

TV Quarterly
Summer 1973

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THE JOURNAL OF THE
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
TELEVISION ARTS
AND SCIENCES

ROBERT SAM ANSON * BURTON BENJAMIN * ZELDA FICHANDLER
WILLIAM HILLIER * JOHN HOUSEMAN * ROBERT W. SARNOFF
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Television Quarterly
1972

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TELEVISION ARTS AND SCIENCES

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TELEVISION QUARTERLY

SUMMER, 1973 VOL. X NO. 4

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GLANCING BACK . . . LOOKING FORWARD

With this issue, *Television Quarterly* rounds out the first season under its new lease on life. To all whose words have graced our pages, we extend thanks.

In television, the season just ended offered some hours of excellence and nourished high hopes for the future.

Television drama moved to reclaim some of the impact and distinction which marked its early years. Memorable evenings included the ABC Theatre's *Pueblo* and *The Man Without a Country*. Also notable were *That Certain Summer* and *A Brand New Life* on Movie of the Week. All had quality, all coped with tough risky themes. More important, all the entertainments prompted discussion and debate beyond the moment of viewing.

All in the Family, risking the ennui bred of over-familiarity, continued to demonstrate that good comedy can be good business. The caterwauling over *Maude's* abortion dented the notion that you must please all the people all the time.

Norman Lear, the Grand Vizier of producers this year, addressing the IRTS in New York this spring, aimed a nudge in the right direction when he urged network executives, "Continue to trust us, and continue to trust yourselves. Please don't retreat back into that corporate monolith known as The Network. Don't look for answers by testing audiences, strapping a group of strangers into seats and giving them dials to turn and switches to flick. Don't think you can turn ten housewives, three plumbers, eleven business men and a hooker who lied and said she was a nurse into one big fool-proof John J. O'Connor. Stick with us . . . stick with yourselves."

In sum, program research should be the servant, not the master of the creative process. One of William Paley's hunches may be sounder than six months of graphs, charts and audience testing with "boredom switches."

In the season now ended, television's news and documentaries continued to merit the word "distinguished." The televising of this year's Academy Awards in the news field was novel and memorable. Commentators may not be dazzling entertainers but the method of awarding the Emmys was the most efficient and

the most effective ever seen on the home screen. Let other prize-giving shows take note.

The drama of this year's political scene appears to have quickened television's zest for investigative journalism. It's a quickening long overdue. ABC has announced it will budget twelve shows in this area next season.

The tangled and bitter quarrel between the Commission for Public Broadcasting and the Public Broadcasting Service is finally ended. Now PBS can resume its proper work which is providing audiences with that warmly appreciated "desirable alternative." Thus we shall continue to enjoy *Bill Moyers' Journal*, *Washington Week in Review* and Bill Buckley's grand salons.

And that concludes the good news. The bad news is that we shall still have too few interludes of splendor in the traditional sea of so-so diversion.

News and public affairs still account for only two per cent of the total network program schedule. And, most conspicuous shortcoming of all, we still have no weekly dramatic series dealing with life in America today, with all its complexities.

We need a dramatic series that will give young writers and directors an opportunity to learn by doing. All burgeoning artists need a showcase in which to develop — and occasionally fail.

It was the dearth of drama — drama written and produced especially for television — that prompted the Ford Foundation and the National Council of the Arts to call a convocation in Tarrytown last March. The problems involved in re-structuring traditional television drama for today's audiences are brilliantly set forth in three position papers from that symposium, now, happily, reprinted in this issue of the Quarterly. It is hoped that the specific recommendations of this Tarrytown gathering will be translated, next season, into vivid reality.

— Hubbell Robinson

VERSATILITY at UNIVERSAL

Universal Television is utilizing prime time production know-how for new directions in TV entertainment.



“Emergency + 4,” the studios first animated children’s series will debut this coming season on NBC-TV.



Last season, Universal launched 90-minute live-on-tape mystery dramas for ABC’s Wide World of Entertainment. More of these concepts are on the ’73-74 schedule.

Based upon the success of this late night programming, Universal Television will produce five 90-minute quality dramas for afternoon viewing this Fall on the ABC Television Network.



IN THIS ISSUE . . .

Under the auspices of the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, leading figures in films, the theatre and the television industry were brought together in a two day seminar at Tarrytown, N.Y. this past March to discuss the ways and means of setting up an original dramatic series on Public Television.

Among the participants were: John Houseman, chairman; Hubbell Robinson, TV producer and chairman of the board of Television Quarterly; Gordon Davidson of the Center Theatre Group, Los Angeles; Zelda Fichandler, producing director of the Arena Stage, Washington, D.C.; James Earl Jones, actor; Norman Lloyd of KCET, Los Angeles; Tad Mosel, playwright; Lloyd Richardson, artistic director of the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre Center, Waterford, Conn., Barbara Schultz, former producer of CBS Playhouse; Edwin Sherin, theatre and television director; Saun Sutton, director of Drama Group Television, BBC, London; Jean-Claude van Italie, playwright; Jac Venza, executive producer for drama, WNET, New York.

In the following pages, Television Quarterly is pleased to present the text (edited for publication) of three outstanding papers delivered at the Tarryton symposium by Mr. Houseman, Mrs. Fichandler and Mr. Sutton.

RCA

At RCA, we're concentrating on many areas of opportunity. Like consumer electronics, consumer services, entertainment, as well as communications technology. Areas in which RCA has an active role today and will seek an even greater role tomorrow.

TV DRAMA IN THE U.S.A.

The Great Drought of 1971-1972 and Some Suggestions for Its Relief

By John Houseman

Not since the days of STUDIO ONE and PHILCO PLAYHOUSE has the air been so filled with dramatic excitement . . .

There are two new half hour drama series at CBS and the promise of another exciting year from PLAYHOUSE 90, HALLMARK HALL OF FAME, Dupont's Show of the Month and the various Rexall and Revlon specials . . . Four stories by Ernest Hemingway will be dramatized by CBS; NBC STARTIME and a new Sunday drama series will include star-studded teleplays and David Susskind will release his much-talked-about THE MOON AND SIXPENCE starring Sir Laurence Olivier.

And don't forget the G.E. THEATRE, ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS, THE LORETTA YOUNG SHOW, SHIRLEY TEMPLE'S STORY-BOOK, THE DESILU PLAYHOUSE, ALCOA THEATRE alternating with GOODYEAR THEATRE and ARMSTRONG CIRCLE THEATRE alternating with the U.S. STEEL HOUR.

On September 1959, *TV GUIDE* printed a glowing forecast of the new season's TV-drama. Among the individual attractions promised were: Geraldine Page, Jason Robards, Larry Blyden, John Forsythe, Ralph Bellamy, Arthur Kennedy, Art Carney, Rosalind Russell, Jerry Lewis, Ingrid Bergman, Alec Guinness, Frank Sinatra, Mickey Rooney, James Stewart, George Gobel, Claudette Colbert, Robert Preston, June Allyson, Dick Powell, Julie Harris, Maurice Evans, Thomas Mitchell, Tony Randall and David Wayne.

Writers announced included Archibald MacLeish, Maxwell Anderson, Henrik Ibsen, William Shakespeare, Sinclair Lewis, Rod Serling, Graham Greene, Cervantes, Ernest Hemingway, Philip Barry, Sidney Howard, Pat Frank and Thornton Wilder.

Schedules of the three major networks during that winter show that between three and four hours were devoted each night to TV-drama — a total of

close to thirty hours a week of prime time. A glance at the *New York Times* Sunday television pages during the 1971-1972 season reveals that there were many weeks, last winter, when — outside of P.B.S. stations — there was virtually no drama on the air at all. (By standards that I shall presently try to establish, the assembly-line “series” and most of the special 60 and 90 minute films being made for television do not qualify as TV-drama.)

These are statistical facts. They reveal a profound change in American viewing habits and public taste and though, as usual, it is unclear whether such mutations follow public sentiment or are, in fact, imposed on the public for economic and other reasons by those who control the instruments of communication, it is evident that, for the moment at least, American TV-drama is very close to death.

It is not my intention, in this brief survey, to shed nostalgic tears over the dear, departed days of television drama but, rather, to note its drastic decline in the U.S.A.; to determine what effect this may be having on the cultural and social attitudes of this country’s more than two hundred million inhabitants; finally, to question whether this change of public taste is final and irreversible.

Television drama, as produced by the major networks in the fifties, was the aristocrat of the air-waves, an important element in the TV advertising and a substantial source of revenue for networks and agencies alike. Though its audiences never equalled, in sheer numbers, those of the top quiz and comedy shows, they were large, loyal and involved. Inevitably, the productions were uneven in texture and quality, but they were consistently high in energy — the kind of energy that distinguishes a new medium — some of which could not fail to get through to its audience.

For its creators, TV drama was an exciting and demanding adventure. It was surprisingly free from interference and offered unusual opportunities to the young to express themselves. It gave actors a chance to play a wide range of parts; numerous new writers (freer on the whole than their better-paid colleagues in motion pictures) did their first serious work there before going on to success in other media; directors, in particular, found themselves facing an exciting creative challenge in which precedent and routine experience were of little help.

On one show alone (*Playhouse 90*) there were five or more staff-directors, all in their twenties and all at the beginning of their careers, each of whom ranks today among the top film directors of the world. Around them, on each major network, were gathered expert and competitive production crews, all rigorously trained and all high in morale and the professional courage and imagination required to turn out a full-length TV drama every few days.

Today, like the shows and the audience they created, those producing units have disappeared — scattered and destroyed through lack of use. On those rare occasions when a network, with great fanfare, announces an isolated dramatic ‘special’, the chances are better than even that it will be produced abroad — in Great Britain, Canada, or Continental Europe.

For the decline of TV drama, it must be noted, is primarily an American phenomenon. In England (where, incidentally, radio-drama continues to flourish) it remains a highly prized and creative activity, performed by Britain’s leading actors, written, produced and directed with conviction and pride and a considerable expenditure of money. This money is apparently well-spent, for the appeal of today’s British TV-drama extends far beyond the confines of the United Kingdom. *The Forsythe Saga*, to cite one single example, has been a smash all over Europe — including the Soviet Union. And its success in the United States has helped, over the past year, to bring about a truly astonishing situation.

Of the TV-drama presently available to the American public, more than half comes over the limited facilities of the Public Broadcasting Service. And of PBS’s dramatic programming for 1971-1972, more than half was imported from England — mostly the product of the British Broadcasting Corporation. If it has filled the vacuum left by the collapse of our native product the reasons are obvious: quality and price.

