternate years assures us that the next Super Bowl will be a battle never-

to-be-forgotten, does not mean that someone as perceptive as Powers, should lose all critical detachment and accept that this is literally the case. Even Super Bowl III, when Joe Namath and the New York Jets destroyed the myth of NFL invincibility, wasn't quite up there with Hastings, The Plains of Abrahams, Waterloo, or Stalingrad.

Powers has been co-opted by his subject. Whereas what he should have given us was a book which provides a valuable history, and a critical exploration of the significance, of the merger between TV and sports, what we end up with is a work which becomes ludicrous in its attempts to elevate the evolution of televised athletics into a phenomenon of mythic proportions. (Indeed, this tone is set in the book's opening sentence, when Powers asks, "What would Zeus have made of Los Angeles in 1984?")

Obviously, TV sports does have significance: for television; for sports; and for those of us who spend large numbers of hours watching televised athletic events. But Powers overstates the first, is inadequate in his treatment of the second, and virtually ignores the third.

For example, he tantalizes us when he makes the following allusion to what many feel is the major sociopolitical function which televised sports has played—as refuge and re-assurer for those unable to deal with the social, and political, counter-cultural manifestations which originated in the '60s:

TV sports became a kind of psychic refuge for millions of Americans, a way of numbing themselves to the horrible convulsions that threatened to disintegrate society as they understood it. At the same time, TV sports provided Americans the pretext of engaging their hopes in something real, something vital, something collective and large . . . and emblematic of the status quo.

Here was a chapter. It got a page.

There are at least two occasions in *Supertube* where Powers is so caught up

in his "gee-whizisms," that he ends up contradicting himself. "DuMont," he states, "carried television's first prime-time football telecasts in 1953 and 1954." But later on, he tells us that DuMont was telecasting night games of the Dan Topping-owned, NFL, Brooklyn Dodger team—which became the All-American Conference's New York Yankees at the end of World War II. I remember watching evening telecasts of the All-America Conference Dodger franchise, as a kid back in the fall of '47.

On page 205, he states that ABC had to fly its films of the '64 Innsbruck Winter Olympics back to the States for broadcast, because while "Communication satellites were in orbit by 1964, . . . they were not yet synchronized with the earth's rotation to provide a continuous . . . signal." On page 206, however, he writes—this time, accurately—that "Early Bird, the first synchronous satellite, had been locked in orbit above the Earth since 1963."

Anyone writing about TV should know that if a TV image did, in fact, only "shift . . . at the rate of once very fifteenth of a second," then both television and silent films would be known as "flickers." An American TV image provides 60 interlaced fields, and 30 complete frames, per second.

But, then, given that this error occurred in the following paragraph of McLuhanistic pseudo-profundity, one can understand why concern for fact came in second. Clearly dominant was a concern with achieving rhetorical flights of fantasy into perilously thin atmospheres of language:

*As a medium, television (along with radio) uniquely retains no trace of a past. On its flat screen, the field of electromagnetic dots, shifting at the rate of once very fifteenth of a second, is constantly rearranging itself into a new time-present. *Roone Arledge*—whose own *freckled face and penchant for polka-dotted shirts and ties imitate that field to an almost satirical degree—may well have grasped, at some point, that television**

in its own way stands outside time. Especially "linear" time and the accumulation of cultural values that have accrued to linear time.



If one brings to his or her reading of *Supertube* the detachment which Powers failed to provide in its writing, there is a lot of material—especially the historical—that is both fascinating and fun to read:

- How Gillette achieved its virtual monopoly over televised sports in the medium's early years through the machinations of the earliest of Powers' patheon of sportsvideo heroes, Gillette's advertising head, A. Craig Smith. (Although, one has to question whether Smith's 1939 signing of an exclusive sponsor-contract for radio broadcast of the World Series, quite constituted "a business deal that would alter the social habits and articulate the folk values of his country for the last half of the twentieth century.")
- The rise (and, in the case of the latter, the decline) of those two early, behind-the-mike greats, Red Barber and Mel Allen. But one has to wonder why Powers makes allusions to mysterious and allegedly aberrant behaviors by Allen toward the end of his New York Yankee years, when these are dropped as suddenly as they are raised, with no explanations provided. The result is that the reader is left with what comes across as a *National Enquirer*-like, cheap shot.
- The financial achievements of NFL Commissioner, Pete Rozelle, whose masterful playing-off of the three networks against each other, has multiplied their contributions to the League's coffers 160-fold in just 20 years.
- What is the one, truly incredible success story in this book—that of Howard Cosell. Just how many of us in our mid-'30s, and with a speech pattern which leaves no doubts of its Brooklyn origins, would embark on a career as a sportscaster and commentator in a field where,

even in New York City, its two greatest successes had Southern accents?