Even on our Public Broadcasting stations it costs a minimum of around \$150,000 to produce a full-length dramatic show. The rental cost of the British imports runs to less than one tenth of that figure. At that price shrewd, “public spirited” sponsors are not hard to find. This has resulted in the following absurdity: that in this, the richest and most elaborately cultured nation in the world, during one of the most critical, challenging and formative periods in history, the only dramatic programs regularly available to its citizens, week after week, were concerned with —

1. The marital affairs of an English monarch of the early sixteenth century.
2. The personal and political crises in the life of his daughter — Queen Elizabeth of England.
3. The Court intrigues surrounding the rise and fall of a British general and his wife two and a half centuries ago.
4. The emotional and financial vicissitudes of an English middle-class family of the late-Victorian and Edwardian era.

Add to these a number of English, French and Russian classics, performed in English accents from an entirely British point of view. The fact that these shows were well-written, excellently directed and beautifully played does not

diminish the absurdity of the situation or lessen the cultural dangers of our new colonialism.

It may be objected that this is a distorted and biased picture and that the American public is, in fact, receiving its dramatic nourishment in other forms. First of these are the countless "series" in which we are invited, each week, to follow complications in the lives of cops, ranchers, lawyers, doctors, fathers, housewives, bigots, private eyes, foreign agents and the like. The truth is that for all their violent action, hysterical emotion, and stereotyped humor, these shows — with few exceptions — hardly qualify as drama: they are cramped, melodramatic, formalized and mechanical, with low credibility and little identification. For all their semblance of realism and relevance they give their audience little to feel or think about.

Second — it could be argued that there *is* drama on the home screen — thousands of hours of it, all day and all night, in the form of old films, most of them better in quality than TV-drama at its best. Unquestionably a million dollar movie has been more lavishly produced, more expensively cast and more smoothly edited than most television shows — thrown together under pressure in a few days for a mere fraction of the average feature-film's original cost.

Still, it is no substitute for TV-drama. Even ignoring the horrors of continuous, brutal interruption, there is a basic difference between a show made or exhibition in a theatre six to twelve months hence and one designed for immediate viewing on the intimacy of a home screen. This was particularly true of "live" television in the fifties: for all its handicaps and imperfections it had a relevance and a directness only rarely found in a theatrical film — especially if the film was made anywhere from five to forty-five years ago.

What, then, exactly, is the nature of my complaint? Why do I grieve over a form of show-business which, by the test of the market place and the rules of supply and demand, is apparently obsolescent? Without indulging in cultural platitudes may I reply that I firmly believe in the value of having a nation live out its personal and collective hopes and anxieties in dramatically reflected projections, and that I feel that the almost total absence of such uninhibited, vicarious experiences on the country's dominant medium of communication is a regrettable and, possibly, a serious thing.

A colleague of mine to whom I described my uneasiness over this deficiency in the American diet sent me the following note of agreement:

"On cultural matters — what happens to young people when there are no dramatic models for them to imitate.

- Not from the Bible
- Not from literature (who reads books these days?)
- Not from extended family or neighborhood relationships

- Not from theatre (inaccessible to most)
- From TV?

Just the image of stimulus response, minute to minute.”

It is this mechanical, shallow, contrived pattern of stimulus-response — both violent and comic — that dominates the airwaves today and provides almost none of that identification, recognition and release that is derived from a vicarious dramatic experience — no matter how simplistic or limited. To this absence may be attributed, I suggest, much of the apparent callousness and indifference with which American TV audiences are accused of viewing the most harrowing and distressing scenes of disaster and suffering — so long as they take place outside the range of their own immediate perception.

I suggest further — though I would have difficulty in proving it — that this dearth of dramatic experience is having its effect on other branches of the medium — notably on its handling of the news.

With few exceptions (such as some of the war coverage, certain interviews, and the reporting of the Olympiads, with its combination of technical expertise and well - documented if slightly overdramatized human values) the flat delivery and visual repetitiveness that characterize the formats of most of the nation's leading news shows reveal a dearth of creative imagination among its producers that may have its roots in a lack of experience and an absence of competitive contact with that most demanding and adventurous of television media — the Drama.

Conversely, in its recent demands for more entertaining and colorful personalities on its news shows, may not the American public be expressing its hunger for an empathy of which it is deprived in its current TV-diet?

This raises the question whether, in spite of our admitted current slump, there is any indication in our recent television output that such native dramatic material is available and deserves encouraging? The answer, qualitatively if not quantitatively is of course that it is and does.

I am not a sufficiently assiduous viewer to give anything like a reliable or inclusive list of shows that (by my own admittedly arbitrary standards) seemed to qualify as examples of creative TV-drama. At random, let me cite a few recent shows that have given me pleasure. I found Channel 13's *Paradise Lost* a satisfying evocation of life in the Depression, though it had many of the liabilities inherent in a literal TV-adaptation of a stage play; I was moved, last year, by at least half a dozen “documentaries” about children, the drug-scene, and our shocking treatment of the retarded and the insane.

At the other end of the social and economic scale — in *If A Dream Comes True* the CBS News department made a sensitive and courageous exploration of the emotional situation of a prosperous middle-Western American family that

fully qualified as Drama. *Young, Gifted and Black* with its tenuous biographical thread, seemed to me brilliantly dramatic in conception and performance — far superior to the Off-Broadway theatrical production on which it was based. I found Hollywood's short TV version of *The Bird Bath* dramatic and touching, and I admired its *Shadow of A Gunman*; generally I admire and approve of the Adler-Browning attempts to adapt opera to the limitations of the TV screen.

I found the repeat of NET's multi-part record of the Denver trial and acquittal of a framed black suspect vivid and deeply significant drama; as a juror for the Columbia-Dupont award I got to see a short documentary made by a small Utah station that threw an unforgettable light on the tragic dilemma of the American Indian. I missed ABC's *That Certain Summer* but I was moved to enthusiasm by Channel 13's recent version of that well-worn theatrical property, Anouilh's *Antigone*, which seemed to me to exemplify many of the virtues of imaginatively conceived and professionally executed TV-drama.

From this very partial, arbitrary and personal selection it should be evident that I am favoring no particular form or substance for American TV-drama. Above all, I am asking for energy and variety. The classics are the world's territory — not a British colonial possession — and should not be ignored: there is a vast body of neglected American material available (to mention only Dreiser, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Frank Norris, among so many others) that is every bit as dramatic and far more relevant to our current existence than Galsworthy, Balzac or Wilkie Collins.

Above all there is the churning, changing, violent, sordid and endlessly exciting raw material of our lives in America in the Seventies. For far too long we have been content to leave such human dramas as Kent State, Baton Rouge, and Attica, melodramatic events like the Manson story, the U.M.W. elections, political assassination, the acute problems of life in the ghetto and the effects of the war in Vietnam to the harried and necessarily superficial treatment of the network news departments.

It is my sincere belief that if our writers have, of late, tended to neglect such vital subjects almost entirely (except on the most diluted and cliched "serial" level) it is because they were convinced that no one would put them on the air.

* * *

Assuming, for the moment, that the two main premises of this brief paper are accepted —

A) The present enervated state of the TV-drama in the USA.

B) The possibility of revivifying it along fresh, indigenous lines.

then the question inevitably arises as to WHO is going to create this hoped-for TV-drama and what practical steps can be taken to stimulate and encourage its growth.

It may be assumed that under present conditions, neither the big “institutional” advertisers nor the commercial networks are likely to give the first shove and that the best that can be hoped for from those quarters is some band-wagon-jumping once the wheels have been set to rolling (e.g. some of the present “co-production” deals with B.B.C. and the belated big-time CBS and IBM support of Joseph Papp and his acclaimed Shakespeare Festival Theatre.) A cursory glance at the structure within which the successful BBC dramatic shows are being produced is enough to make writers’, producers’, and actors’ mouths water, but it also makes it evident that the BBC operation bears little relation to our own current television scene.

Nevertheless, three significant facts emerge that should be of some help in considering our own problems: The BBC presents between four and five hundred hours of television-drama each year on its two networks to around fifty percent of the total British viewing population. To handle this output it maintains a vast, permanent producing organization in which programming is elaborately preplanned, balanced between its two networks and constantly reappraised in response to carefully weighted audience analyses. These appraisals take into account not only gross numbers but the relative response to programs at different audience-levels.

The BBC’s comparatively low production costs are not entirely attributable to lower British wage-scales: they have to do with a well-organized production machinery in which physical and human facilities are utilized fully and continuously to fill constant and predictable programming needs. Thus a new show can be absorbed into their smoothly running production structure — much as a new dramatic concept like our own *Playhouse 90* could be absorbed without too much difficulty or disruption into CBS’s efficient and flexible drama production structure of the mid-fifties.

The enormously successful *Civilization* series was cited to me as an example of a wonderfully original notion that might never have been realized without a highly-organized, smoothly functioning, versatile and adaptable producing organization to execute it—an organization that includes among its creative personnel not only technicians, directors and performers, but, above all, writers who, in England, today, continues to look to television as a valuable and reliable outlet for their work—much as our own upcoming playwrights and novelists used to look to Television two decades ago—but no longer can.

I repeat that our conditions are so utterly different that, even on an artistic level, we cannot and should not look to the B.B.C. as our model. How to proceed within the very different, rigid and discouraging commercial set-up that currently dominates our own air-waves is the assignment of our panel. It is my earnest hope that, in our wide-ranging discussions, some altogether new and

original options will be presented. Meantime, may I suggest three obvious lines of thought?

1. Assuming that the necessary impetus must come through Public Service Television—should the funds and the encouragement be concentrated on that small number of major stations that have proved their ability to handle such tricky and difficult undertakings or should some way be found to encourage local production in spite of the overwhelming technical and creative obstacles to the effective small-scale production of TV-drama?

2. In the present climate, can real freedom from censorship (overt or implicit, moral or political) be achieved by Public Service Television? If not, the whole thing is hardly worth trying: if so, what is the nature of the artistic, economic and technical supervision that must be exercised if acceptable standards of quality are to be maintained?

3. Most important: If our brief examination of the B.B.C. structure can teach us anything, it is the artistic and economic value of CONTINUITY. I have been on too many panels and committees in my time where money was allocated with admirable intentions to worthy individual projects—with such limitations of time and money that the objective desired was virtually impossible of achievement. It is one thing to prepare and present a request for a grant—to demonstrate the artistic and social desirability, feasibility and, even, the necessity for a good dramatic anthology about, let us say, Black Life in the U.S.A. or to insist that young American playwrights should be encouraged by having a number of their shows produced under viable, creative conditions. It is a wholly different and far more difficult thing (through trial and error, success and failure) to set up and operate such a project until it becomes artistically and technically secure enough to produce its best potential work. (Such security is particularly difficult to achieve under the benevolent but nervous eyes of the sponsoring organization, subject to possible political pressure and the capricious judgments of helpful but fidgety newspaper critics).

In other words, I am suggesting that our advisory efforts be applied to creating a viable producing structure for TV-drama in the U.S.A. rather than the selection and funding of isolated projects, however attractive.