- The aloof attitudes and practices of CBS and NBC toward sports during the early years of television, which practically gave ABC its ascendancy in this realm by default. How ABC won the '60-61 NCAA football contract by a pure 'psych-out' of the gentlemanly competition, makes for some of the book's better reading.

Most of all, there is Roone Arledge—the of the mobile unit's flight deck, back there in 1960, "looking at the future."

Let's accept that Roone Arledge is good—as television executives go, outstanding. After all, it was Arledge who took what was not even the third—but more like the "two-and-a-half"—network, and propelled it to the top in one realm of programming years before ABC could claim it was a legitimate third chain. I'll even concede that Arledge occasionally displays what, in the realm of corporate television, constitutes integrity. (How many of those who've criticized Arledge in his other domain, as president of ABC's News Division, have stopped to notice that it is the ABC prime-time *Evening News* which, for all of its alleged hyper-graphic concern with going-only-for-the-numbers, has consistently provided the most, and the most serious, coverage of foreign affairs?)

Yet, as I write this thinking back on the excessive rhetoric about Arledge, why is it that the summary impression of ABC's sports head that I'm left with, is that Arledge's videosports genius, stripped to its bare essentials, was little more than to cut away from the playing field to show side-line close-ups of emotionally-drained players, and medium shots of pretty bossomy women? And, given such technical advances as portable cameras, fast re-wind VTRs, and the unlimited special effects which microchip circuitry makes possible, is Powers implying that without an Arledge to show it the way, TV sports would

have continued to cut between three cameras pointing at the field from high atop the stands, and never tried anything more?

Here is a litany of representative quotes:

- Powers introduces us to Arledge, as "A man prodigiously equipped to exploit his particular moment in time, . . . [who] created a unified and fundamental theory of television itself."
- Arledge takes on characteristics of deification when we are told by Powers, that his "entree into the medium was consistent with his reputation as a sort of a Messiah."
- A rather commonplace put-down of Howard Cosell by Arledge at a staff meeting, is cited by Powers as an example of the former's "Algonquin Round Table-like skill at deflating with the well chosen mot."
- A memo Arledge wrote early in his career at ABC Sports outlining his ideas about how TV must do more than just gaze at the playing field, so that instead "of bringing the game to the viewer—now we are going to take the viewer to the game," is introduced by Powers as encompassing "a completeness that almost approaches a tableau in a John dos Passos novel."

Such are the excesses of a book flawed by excess.

And also by omissions:

- What did the increasing popularity of televised sports during the so-called '60s revolution, have to tell us about an America which, anyone looking elsewhere on TV could never have imagined 12 years later would elect a Ronald Reagan as President?
- What are the reasons and the implications—especially for youthful male audiences—of the increasing share of televised sports advertising-time bought by alcohol beverage makers?
- Why not a mention of what may be one of the *legitimate* significances of vide sports—at least on the playing fields,

and thus in our living rooms (if not in the management suites of the franchises, the leagues, or the network sports division)—a consistent presence of Blacks in what is that one realm of contemporary America where they have achieved a status somewhere between parity and superiority?

- What are the effects, often TV-motivated, and frequently racist as well, when large central cities lose their unifying symbol of a major league team due to a franchise shift? It is no accident that it has been mainly in those cities where Blacks dominate, or soon will come to, that teams pick up and leave, as did baseball clubs in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Washington, D.C., and football teams in the Bronx, Oakland, and now in Baltimore.

As Powers notes in his concluding chapter,

Television rules American sports utterly; there is no contemplation of sports that is not bounded by an imaginary frame, the soft-cornered rectangle that contains the flat cathode field, the true playing field of sports now.

This is a thesis with which one cannot argue.

Entertainment television, however, not television sports, dominates two-thirds of American living rooms in prime time (even on fall Monday evenings). And it is a TV-dominated *politics* which has so profoundly influenced the American electoral process. In other words, it is television—and only in small part, television sports—which dominates.

Thus, while the inevitable melding of sports and television may have more than mere passing significance, in no way does it constitute the majestically mythical manifestation which Powers' rhetorical excesses imply.

CAREERS IN CABLE TV

by **Jon S. Denny**

Barnes & Noble Books (A Division of Harper & Row), New York, \$7.95

TELEVISION WRITING

by **Richard A. Blum**

Focal Press, Boston

BY FRITZ JACOBI

With the possible exception of certain splendid cookbooks, one or two woodworking manuals and some indoor-gardening tomes, how-to-do-it books tend to promise a lot more than they deliver. Such an effort, I'm afraid, is *Careers in Cable TV*, by Jon S. Denny, an alumnus of the Turner empire who now heads an independent cable-television production company. On the other hand, there is an impressively helpful surprise in *Television Writing*, by Richard A. Blum, an experienced practitioner as well as a scholar.