In selecting the personnel that is to form this structure and help to create the new TV-drama we are hoping for, I trust that those in charge will not overlook two groups that have shown unusual energy and imagination during

the lean years:

1. The documentary-makers who, through this disturbed period in our history, have continued to extract dramatic and significant human values from our social and economic crises.
2. The eager and dedicated men and women (producers, directors, actors and designers) who, over the past decade have moved out of the ruins of centralized, commercial Broadway into the new and fruitful field of popular, regional and community-supported theatre.

Add to these the writers, (not only the established names but also the young) the playwrights, novelists and journalists who have found little or no employment under the media's present hierarchic hiring habits, but who, if helped and encouraged, will find in television drama, as their predecessors did twenty-five years ago, an exciting and satisfying form of creative expression. Between them, and in collaboration with all those other fresh talents that never fail to appear wherever vital dramatic activity is in progress, they may help to infuse energy and emotion into the enervated body of American television.

* * *

JOHN HOUSEMAN has been a major figure in the entertainment world since the 1930's. Co-founder with Orson Welles of the Mercury Theatre (as well as the Mercury Theatre of the Air), he has also been a producer at MGM, a principal contributor to Playhouse 90, and producer of the Seven Lively Arts series. His recent autobiography, "Run-through," has been highly praised by critics, both literary and theatrical.

For the past three years, Mr. Houseman has been artistic director of the Juilliard School of the Dramatic Arts.

* * *

THE HALLMARK HALL OF FAME

returns this fall
for its 23rd season
on NBC TV.

The season includes
a television adaptation of
"Lisa, Bright and Dark"
the moving story
of teenage mental illness
starring
John Forsythe
Anne Baxter
and Kay Lenz as Lisa



SOME THOUGHTS ON TELEVISION AS THEATRE

By Zelda Fichandler

I am prejudiced against television. I am not a television viewer. Even circumventing the edgy question of whether or not television is an art form, let me say that I have a disposition against the circumstances under which television is viewed; the size and scale of the box, the quality of the images and their proportion, the tinny, remote sound, the essentially anti-social ambiance within which even a small, nuclear family looks at a program, the lack of psychic concentration television requires and even fosters, its resemblance to — not even a shadow — but the shadow of a shadow, and the threat it poses as an easily accessible alternative to direct, experiential living and an inexpensive alternative to the living arts. On occasion, I watch television. Since the panel assignment, I have watched it more often than I would have otherwise done, to try to understand it, and my feelings about it more clearly.

But the occasions on which I turn to television are normally rare, indeed. I went through a one month hospital and at-home confinement without once feeling the impulse to reach for the knob. I have trained the kind people at the hotel in New York where I spend at least one night a week not to turn on the TV set with the light switch when they take me to my room. I have dealt through the years of marriage and child-raising with the resentment within myself at the glazed looks of members of my family when they are — so to speak — “absorbed” in front of the screen.

This prejudice is one that I have not fully aired before now. Some years ago I stopped noting it out loud in public places because I could hear with my own ears how high-falutin’ the words seemed. I had already learned the predictable response: that there were many good things on the magic box (to be followed by an enumeration of “But did you see. . .?”), and the futility, in casual conversation, of attempting to explain my own peculiar reservations.

I do realize that television is here to stay, that the task is to utilize it for its maximum potential contribution, that it is the very pin-hinge of many lives, that is a myth-making, culture-creating medium, and that by its very power to be

deadening it requires that an instrument be created that will search out the aliveness within it and cause this aliveness to prevail.

Still I proclaim my personal antipathy. An antipathy that is full-blown and of long standing.

This antipathy, I have concluded, is at one with the rest of me. I prefer to gather my information in direct, experiential ways: through interaction with people; through observation; through the printed word in newspaper and book, sifted and sorted out by me, myself; through tactile and kinetic involvement with the physical world; through deep, intimate conversation with small groups, or preferably one person; through interior silence.

As I have grown older, and perhaps grown up, I have become rather more modest in my attempts to understand the world around me. I want less information and fewer experiences. If I can understand a few instances deeply rather than many instances casually; a few people profoundly rather than more people by name and not by nature; a few issues in all their contours rather than being, in general, "well-read"; if I can be open to receive and synthesize stimuli in such a way that I truly learn, instead of merely pretending to learn, then these are the things I want. In a busy, over-stimulating world, what is authentic for me is an action of limiting and paring down. I have always found television noisy and random. Now, more than ever, I find it a distraction and, more often than not, a timewaster.

Now, the hole in this, of course, is that many people do not feel this about it at all. Some people derive pleasure and information from their television sets. Other people lead lives that are barren of stimuli from which to learn. And without stimuli it is hard, impossible even, to build ego, to build selves.

So I hasten to reinsert here the thought that I realize I must not rest with my own personal prejudices, but only start with them. There may, however, be some kind of message in my feelings and it is with this hope that I track down my thoughts.

My television viewing over the past several weeks, as part of my "assignment" for this panel: I watch with my 16-year-old son the movie *The Blue Angel* with its brooding, poetic overtones and the extravagantly-shaped performances of Marlene Dietrich and Emil Jannings. I had seen the film recently in New York. It is on Channel 26 and there are no interruptions for commercials. There is no one else at home and we view it really together. Mark is interested in why the film is considered "great." I point out the two ends of the Professor's crowing like a cock — once in emotional triumph and once in an explosion of rage and despair. We talk about that element in human nature that prompts to self-liberation and to doom at one and the same time, and about the fact that one can bring harm to someone else even though one loves them. ("I can't help it," sings the fabulous Marlene).

Mark observes that between what we do and what we know we do, there is a long distance. He enjoys the German songs, seeing Dietrich as a girl. He has a good experience and he both enjoys and learns. The next day, he talks about the film again, and several more times. I have seen the film itself. I have a secondary experience. Reminiscent, enjoyed because of sharing it, but thin. The screen is too small, it is out of focus, the visual details are lost, it is all too diluted.

I watch Dietrich's one-woman show, performed in London and filmed at the performance itself. She is fabulous, a humanist, daring to superimpose over the "real" facade portraits of herself at the height of her beauty, tottering somewhat under the weight of the ridiculous, over-bearing fake fur cape, limited to the range of two or three notes, zooming that personality out into the hall, enrapturing the audience who cheer and cry. I am alone in my bedroom with the image, the only light that from the TV set. I had planned not to give the hour total attention as I had sewing chores to do, but I am caught. I weep, too! Something about the process of aging, something about human sharing, something simply about the sheer showmanship of the event. But it is event *manqué*. I turn off the set and think: "I wish I could have been there."

I look at *All in the Family* because it has, I read in the papers, 45 million viewers. Forty-five million viewers! It is rather more entertaining than I thought it would be. It has a fairly progressive political slant, in a mild, acceptable sort of way and a tongue-in-cheek attitude about the emotional clichés of marriage, memory and passing the time of life. It has a certain homely kindness. We are told at the end of the show that it had been taped with the audience present—to prove, I guess, that the laughter had been "real."

There was a lot of laughter during the half-hour, but I didn't join in. It's hard to laugh by yourself. I learned something about what America was watching, but I wasted half-an-hour. I thought, "Yes, something more has to be found. Will an audience watch 'something more'? Does it matter if 45 million people laugh, turn off the set, go back to the same lives they have left? Is there harm in this therapy of laughter?"

"On the other hand, must one be light-minded in order to be light-hearted? Why must we always in this country — in education, in consumption, in the arts, even, *quantify* everything? Is it more significant for 45 million people to have the experience of *All in the Family* than for 20 million to have the experience of *Much Ado About Nothing* (they were hoping for 23 million, alas!), than for 4,000, or however many, people, to have had the experience of Chaikin's *Terminal*. In those great balance sheets that someone is keeping, what is 'worth' more — to touch a lot of people lightly or to move, disturb, transform, one person deeply? (And how does one know which one is doing???) If history makes men, men also make history. Which man is the man who is going to make that

history? He may be the 'one in a million.' ”

A half-hour largely wasted, except to get some wheels spinning.

I watch *Much Ado About Nothing* with my husband. I regret I forgot to call our son at college to remind him of it. The at-home son chooses to watch it alone upstairs in his own room, so he can “concentrate” better. This baffles me . . . I become bored. Restless. Nothing moves inside of me. Tom has seen it in the Park and loved it. He, too, is not being held; he skims in and out of a newspaper. His interest is in seeing “how they made it into television.” Finally I retreat to my room to read a script, Tom assuring me I’ll get to see *Much Ado* “live” in New York. I make a mental note that my interest was aroused by the commercials! My body came alive, I was interested in how the IBM computer processes data having to do with conservation of wildlife, how it assists in compiling Braille books. I toy with the notion of how many useful ways there are to engage one’s mind. I have a fleeting moment of sadness that there is time for only one life.

The next morning I ask the at-home son how he liked the program. He did, rather much. In sixteen years he has seen well over a hundred theater productions and many, many films. I ask him how this stacked up to other experiences. He replied that it wasn’t as good as “real theater,” but that he may never have seen the production otherwise and, further, that he was able to follow the words better than any other Shakespearean play that he has seen in the theater. I pursue this a bit. In the theater, he says, there is so much visual stimulation, there is the sense of being in a crowd, there is the movement of stage life, so that often the language, particularly Shakespearean language, gets blurred. Here, the people and what they said were very clear, even though the total event was not as exciting. The same opinion is given independently by friends at dinner the next night.

I realize again my own special impatience with secondary experiences. Words are only a part of theater, the mere beginning. Images are theater. The total event is theater. I cannot handle the partial nature of the television experience. I read the glowing reviews, I could not share in the delight; I feel deficient. I continue to insist on my deficiency, I will not change.

What is the nature of television? What can it do? What can it do better than related media? What can it not do? If one could get hold of workable answers to these questions, would that not help to define pertinent objectives and viable mechanisms for producing drama through public broadcasting? I am impressed by the comment that British TV does not put walls around the categories of news, feature and documentary material, and drama. I would guess that this non-compartmentalization is a function of a deep understanding of the medium.

I ponder the idea that a medium of communication can best be understood

in a fundamental way, not so much by its content as by its relationship to technology: that is to say, in what way and to what degree it relies on mechanical or non-personal elements to gather its data, turn these data into its “message,” and then send the message to those for whom it is designed. In penetrating the way a medium of communication uses materials (not only physical materials, but also ideas, the human body, etc.) and the way in which that medium impinges on human consciousness, one learns the most one can about it.

Reaching first of all for what I know best, the theater: Theater is defined most basically by its total non-reliance on technology. It is the most human of the communicating arts. It has come to use technology (sophisticated lighting systems, motorized sets) but these are decorations, embellishments of a non-organic kind, and have nothing to say to what theatre is really *about*. Theater can do without them. Theater is a medium, not of technology, but of transformation — transformation of place, psychology, ideas, relationships, embodiments of any kind, concrete or abstract. These transformations take place by means of the imagination, will, and the power of human language. Further, it is a shared event, coming into being precisely at the moment of the sharing and dying away once the sharing has stopped. It is an art created as it happens, created as a result of the exchange between the enactors and the actor-spectators.

The technology of television is something entirely unique. As a means of communication, it is capable, first of all, of instant relay (like the telephone, except that it has “vision”). Television can “phone in” moon shots, tennis shots, gun shots. Its instantaneousness reminds us of the art of the theater, but this is a false clue, for the reporting is only one way and neither side is alive to the other.

Television is also capable of infinite time delay, like the film. It can maintain an unlimited storehouse of recorded images; a library for re-play that is inexhaustible. Witness the Late Late Show. On the other end, the receiving end, it can be channeled into an infinite number of viewing places. Its distribution mechanism is the second pivot of its technology, the first one being the mechanism of instant transmission. The receiving end can be so multiple (and so fragmented), that several receiving points (television sets) can exist within one house, and individual members of one small family can be receiving different sounds and patterns at the same time.

Only later, after the fact, will the members of a peer group, for example, form a collective image out of what they have seen separately. What is truly amazing is how images perceived so separately can be welded into such important, collective, motivational signals. *The key, I think, is in their constant, changing immediacy—their capacity to touch the running nerve of contemporary life.*

In a former sense, television is more akin to the film than to theater. The camera is the editorial eye. Techniques from the film apply, except that the screen is small and can't meaningfully contain the architectural formations that identify the great films. The artistic possibilities of the screen seem to be defined by this screen size, which bears a closer approximate relationship to the human head, for example, (or a couple of human heads), than it does to long shots of panoramic vistas. On a dramatic level, the television screen suggests itself as most hospitable to the intimate probing of meanings, thoughts, feelings and relationships.

In between television-of-the-instant and library-television, there is the television of imaginative invention—the area where this panel means to tread. It is interesting to notice, as a parenthesis, that imaginative inventions are not the very stuff of television, as they are the very stuff of theatre and, to a large degree, the stuff of the moving picture. The stuff of television is defined by its technological capacities. It is anything that can be recorded or transmitted: any event happening anywhere in the Universe including the universe of the human mind. Happening in the past or present, actually or fictionally.

No wonder the British television people make no arbitrary categorizations! The technology of television does not really suggest such categorizing, and any divisions that are made are bound to be arbitrary and counter to television's real nature.

The social meaning of television should come from its linkage, from the total point-of-view of which each program is a part. It is the absence of connected content on American television, its philosophical hit-or-missness, that makes it for me an intrusion and a least-favored source of new perception.

It is very easy to "get lost" in front of a TV set, which is why many people use it instead of a warm bath or a valium pill. Even an isolated theater event on Broadway has the linkage, the continuity, provided by contact with one's fellow human in the exploration of what that shared human condition is all about. The impulse to create resident theaters in America is the impulse to link such experiences: for the producing collective, for the audience, and for both of these taken together. The real meaning of a theater is not contained in one single experiential point, one single production, but in the locus formed by the many points of experience over the years. A theater has to have the ingredient of a point-of-view that is continuous or it cannot significantly bear upon the conscience and consciousness of its community. Should not the same hold true for television?

Without radical reorganization, I wonder what American television can yield up? There is a whole catalog of organizational complaints. There are many individual sponsors bumping elbows on the set. There are many tastes to reach,

even within one family. No one point-of-view can prevail. There is good as well as bad, but the good is interlaced with the bad, and there is more bad than good, so that the habit of positive expectation and, hence, of attention, is not formed.

Being a “home” instrument, television lends itself to being used as a substitute for human inter-action instead of a goad and stimulus to it. Product-oriented sponsors feed on this circumstance, and play up to it. Good creative talent is bought away from the theater, fed economically, starved artistically. Mobility of talent between the theater and television worlds is hard to achieve because theater is spread around the country and television is concentrated in two production centers. Television competes for free with original experience that costs money, as with *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Eclecticism is the death of creativity. Because of the breadth of its world and the extent of its distribution, without strong coordinating principles and personnel, I wonder if American television can ever amount to much. Knowledgeable people say that the British system of organization is not applicable to the American experience. I wonder if there is, indeed, any other system possible.

But our immediate task is not to reform, transform, American television *in toto*. Our task is “to develop a plan by which public broadcasting in the United States would produce and broadcast 40 one-hour television dramas (or adaptations) a year, by American writers, produced within the framework of a unified or cooperative management structure.”

I note further that the objective is “to create a market for American writers, as well as to provide an outlet for actors, directors, etc., and to provide the American public with quality, domestically produced drama on a regular weekly schedule.” Still, even with this limited frame of reference, I feel the fear of eclecticism and randomness. I think we must start with a through-line of intention, even as one directs a play or evolves an art institution, or, hopefully, lives a life based on some kind of organizing thrust.

Given: the vasty out-reach of television. Given: television’s wide-ranging world, which we are limiting to the world of drama, but which is still wide. (I assume the word “drama” to mean “the dramatic” and include documentary material in my thinking). Given: a society out there with iron filings for the magnet of television—moods of alienation, fragmentation, isolation; the drawing of information and experience back into the home, with the door locked against the threatening city; the solitary viewer in front of the single set.

Is it impossible that the panel might come up with something more than an administrative plan to organize and produce 40 dramas a year? Would it be presumptuous to begin to provide, by means of this dramatic program, the beginning of a reconnecting impulse: to make the “beat” of each of the forty

hours adhere to and be part of the same organizing spine? And might not that spine be the rebuilding in America today of the sense of human power—youth power, middle-aged power, black power, man power, woman power, the power to live and die creatively, the power to work, learn, evolve, change the environment, the power to become fully alive? “Everything has a master above, everything is locked with a key,” despairs a Peruvian poet. Would it not be a fascinating experience to organize a dramatic television program that would speak to this poetic line? Not to speak in a pollyanna “happy-talk” way. But to speak to it creatively, inventively, imaginatively, including in a way that would recognize this existential cry as the pervasive one in our life today.

A television set behind a door locked against the threatening city. The city may be the antithesis of nature, but its artifacts are no less eloquent. There is a treatise in the knife-ripped bus seat; a monograph in the charred hallway carpet; the vandalized pay phone that won’t work speaks a message. So do the broken aerials and slashed tires of the big cars nightparked along an exclusive street. The shattered school windows, the burned-out branch library, the pilfered museum, the chained-down park trees, the zoo animals which must be protected from the public like chiefs of state—these are signs, portents, manifestos. They proclaim that growing numbers of people no longer identify with society and its institutions; that they are—or feel—socially and economically beyond the pale, that they are angry at finding themselves outside—angry at themselves and those who still have, or seem to have, status and place.

Violence—against self, others, things or institutions—is only one manifestation of the fury people feel at being unneeded, insignificant and left out. Man’s primary psychological need is to be *needed*. Yet technology, of which television is one aspect, has as its function to make people—as workers, and then as human beings, for the two are inter-connected, unneeded in production; substituting things (machines, structures, etc.) for labor as the most effective way of raising output while cutting costs.

The economically disconnected have always known that alienation was intimately related to technological change. But now all of American society is beginning to feel it, if not yet knowing how to name what it is they feel.

Would it not be a Grand Game to use technology to fight technology’s effects of alienation? If we are to become consumers of television images rather than of direct experience, assimilators rather than creators, sponges rather than actors, would there not be an ironic poetry in using this both-child-and-parent of the disease of alienation to turn the knife against the disease, opening it up, probing inside, with a hope of some kind of healing and cure? Is this too preposterous a thought, I wonder? In law, to alienate is to convey, transfer or divert a right or thing from its original possessor to another. Loss is inherent in

the concept, as well as gain. Is it not within the scope of the medium of television to help restore the loss of human power that our technological society has wreaked upon its members, reaching — as television does — such a large number at one time? More pointedly, is not public broadcasting — free to address its public as producers rather than as consumers — in the best position to confront this vital, human question? And is not the dramatic form a compellingly appropriate one with which to begin to try?

* * *

*Twenty-two years ago, not long out of college, ZELDA FICHANDLER opened a small professional theatre in an old movie house in downtown Washington. In the intervening years, both Mrs. Fichandler and the Arena Stage have won international recognition for daring and excellence. Director as well as producer, Zelda (as she is universally known in the theatre) has overseen the premieres of such memorable plays as *The Great White Hope* by Howard Sackler, *Loring Madel's Project Immortality* and *Robert Anderson's All Summer Long*.*

In addition to her full-time activities at Arena Stage, Zelda is currently professor of Theatre Arts at Boston University. She is a member of the Theatre Advisory Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts.

At Cornell, Zelda majored in Russian literature and was graduated with Phi Beta Kappa honors. Her M.A. thesis (George Washington University) dealt with "Shakespeare in the Soviet Union." This summer, the gifted Mrs. Fichandler will visit Moscow as U.S. delegate to the International Theatre Institute Conference.

* * *

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National Broadcasting Company

DRAMA, BRITISH STYLE

By Shaun Sutton

Mr. John Houseman, in his strong plea for the return of serious drama to American television screens, was generous about B.B.C. output seen in the States. He also made the important point that, however good it may have been (and *some* of it was, not all) that is no reason why other countries should imitate it. I agree with this most vigorously, for here John Houseman goes to the heart of the matter in recognizing that domestic home-grown drama, indigenous to town, State or country, is the only base on which a healthy drama schedule can be built.

America, in fact, has seen practically none of the B.B.C. 'domestic' production; the plays and serials seen on P.B.S. Channels have been mostly classical in form, adaptation of great novels, stage plays, biographies, and so on. What you have not seen is that part of our drama which reflects the abrasive problems of England and the English, social, moral and political.

Presented mainly in three strands — *Play For Today*, *Playhouse*, and *Thirty Minute Theatre* — we manage about eighty of these plays a year, practically all of them parochial and un-exportable. They are permissive and harsh, they cut into convention, they raise protests and storms of outraged morality. They draw our smallest drama audiences, and are our most expensive projects. They are worth every penny of their cost, for without them, our drama schedule would be flabby and 'safe', also irresponsible in that it would in no way reflect the mood of the country. It would fail utterly to compete with theatre and film. Scripts of high enough quality are hard to find. Though these shows are the Mecca of established and new writers, not all of them are good enough.

Naturally I am diffident about commenting on the American television drama scene. I see as much of it as I can, but that is little enough. I think that I can only speak with authority about British T.V. Drama — either B.B.C. or the independent companies; and mostly I would refer to my own world, the B.B.C., which I joined twenty years ago — on a reluctant seven week contract.

I think that the television drama of any country, if it is to have health, must be wide in scope and independent in thought. It must be un-servile. And if the abrasive modern original plays lead the way, they must also be supported and highlighted by as varied a schedule as can be managed. Mr. Houseman more or less dismisses the 'series' type of television drama as an inferior breed. I don't agree with him.

Episodes of long running series and serials can be and should be as well written as single plays, and it is an initial mistake to assume their inferiority. I take the point that the established series, with its characters and situations set, may seem less attractive to the very top television writer; but that can still leave enough good writers to tackle the series' form properly.