First the bad news. *Careers in Cable TV* is subtitled "A complete guide to getting a job—from receptionist to producer—in America's fastest growing entertainment industry." Anyone who plunks down \$7.95 in the fond hope of finding out how to do this must wade through a welter of rambling and discursive historical and anecdotal background information before gleaning a scintilla of knowledge about how to get a job in cable TV. Granted that the neophyte can benefit from an understanding of the genesis, growth and development of cable, still the manner in which Mr. Denny's information is (or is not) organized makes it a confusing jumble for anyone eager to learn the ropes.

Fritz Jacobi, who has been observing the television scene for nearly 35 years, is Director of Public Affairs for Columbia Business School.

In his acknowledgements the author offers "a major bow" to his editors. I'm inclined to think that either they never saw the manuscript or else they exerted such a light editorial hand as to be guilty of criminal neglect. It is my firm belief that an editor has a responsibility to help an author who is not a professional writer with his language and his structure. In fact the book reads as if it had been slung together by a breathless, semiliterate press agent who mixes metaphors in a Cuisinart.

For example: "How do I get into cable TV?" That's a question that has been put to me a dozen or more times, by warm bodies and bright minds interested in slicing of a piece of the video pie." Or this: "We had conceived of a show called 'The John in Society,' and felt that the time was right for a visual inquisition" (he means "investigation"). And this: "Her show seeks out the rich and powerful for interviews, usually in discos and other glittery and insouciant (sic) spots."

The book also abounds with lapses of taste, as if the author couldn't bear to eliminate a single quote from any of his tape-recorded interviews, no matter how scatological.

Far more inexcusable, however, is the complete lack of information about qualifications required for specific jobs which the author describes. While he does report on the background of certain individuals whom he has interviewed, each one is a special case. No clue is given about the education, training or experience necessary for the vast majority of jobs listed in this book about how to get a job in cable TV.

From accountant to trunk technician, the author describes what these people do but not what they must know to get the job. He also provides a ridiculously loose salary estimates (a system manager, for example can earn from \$25,000 to \$75,000 a year, with equally broad ranges for more mundane jobs). The author makes no mention of union imperatives. He interviews some individuals with high profiles, but while these stories may be marginally interesting as

interviews they are really not useful to the job seeker.

Nearly 200 pages into the book, which totals 237 pages of text (the rest is glossary and appendix), we find some useful advice: where to learn about cable television at various institutions of higher education and how to go about looking for a job. These two chapters are solid, meaty, authoritative, and so different from the rest of the book as to seem to have been written by somebody else.

This is not a good book and that's a pity. Some of the anecdotal material is fun, it's clear that the author worked mightily to put this guide together and it's also clear that he has an abiding enthusiasm for cable television. He just needed more editorial assistance.

The good news is that *Television Writing—From Concept to Contract* is a realistic, logically organized, thoroughly researched and crisply written guide to an enormously complex discipline. The advice the author gives appears to be accurate and reliable.



Richard A. Blum teaches film and TV writing for the American Film Institute. He has served as senior executive producer for Rainbow Programming, a cable outfit, as program officer for the National Endowment for the Humanities and as a writer-producer for Columbia Pictures TV.

Dr. Blum divides his book into four parts: program proposals and series presentations; story and character development, the script; and marketing. In each segment he provides such nuts-and-bolts information as how to write a proposal, what are the acceptable formats, how to interest a packager in a variety special or a quiz show, how to navigate the turbid waters of public television and its funding agencies.

He shows how to develop a story line, defines "action points," plots the course of audience interest in a given script, and does not neglect to remind the tyro that in the process of adapting literary

works for television, he/she should be certain to investigate the copyright situation thoroughly before blocking out a filmic approach.

As a good teacher, Dr. Blum illustrates the difference between episodic and epic writing, gives examples of character development, and defines "The Method," an American adaptation of the Stanislavski system of acting, a section I found particularly fascinating.

And the author displays real ingenuity when he combines a sample film script format with instructions on how to write such a script. He also explains why film and videotape demand different script formats. And he goes on to list some realistic checkpoints for script revision: Is it visual? Is it produceable or does it call for \$35-million worth of sets, period costumes and worldwide locations? Is the story focused and well developed?

In eight pages on marketing Dr. Blum succinctly provides a more vivid and informative view of cable television than Mr. Denny does in 198 pages. He shows why cultural cable failed. He even gives realistic advice on how a writer can get an agent (I should know: I'm married to one).

For an aspiring script writer or a professional who has never before assaulted the ramparts of television, broadcast or cable, *Television Writing* must be a useful and helpful guide. A nagging question, however, remains: can one really find a job or sell a script by reading a book?

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