Is there perhaps a tendency to *accept* an inferiority which need not exist at all? I have found, for example, that the recent B.B.C. series *Colditz* (the V.I.P. prisoner-of-war camp in World War 2) attracted many vintage play writers, because each episode was complete in itself, with new leading characters and situations fed in. There seems no reason why a 'series' cannot do virtually a series of single plays, and a high quality be demanded from, and accepted by, the writers from the beginning.

If I seem to be labouring this point, it is because it leads to something more important. A wide drama schedule will attract, hold, and even create, a large corps of writers. Not every writer has an instant original abrasive ninety minute play in him.

But if the schedule is large enough to offer him a choice of plays, serials, series, classics, science fictions, thrillers — all under the control of a small body of producers in one Drama Group — then that Group can cast its net very wide indeed. It can train and encourage writers, it can offer them continuity and regular outlet. It can guarantee them a living from television alone.

In England this is important. Few films are made, and even in the theatre, which is flourishing, the financial rewards are often slow to come in. The advantages work both ways — the writers find security, we get the scripts.

Writers are the shortage, anywhere. In many countries of Europe — West Germany, Holland, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark — this shortage is so acute as to inhibit the growth of television drama. In England, (and surely in the States) we are more fortunate. There is a potential of established writers, an even greater potential of new ones waiting to be asked. But it is a situation that

remains frozen until the opportunities are created.

It means money to buy space and effort and time. Someone has to pay. Here I think that the B.B.C. works with one great advantage. It is neither a commercial company, nor a Government organization. It derives its income directly from the public, from the standard license fee. There are no extra Government grants, no generous wiping out of accumulated debts when things get out of hand.

This is good; for it has meant, over the years, that the Corporation has maintained a precarious but real dependency. And nowhere does that independence count more strongly than in the Drama Group. If I were asked for a list of the qualities and conditions necessary for the formation of a Drama Department, I would say:

1. It must have independence of action and choice, within proper reasonable limits; it must have the right to spread its income internally within the Group, as it thinks wise. It must set its own standards of censorship and taste. This demands that the Producers must control their strands with personal responsibility.

2. A wide schedule. Drama of all kinds, at all lengths, and for all ages and tastes. It should comprise modern plays, historical plays, classic theatre plays, comedies, thrillers, series and serials of all kinds, children's drama, science fiction, even good soap opera. Lengths should range from 25 minutes to 2 hours.

3. Continuity of production. There must be the conditions to plan for years ahead; to develop ideas, staffs, writers, without the fear that the whole project will be suddenly abandoned. There must be the right to fail occasionally, and to support the writers and directors during their occasional bad patches.

4. The right to play to small audiences. Naturally, everyone goes for a large audience. But even a star-studded *Merchant of Venice* will (in England) only raise one third of the audience for the regular series or serial. This must not matter. If six million people watch *The Merchant of Venice*, this is probably more in one performance than all the theatre productions since Shakespeare wrote it.

Drama is the most expensive item in television — it uses everything from an egg to an elephant. In England, as in America, the cost of everything is soaring. During the past years, my own battle has been to contain prices within reasonable limits, and perhaps some of the difficulties I have encountered are relevant to the battles that will undoubtedly confront those who advance from this Seminar.

To list them:

(a) B.B.C. Drama has always worked on the assumption that it can record thirty minutes of drama per day in a studio. Thus, in long term planning, a thirty minute play gets one studio day, a fifty minute — two days — and anything above three or even four days. This high rate of productivity explains to some extent the relative cheapness of our productions. It argues, of course, that the dramas are thoroughly rehearsed, artistically and technically, before they reach the studio. This calls for a fairly sophisticated planning run-up to each recording, a snowball that gathers size as it nears studio day.

The maintenance of this thirty minute standard is vital to our drama economy. To add just a day to each of our five hundred productions in the year, would add hundreds of thousands of pounds by the basic cost of studio alone.

(b) We are almost completely a tape operation, and this allows the high studio productivity. We do, in fact, produce about twenty all-film dramas in the year (16mm) and most of our productions have a filmed content, which is fed in during recording. But the basic output is electronic.

(c) I have been experimenting increasingly with the production of drama on location completely on tape, using a four camera mobile recording unit, in place of film cameras. Two recent examples have been *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. We have also used smaller recording units to shoot what would be the film content of drama series; I hope soon to have the use of a lightweight tape unit, with two hand-held electronic cameras. Productivity on this condition can be very high, up to twenty minutes per day. Changing weather conditions are more readily accepted, and the match with studio is better. Above all, the unit can see exactly what it is getting as it goes along, and can re-take if necessary.

(d) To reduce tape editing costs, helical scan recordings on Shibaden Recorders are now taken in parallel with the main recordings. These helical machines can then be wheeled into the director's office the next day, and he can plan his editing in leisure, and without wasting the time (and the cost) of valuable V.T. Editing units. These helical recordings are of particular help to composers.

John Houseman asks a difficult question. Should the available talent and money be spread amongst all stations, or should it be concentrated on those who have shown most drama impetus over the past years? I am thankful not to have

to answer that one officially. Unofficially, I would say unhesitatingly that one should concentrate every effort for the first years on to a few stations. Once the thing is rolling and popular, it will spread quickly enough of its own accord.

A last point — a personal one from my own experience of producing and directing the classics. There is an ever present trap. It is the danger that, faced with the great proved classic, one is always tempted to treat it with over-reverence, to inhibit it with good intention, with weighty and meaningful acting. It is a trap that snares the adaptor also who may hesitate to compress, cut, and even alter the splendid original. The original may be great literature — it has also probably survived through being great entertainment, and there is no law against this quality arriving on the screen.

In a subsidiary paper, Mr. Peter Zeisler poses six formal questions. They are pertinent and personal to American television, and I can only give my reaction to a similar situation in England.

1. Would it be desirable to form a repertory company? I would have thought not, unless it were a very large one. Surely it is better to cast the net to all available talent? Most of the directors and producers in England (and all the writers and actors) are free-lance, and few would care to be confined within the limits of a repertory for any period.

2. What balance between new and adaptation work? Unquestionably for the new work, here is the vitality and excitement. Here too is the lure of both established and new writers. Later, they can be asked to do adaptations. Nor should the lighter work be ignored. American light comedy is the best in the world, and has been for years. Much of the best early Hollywood work continues to succeed because of its good humor, because of its great craft. This is a peculiarly American gift that must not be dismissed as second-rate work, unfit for serious T.V. drama.

3. What are the major resources of identifying new talent? The same as in England. Endless reading of scripts, viewing other work, visits to theatres, cinemas, clubs — above all, vigorous explorations of the regions. Not all the talent gravitates to the big cities; and when it does, it is often swamped in the mass. Good novelists are often pleased to be asked to try a script.

4. Should there be a different director for each play? If possible. Though, naturally, every unit gradually builds up its favorites.

5. Should one invite film makers and stage directors? Yes, if they are good ones. I found that even the totally untechnical stage

directors can bring off a T.V. production with a little help. In the end, it is the performances that matter, not perfect camerawork.

For a man who proposed diffidence about commenting on your television scene, I seem to have said rather a lot. I hope I have not been guilty of teaching my American grandmother to suck eggs. Perhaps the most important point I have made is about continuity. If a fine drama output is to be built up, it will take time. It may take years to create the conditions and the atmosphere; it may take longer to build a regular and faithful audience. But America is rich in writers. If they can be persuaded into television drama, then the way is clear. It will probably be as hard as getting a man on the moon. But you've already done that!

* * *

SHAUN SUTTON, born in England in 1919, made his stage debut at the age of five. He was allowed to "walk on" in a production of Julius Caesar in which his parents were appearing at the King's Theatre, Hammersmith. He worked as an actor and stage manager in the West End — with time out for service in the Royal Navy — until 1952 when he joined the BBC. Mr. Sutton has been a writer, director and producer, turning out serials, original drama and adaptations. He was appointed head of the BBC-TV Drama Department in 1969.

* * *

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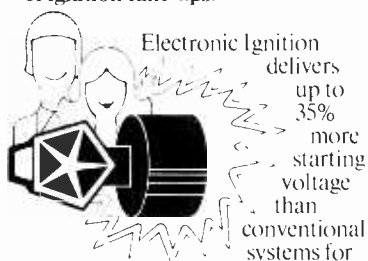
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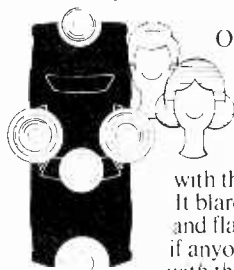


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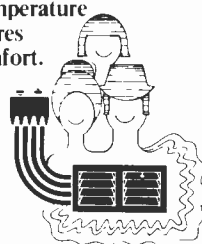


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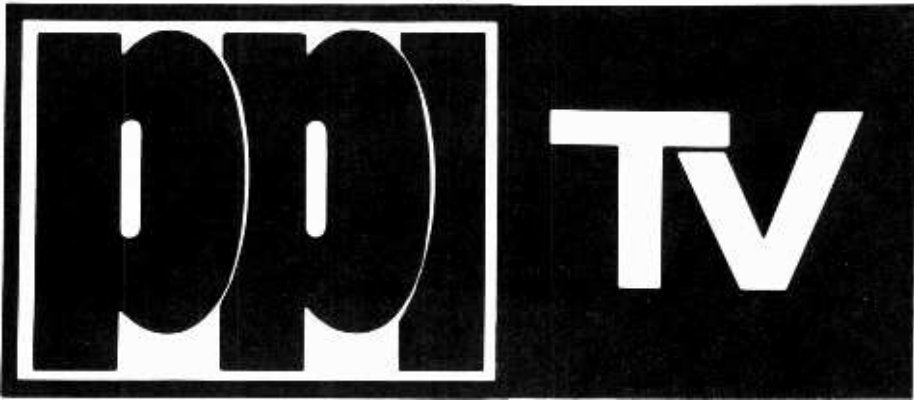
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LAST VISIT TO THE RANCH

By Burton Benjamin

It normally takes half an hour to drive the 18 miles to the LBJ Ranch from Fredericksburg, Texas, (“Widest main street in America, wide enough to make a U-turn in a wagon train”). On the morning of January 10th it took me an hour and a half. There was a “norther,” roads treacherous with ice, optimistic Texans disdaining snow tires.

I found him at his office at the Ranch House, poring over a scrap book of clippings of the LBJ Symposium on Civil Rights. I had covered this story a month before. I was here now for his CBS News’ interview with Walter Cronkite on “LBJ: The Struggle for Civil Rights.” That was the title then. It was called “LBJ: The Last Interview” when we broadcast it on Feb. 1.

He looked reasonably well; weight up a shade, perhaps; color off a shade. He joked with me about the weather. “Bringin’ that New York (always spat like an expletive) weather down here again,” he said. There had been another ice storm at the time of the Symposium. “You know why my Symposium got such a big play? Because Mr. Innes of CORE interrupted the meeting. That got us on the evening news shows. Otherwise we’d have been back under the livestock quotations.” Later, Walter Cronkite would ask him whether he had planted Mr. Innes in the audience, and the notion brought on that wide LBJ grin.

He took me out in the big Lincoln to pick a location. He wasn’t driving much when I was down in late October, two days after Dr. Kissinger’s “peace at hand” announcement when the President had cautioned me that the pens weren’t quite ready to drop.

“Stay for lunch,” he said. There were five of us, and I protested about imposing. “No, stay. I already told them in the kitchen.

Our plan was to fly Cronkite in the next day to the landing strip at the Ranch. “Never make it,” he said at lunch. “Not in this weather. My pilot says no way.”

He lit another cigarette. He was smoking more than I’d ever seen him in three years and a dozen visits to the Ranch. One of the men told me the doctors were unhappy about it, naturally, but it kept him in good spirits.

That night at the motel restaurant I received two calls. One was from Mike Howard, head of his Secret Service detail. "The weather is terrible and getting worse. The boss is worried about Cronkite and your other people getting in here." An hour later, the President on the phone: "I don't want you taking any chances with your people. I'll work Friday, Saturday, Sunday, any day. But don't take any chances."

On the evening of January 11, shortly after Cronkite arrived by car from San Antonio, a call came from Mrs. Johnson. "Come out for dinner and bring a bunch of your people who haven't been here yet," she said. Before we left, practically every member of the crew of 20 had dinner with the Johnsons at the Ranch.

On this night, the unit production manager, Gene Garry, celebrated his birthday. For Garry, a Texas Stetson and cufflinks from LBJ. The President had apparently overheard me talking about it the day before.

Ten minutes into the shooting on January 12th, the President raised his hand. "Stop the cameras," he said. Now, for the first time, I got close enough to notice that he was pale and suffused with perspiration. We walked outside. "Angina pain," he said. "Nothing."

He popped a nitroglycerine pill into his mouth. Five minutes later we began shooting again.

He insisted we stay for lunch. "There must be some folks haven't had a chance to eat with us." As always there was a phone next to him on the dining room table. He got two calls. One from Dolph Briscoe, then governor-elect of Texas. LBJ wished him well.

The other call was from a subordinate and his face clouded with some news that annoyed him. The man had apparently phoned someone he shouldn't have. The President's voice remained low and cold and he began to chew the man out. We had to leave, and he waved us goodbye, a smile to us, a frown to the phone, Lyndon Johnson to the last.

* * *

BURTON BENJAMIN is Senior Executive Producer of CBS News. He produced "LBJ: The Last Interview."

Mr. Benjamin is the newest member of the Editorial Board of Television Quarterly.

* * *

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SELLING OUT TO TELEVISION: CONFESSIONS OF A PRINT MAN TURNED ELECTRONIC

By Robert Sam Anson

Not long after I went to work last year as a producer-reporter for *The 51st State, Channel 13, New York*, I happened to bump into an old colleague from my days as a print journalist. We hadn't seen each other for some time, so, after a ritual exchange of pleasantries, he asked what I was up to, professionally speaking. "Oh," I said, "I've gone to work for public TV."

My friend is a very diplomatic sort, and he struggled manfully to contain himself. But his eyes gave him away. Balefully, they stared back at me, as if to say, "How could you . . . and after all we've been through." "Well," he said at last, clearing his throat uncomfortably, "Television, eh? You must be making a lot of money." "No," I answered gravely. "This is *public* television."

At that, my friend lost control. "Dammit," he sputtered. "If you had to sell out to television, you could at least have sold out for a price."

On the subject of television, and electronic journalism particularly, print reporters are like that. I should know. I was a print reporter myself for a half dozen years, every minute loathing those noisome, rude TV types in their double-knit suits, elbowing us members of the *working* press out of the way at press conferences. They and their cameras. That equipment they lugged around, with all those helpers, or whatever they were. And for what? A minute-and-a-half of sensationalism on the six-o'clock news and a paycheck that gave them a hernia lugging it to the bank.

That is how we regarded them. The rabble. And, by and large, that is how most pencil-and-paper journalists regard people in the electronic media today. (When, for instance, was the last time you heard a self-respecting *Times* man refer to himself as a member of the "media"? Media is a TV word, a hype

meaning reporter). Exceptions to the rule—men like Bernie Kalb at CBS or Dave Brinkley at NBC or Harry Reasoner at ABC—were always explained with the parenthetical notation, “Of course, you know, he used to be a print person.” Before he slipped into sin.

Ah yes, how smug we were. And how secretly envious. Because journalists, whatever their medium, have one thing in common. As Timothy Crouse put it in a perceptive article on the press a few months ago in *Rolling Stone*, ours is a business populated by “shy egomaniacs.”

That is what finally shoved me into television, certainly not any McLuhanesque propaganda about the death of movable type. Ego—and numbers. Television has them—warm bodies out there watching and listening and absorbing the news as *you* report it (and don’t let the “objectivity” of reporters fool you; we all feel we have a message for the nation)—in numbers that print, any kind of print, will never be able to compete with.

Still, even with all these new-found rewards, it was hard to put aside all my print prejudices. Nor did I really want to. Like the lady of easy virtue who never works on Sunday, I wanted some shred, some last vestige of responsibility. Feeling I was still a print person, temperamentally at least, provided it.

But it was difficult concealing the good time I was having doing all the things I had always despised “media” people for doing. The prejudices became even harder to hold on to once I found that, behind the tube and the gimmicks and the flashiness endemic to television, there is actually serious journalism going on. And that in many respects the product is the equal, if not the better, of that being churned out in typewriters.

My first discovery was that the people who worked in television were not at all the way I—and so many of my fellow print reporters—had typed them. In fact, I came to know (and this was the most grudging admission of all) that they were pretty much like me, with all the abilities and limitations.

What it comes down to, finally, is a recognition that men and women make the medium, whatever it is, rather than the other way around. There are a lot of lousy TV reporters, and a lot of lousy TV news programs because of them. Just as there are a lot of lousy print journalists and lousy newspapers and magazines because of them.

The difference is visibility. The cheap shots a TV reporter takes smack you right in the face. You can see him on camera, acting like a boob. Meanwhile, his counterpart in print toils away in relative obscurity, doing his equal damnedest, however, to screw up the facts.

Of course, there is all that equipment, the stuff that keeps getting in honest print people’s way. For a while, it had me thoroughly intimidated. Even the language was different: MOS, SOF, double-system, slop track, a-wind. Then finally, a *51st State* producer, sensing my dismay, counseled me, “Ignore the stuff. It’s just a lot of hocus-pocus. Go out and do the story like you would do a print piece and it will turn out all right.”

At least half of that advice is right. Cameras and tape recorders and all the other assorted paraphernalia necessary to put together a film report are simply part of a delivery system—just as print has its own, though simpler, delivery system. The important part is what comes out at the end: the quality of the word or image.

Naturally, each system has its built-in benefits and drawbacks. You can't beat print for depth, speed and mobility, and I doubt seriously whether I will ever be comfortable trailing a cameraman, sound man and assistant with me wherever I go. The presence of so much commotion, just so damn many people, oftentimes robs an event of its spontaneity. News sources find it hard to resist "playing" to the camera—or freezing in front of it. And, it is only too well known, how the simple presence of a camera will sometimes make news itself, especially in a potentially explosive situation.

But, for me, the biggest problem is that there is no way for someone I am interviewing to say something "off the record" when a camera is rolling. The remedy is two interviews: one truly off the record, with no camera present and for the purposes of background only, the second far more guarded and for the record.

Of course, the more sensitive the story, the more reluctant sources are to appear on television under even the most stringent ground rules. All of which combines to make investigative reporting harder to do on television than it is in print. Harder— but, not impossible, as both public television and the commercial networks have demonstrated on a number of occasions. The key is the reporter—and his determination not to let his medium get the better of him.

For many weeks it was getting the better of me. The cumbersomeness of television—the excess professional "baggage" print people find so distasteful—was proving a real frustration, and I began to doubt whether I would ever come to terms with the medium, much less master it.

Then, one day, while out shooting what I thought would be a very routine interview with a friend of a murdered man on whom I was filming a story, I finally realized the tool television could be.

My source was answering questions very matter-of-factly, until I asked her how she felt about the dead man, not as a colleague, but as a human being. She gave a straight answer and then she paused, waiting for me to follow up. But I sensed the emotion building. So I said nothing and instead simply sat there while the camera continued to record the scene in front of me. At last the woman said, "I really loved him. I guess I never realized it until now." And then she began to cry.

I could have written that story. I could have put down in black and white

what happened and why. I might even have tried to describe the emotion of the moment. But, somehow, it would not have been the same as actually seeing it there on film.

For me, that single interview, those few feet of film, made it all worth while: the hocus-pocus, the gimmickry, the cumbersomeness of the medium.

I have looked at that piece of film literally dozens of times. Even knowing what I am going to see, even having memorized every word of dialogue, I never fail to be moved by it.

That is why I am in television. I guess I could have told that to that print friend of mine. But telling him would not be enough. He would have to see it.

* * *

ROBERT SAM ANSON was graduated from Notre Dame in 1967. In 1970, while a correspondent for Time Magazine, he was captured and held prisoner for three weeks by Cambodian guerillas. He has written extensively on poverty, Vietnam and the New Left. He is currently chief political correspondent for the WNET, New York news program, The 51st State. The preceding article appeared originally in Image, membership publication of New York's Channel 13/NET. It is reprinted by special permission of the Image editors.

* * *

CAN A FREE SOCIETY SURVIVE A FREE GOVERNMENT?

Any government needs enough freedom of action to protect a people's security. The question is, how much is enough?

Consider these examples.

In 1967, the city of New Rochelle, New York, began gathering secret intelligence files on some of its residents, although none were suspected of criminal activity.

In 1970, the Federal government obtained the right to scrutinize bank checking accounts. Without informing the people involved. And without a court order.

In 1972, five New York men were ordered to appear before a grand jury in Fort Worth, Texas, 1400 miles away. When they refused to answer questions, they were jailed without a trial.

In each case, the question involved is the same: in the quest for security, how much of our freedom and how many of our rights must be sacrificed?

It's a question Group W's Urban America Unit explored in a one hour television documentary, "Freedom and Security: The Uncertain Balance," which was televised last spring on the five Group W stations and elsewhere in the country.

In interviews with law enforcement officers, Justice Department officials and private citizens, the program examines federal and local surveillance, the use of grand juries, and the role of FBI informers. Proving that the issue of civil liberties doesn't concern only dissenters and social activists.

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"Freedom and Security: The Uncertain Balance" is part of a continuing effort by Group W's award-winning Urban America Unit to focus on problems confronting society. So people can begin to solve them.



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YOUR SHOW OF SHOWS REVISITED

By Andrew Sarris

The funniest movie in 1973 may well turn out to be a collection of old kinescopes entitled "*Ten From Your Show of Shows*." Who would have imagined that ancient television would turn out to be so much more fun than modern cinema? Unfortunately, audiences haven't yet been cued in to the volume of laughter the show deserves. I suppose they're waiting for some prestigious critic to call the show a "break-through" of some sort or other. But it's already too late for a *Time* or *Newsweek* cover for Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, Carl Reiner, Howard Morris and their merry crew. They remain enshrined back in the supposedly humorless years of the Eisenhower and McCarthy '50s when so many humorless essays were being written about the decline of humor and satire in America.

So many of us would laugh our heads off on Saturday night through "Your Show of Shows," but by Monday morning we would be nodding in agreement at some gloom-and-doom pronouncement in the public prints on the sad state of humor in our repressed republic. The gloom and doom were dispensed in regular dosages by James Thurber, E. B. White, Malcolm Muggeridge, Marya Mannes, John Crosby, and other eminent takers of the public pulse. Where, we were asked again and again, was America's Aristophanes, Moliere, Voltaire, Beaumarchais and Swift? On occasions, we were even asked to mourn the absence of inactivity of such supposedly trenchant satirists as Mark Twain, Will Rogers and Fred Allen. No matter. By Saturday night we would be rolling off our collective couches in the national living room only to forget by Monday morning the art and craftsmanship we had been privileged to witness.

Of the ten skits in the current selection I would say that only three — the take-off on "This Is Your Life," "Bertha the Sewing Machine Girl," and "The Bavarian Clock" — rank anywhere near the top of the Caesar-Coca-Reiner-Morris repertory. "Big Business" and "The Music Evening" are middle-range sketches with great moments while "From Here to Obscurity," "Breaking the News," "The Prussian Doorman," "The Interview with the Viennese Space

Expert,” and “The Movie Theatre” are closer to the bottom than to the top of the vast reservoir of revue material from “Your Show of Shows.”

Even so, there are more deserved belly-laughs in the single Caesar-Morris-Reiner demolition of “This Is Your Life” than in the total oeuvre of Woody Allen. And yet I dare say that the humor-exhumers of the future will decide on the basis of printed artifacts that Woody Allen deserves an entire chapter whereas Sid Caesar deserves at most a footnote. Hence, though 20 movies on the order of “Ten From Your Show of Shows” could be assembled without dropping down to the dregsier sketches from the show, there does not seem ever to have been the slightest interest in writing a book on this showbiz phenomenon.

If indeed there is such a book I stand corrected, but I’ve never heard of it. I’ve never encountered a decent essay on the subject. When I happened to mention Sid Caesar on my WBAI radio program some years ago, people congratulated me for my emotional loyalty to an obscure pleasure from the past. As I recall, the only reference I have ever made to “Your Show of Shows” in print occurs tangentially, (and parenthetically) in a review of a book on the Judy Garland television show (*The Other Side of the Rainbow* by Mel Torme): “The recent history of the medium is replete with instances of sophisticated shows being swamped in Trendex terms by cornpone attractions.

“It probably all began when Lawrence Welk drove the *Show of Shows* off the video screen even as Sid Caesar, Carl Reiner, Howard Morris and an army of professionals were doing scathing satires on the folksy amateurishness of the Welk Show.”)

The same question therefore comes back to haunt so many of us: why have we been so ungrateful and forgetful over the years to a group of people (and let us not forget producer Max Liebman and writers Mel Tolkin, Lucille Kallen, Mel Brooks, Tony Webster, Caesar, and many others) who have given us so much exquisite entertainment in spite of the minimal cultural encouragement provided by the medium itself and those who professed to meditate on it? But before we consider this question of our own perplexing ingratitude, we must attempt to recapture the atmosphere in which *Your Show of Shows* originally materialized.

The first big comedy star of television was Milton Berle, in many ways the stylistic antithesis of Sid Caesar. It would be startling today to rerun the old Berle shows simply to check off the innumerable times Uncle Miltie made his grand opening entrance in drag, and how often he indulged in pinky-twiddling, powder-puffing routines out of the gay grotesqueries of the Borscht Circuit. He was low-down, vulgar, dirty, boisterous, obvious, and outrageous, and the kiddies loved him even more than they loved Pinky Lee with all the latter’s

lissing juvenilia. Berle established the comic tradition on television of an insolent unprofessionalism by which the comedian was rewarded by the audience with bigger laughs for going up in his lines than for delivering them correctly. This tradition was later extended and perfected by Jackie Gleason, Red Skelton and Dean Martin.

Sid Caesar was different, one might even say dialectically different. He appeared at the beginning of each show in his bathrobe to announce the various acts with dull humility. His manner and dress seemed to say: I am not a stand-up comedian with a glib line of patter, but rather a most humble artist or even artisan trying to entertain you with bits and pieces of comic legerdemain. Of course, the 'umble pie routine didn't quite come off what with all the grandiose fanfare preceding it, and with all the abrasively pushy personality sketches which usually followed the character comedian bathrobe bit.

Truth to tell, Sid Caesar lacked the ineffable beauty and divine charm of the greatest comedians. He had first emerged from under the very large shadow of Danny Kaye, and their early airplane-movie routines were strikingly similar, but whereas Kaye started out in his Sylvia Fine period as a beguiling blend of Harpo Marx and Noel Coward, Caesar was a roughneck by comparison. He could function properly only in an atmosphere of perpetual parody. There was nothing really "straight" about him, whereas Kaye could sing and dance with sufficient charm and dexterity to beguile even the Russian Tea Room out of its slow, surly service.

Also Kaye was the verbal dervish par excellence whereas Caesar had a voice problem in the off-putting realm between the perpetual rasp and the frequent cough. (Of course, I am speaking of the demonic Danny Kaye who kowtowed to nobody in those early days before the Queen Mother and UNICEF turned him into a dull, public institution.)

Still, Caesar's voice — rasp, cough and all — was very finely tuned to the cadences (though not to the textures) of parody. In "From Here to Obscurity," Caesar takes on a composite part that is half Montgomery Clift (the trumpet part) and half Burt Lancaster (the love scene on the surf-soaked beach), and he doesn't really evoke either actor.

Indeed, Frank Gorshin can do a better imitation of Burt Lancaster in his (Gorshin's) sleep. What Caesar successfully parodies is not any particular performer, but rather the clumsy mechanism of middle-brow allegory with low-life characters.

Actually, Caesar and Coca were far more devastating in their take-offs and put-downs of "Streetcar Named Desire" and "A Place in the Sun," two skits not in the current series. Even so, Caesar did not so much evoke Marlon Brando as expose Stanley Kowalski, and Coca did not so much express Shelley Winters

as excruciate the shrewish wife-to-be in the rowboat on the lake. Thus, "Your Show of Shows" was unique in going beyond the surface of performances to the substance of characterizations in its show-biz satires.

Nonetheless, the most precious moments in "From Here to Obscurity" is connected less with the satiric sensibility of the enterprise than with its "live" professionalism. The moment I speak of is the moment in which Imogene Coca breaks up as she watches Caesar's shrewdly sappy expression of surprise as a bucket of water splashes over his timing of the scene. But rather than exploit her breaking up for the easy laugh of amateurish-audience identification, she covers the breaking up by turning her face from the audience while seeming to nuzzle Caesar's shoulder.

Every week for six or seven years, a group of talented performers would undergo the most stringent demands of both theatre and cinema. That is to say that they were locked up in both the inexorable time machine of the theatre, and in the cold-fish-eye objectivity of the camera lens. Their opening nights were thus not only their closing nights, but also their eternal incarnations. And as much as they might have been appreciated by their live audience, they knew that their ultimate fate depended on a vague, amorphous mass of viewers with whom they could communicate only through an electronic image. Performers in the theatre can have an occasional bad night without jeopardizing their reputation. Performers in the cinema (and now canned television) can do as many takes as they need to become letter-perfect. But the very real charm and excitement of early live television B. T. (Before Tape) consisted of the suspenseful possibility of human error by even the most professional performers. Hence, no recapitulation of "Your Show of Shows" can fully reproduce the exquisitely wrought emotional tension of the original experience. And no revival can ever bring back the full force of that earlier laughter.

Although the current selection from "Your Show of Shows" is not ideal by absolute standards, I am not sure that I would like even the best skits to be assembled in this fashion. Ultimately, "Your Show of Shows" does not belong on the movie screen, but on the video screen, and not just the comedy sketches, but the whole show.

As it is, the laughs come too close together without the pleasing interruptions of the snazzy dancing of the Hamilton Trio, the singing of a personable tenor named Bill Hayes and his female operatic counterpart, Marguerite Piazza, a veddy, veddy stylized twosome called Mata and Hari (a bit of a drag, I always felt, and too close to the burlesque ballets of Imogene Coca), the ever ebullient Billy Williams Quartet, and, more often than not, a guest star from the silver screen. If none of the major networks want to pick up the show, why doesn't the Educational Network pick it up in the name of early and middle

'50s nostalgia and social history? Or is there an unconscious fear of demonstrating that the much-maligned '50s were infinitely more entertaining than the hyped-up '70s?

Of course, "Your Show of Shows" never sought to fulfill the tendentious rhetoric of the more solemn soothsayers of the Republic. There was none of the pseudo-significant topicality of the proto-talk-show-type comedians like Mort Sahl, Steve Allen and even the relatively expurgated Lenny Bruce of the television medium.

Although most of the writers and performers on "Your Show of Shows" might be said to have partaken of a distinctively Jewish sensibility in their satiric orientation, they were nonetheless completely immersed in the ambience of popular culture. What makes "Bertha the Sewing Machine Girl" truly magical is not merely the lurid precision of the eye-rolling and lip-speaking "pantomime" of the silent screen, but of the emotional energy that Caesar, Coca, Reiner and Morris expend on the enduring vitality and sincerity of that ancient form of dramatic expression. This then is the source of their stylistic conviction as satirists: a loving complicity with their mass audience on the inherent absurdity of all dramatic formulas and melodramatic mechanisms.

To return to the Jewishness of "Your Show of Shows," it was still light years away from the more modish late '50s absurdism and alleged anti-Semitism of the unexpurgated Bruce, the Omnibus-oriented Nichols and May, and the Voice's very own Jules Feiffer. The difference between a Sid Caesar skit and a Nichols and May skit was not only a difference in period, but also in class consciousness. With Caesar, a fundamentally popular common sense was appealed to with every bellow of outrage. With Nichols and May, an elitist frisson of intellectual and cultural superiority was cultivated at the expense of our most sacred cows. This was the beginning of the civil war between the Jewish intellectuals and the Jewish philistines, and also the beginning of an era of cultural affluence and alienation, and of increasing fragmentation of audience sensibilities.

Thus, in a sense, "Your Show of Shows" was more a hangover from the socially united '40s than an expression of the socially divided '50s. Caesar and Company steered clear of politics and any trace of sick humor. Ethnic jokes were verboten unless they had been filtered through a secondary cultural source. Hence, Italians could be caricatured only in a parody of neorealism. Germans of the Blue-Max Prussian-Yiddish School of dialects were okay. But the Black-Shirted SS Men of such later entertainments as "Stalag 17" and "Hogan's Heroes" remained alien to the circumscribed comic vision of "Your Show of Shows."

The clinical orientation of most of the slapstick humor tended to be oral

rather than anal. "Big Business," for example, depends for most of its humor on the debunking notion that food is more important to a hungry executive than even the fate of his firm. Curiously, the basic joke in "Big Business" is redone with off-key ennui in the meeting of the media people in "The Candidate." Then or now, it isn't that much of a comic idea on the drawing board, but who can ever forget Howard Morris's flapping his pickle with diabolically phallic force right in Caesar's drooling face.

The plastic precision with which this incredibly intricate sight gag is executed takes us into the highest reaches of humor and archetypal imagery. And to watch Howard Morris's clinging to Sid Caesar like an overly affectionate orangutan in "This Your Life" is to feel a primal laughter gurgling out once more from the depths of one's intestines.

Louis Kronenberger recently requested a moratorium on the use of the words "subsume," "epiphany" and "persona." I'll try to accommodate him on the first two, but I'll have to borrow "persona" one last time to try to explain why Sid Caesar has never retained a loyalty among his laughing followers comparable to that accorded to Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd, Langdon, the Marx Brothers, W. C. Fields and Laurel and Hardy. What they and most comedians have, and what Caesar did not, is a persona.

With the persona-performer, we can't remember after a time which gag was in which picture, and we mercifully forget all the lapses and *longueurs*. We remember only that Jack Benny was stingy, that Jackie Gleason preferred ouzo to water in the office cooler, that W. C. Fields disliked women and children, that Groucho enjoyed playing the cad, that Hardy was eternally exasperated with Laurel.

A more severely limited comedian like Jimmy Durante seemed to earn the gratitude of his admirers simply by having survived to entertain them with the same old jokes and routines. Ultimately, therefore, the strongest link between the lasting comedians and their admirers is one more of ritualistic love than of renewable laughter.

Caesar in his bathrobe of the anonymous craftsman did not ask for our love, only for our respect and admiration. What little did filter through about his "true" personality seemed to accord with the imperial cast of his name. There were rumors of his tyrannical temperament, and rumblings about his video "divorce" from Imogene Coca. And he very often played bosses and bullies, but, just as often, he played against type as the hapless schlemiel of "A Night at the Movies" and "The Bavarian Clock," thus shrewdly indulging the audience's subconscious desire to see him dampened and virtually dismembered.

In terms of media poetics, he was anti-McLuhanist to the core, of high rather than low definition, and ultra-professional in every bone of his body.

Indeed, he seemed somehow to thrive on the insane stopwatch pressure of live television where pure energy was at a premium, and where the rough edges of a performance could be blasted away with sheer gusto. He was considerably less effective on the stage and screen where a further refinement of his talents was required and never forthcoming.

Unfortunately, the current series fails to do full justice to Imogene Coca and Carl Reiner as invaluable mercenaries in Caesar's imperial army. Imogene Coca's supper-club subtlety was one of the earliest casualties of ad agency decisions to equal so-called "national" taste rather than elevate it. Whereas Lucille Ball triumphantly incarnated the West-Coast nit-wit housewife with more things than thoughts on her mind, Imogene Coca seemed to be powered by the cosmopolitan neon of New York as she floated through boozy mantraps, one eye beckoning and the other blotto.

As a failed femme fatale, as a hiccupping Helen Morgan with more of a whine than a catch in her voice, or as a Pavlova sinking gradually from a swan's glide to a duck's waddle, Imogene Coca represented a culture secure enough in its sensibility to laugh at some of the convulsions of art appreciation at any cost. Over the long TV haul, however, Caesar and Coca did not make a compatible couple with their strenuous idiosyncracies. Certainly, they were no match for the witless authenticity of Lucy and Desi as a wildly Pirandellian pair of performers, or of the joyless gutter sentimentality of the Cramden couple impersonated by Jackie Gleason and Audrey Meadows.

In addition Lucille Ball was one of the most beautiful women ever to take pratfalls in any medium, and this may help explain Caesar's desperate decision to revamp his own image by taking on Nanette Fabray and Janet Blair as video wives after disposing of Imogene Coca. Despite the comeliness and talent of the newcomers, the "marriages" never really worked. Instead, Caesar seemed broader and more raucous than ever before now that Coca's slyly provocative stylization was no longer available to relieve him of some of the comic responsibility.

By contrast, Carl Reiner was always Sid Caesar's indispensable right-hand man, his genial fool, and his willing foil. In their years together, Reiner joined the select company of sterling straight men — George Burns, Bud Abbott, Dean Martin — who eventually eclipse the top banana in the eyes and ears of the connoisseurs. I remember at the time we were always nudging each other over Reiner's catatonic comedy style lurking around the edges of Caesar's hysteria.

Toward the end, I was laughing more at Reiner than at Caesar, and I am reminded particularly of Reiner send-ups of James Mason's emceeing a drama series on television, and of Mike Wallace's inquisitorial techniques on "Hot Seat." But by then it was too late. The cost-per-thousands boys and the ratings

rajahs and the sponsor's wives and the demographic samplers had taken over television, and the noble experiment with live, sophisticated entertainers was terminated. Even the survival of "Your Show of Shows" on kinescope is an accident of television history. The studio kinescopes have long since been destroyed. Only Max Liebman's personal copies have survived to remind us of a fantastic episode in the history of popular entertainment.

* * *

ANDREW SARRIS is film critic for The Village Voice and author of a new book, "The Primal Screen: Essays on Film and Related Subjects." He was graduated from Columbia University where today he serves as Associate Professor of Cinema.

The preceding article, written especially for Television Quarterly, is a greatly expanded version of a critique that appeared originally in The Village Voice.

* * *



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“AND THIS SEASON . . . SOMETHING NEW!”

By Tom Seller

Some people save string. Others stamps. Others coins.

I save TV formats.

A TV format, in case you've never seen one, is a sort of glorified brochure, describing and touting each of the new TV series intended for the next season. It usually runs anywhere from one to forty mimeographed pages, and details the nature of the series, its permanent characters, its theme, its style, its locales, its taboos, and any other pertinent factors. It is sent primarily to TV writers so that they may come up with ideas, plots, story lines, for possible episodes for the proposed new series.

For most of the last twenty-four years I have been receiving — and saving — these formats. But this year I ran out of storage space and made a valiant decision. I would take every format I had that was over five years old, and toss it down the incinerator.

Unfortunately, I made one fatal mistake. I started to reread them first.

Does Jack Benny throw his violin down the incinerator?

Does Milton Berle throw Joe Miller down the incinerator?

It wasn't until I started to reread them, many of them a dozen and more years old, that I realized I was in possession of some of the more important social documents of our times.

TV formats generally open with a paragraph intended to arouse the enthusiasm of the writer, and at the same time establish beyond any doubt that *this* new series is indeed unique, fresh and original — that it's never been done before, in any decade, in any country, in any civilization.

Their approach may be forthright, dewy-eyed, ecstatic, challenging, gushy, circumlocutious, turgid, devious, sneaky, sensual — you name it; it's there somewhere.

Take for example, the opening paragraph of the format for *The Bob Cummings Show* (1961): “Picture an exotic setting . . . a verandah in Calcutta with punkahs waving . . . or a lanai in Honolulu under a tropical moon. Picture a man and a girl . . .”

(I pictured — and then submitted a couple of great ideas — but apparently my punkah was waving in the wrong direction.)

Still other formats entice the writer's interest by making *him* the hero of the show. "This new television series," states the format for *Frontier Circus* (1961), "is concerned with people like you and me . . ."

"It is a matter of record that outlaws, men like Jesse James and Cole Younger, once traveled with small wagon shows, as a means of hiding out. . . ." Even as you and me?

Then there is what I can only describe as the "Me-too-but-I-can-do-it-better-than-you" format. Such as *Flipper* (1964): "In the 7:30 Saturday night time-slot," it begins, "we owe to our audience much more entertainment than a *Lassie* series would give with a dolphin replacing a dog . . ."

"The father and sons' relationship must be as good as or better than in *My Three Sons* . . ."

(And perhaps a new title would help too: *I, Flipper, Take Thee, Lassie* : . .)

I think the most grandiloquent of all the opening paragraphs of all the formats I've saved would have to be for *The Outer Limits* (1963).

"Out of the issues and the human conditions of this our time," it begins; "out of the north-and south-seeking poles of human impulses and behaviors, out of the world as we know it, come the themes which are the warp and the woof of our drama. . . ."

(This was another series to which I contributed brilliant ideas, but to no avail. I think it was my woof that did me in. My warp has always been above reproach.)

Once the subject matter of a series has been established, the format usually turns to a description and/or eulogy of its leading characters. These can range anywhere from the sublime to the subversive, with several stops along the way.

Series heroes, usually male, are nearly always regular guys like you and me, who are also larger than life. Much larger. They are afflicted with all the human frailties, but only when absolutely necessary.

If the lead is to be played by a big name — or even a little name — the format rhapsodizes about his Gable looks and Barrymore talents.

Sugarfoot (1957) — Tom Brewster is his name — will be portrayed by Will Hutchins, a Warner Bros. contract player in his early twenties, who possesses all the winsome appeal of a James Stewart, plus youthful charm. . . ."

(I submitted several winsome ideas to this series, but apparently not winsome enough.)

At the other end of the spectrum is Cord, the tight-lipped hero of *Gunslinger* (1961). No James Stewart he.

He is good with a gun the way another man is good with a hammer; one becomes a carpenter, the other a gunslinger. . .”

Cord holds a special place in my heart because he is one of only two TV series heroes in all my formats who share a common and guilty secret.

“It will never be stated,” the format states delicately, “or even implied (unless network censorship undergoes a dramatic change within the next months) but Cord is probably illegitimate, and this affects his attitude both to women and to the world.”

Cord’s only compatriot in this area is the lovely heroine of *My Friend Flicka* (1955), the horse owned by young Ken McLaughlin. “Her parenthood is somewhat uncertain,” the format warns us, “but it is believed by Ken’s father that her sire is one of the wild stallions which roam the mountain ranges north of the ranch, and that her dam is one of the ‘escapees’ which would account for Flicka’s magnificent lines and speed. . .”

Flicka, meet Cord.

Without question, the most Sybaritic of all the format heroes would have to be Grey Holden of *Riverboat* (1959). In addition to being an art connoisseur, a poetry lover, and an expert player of the spinet, “he drinks no alcohol except, on special occasions, a particular wine of which he is fond. He has two cases of this wine aboard ship and keeps them constantly chilled. His favorite drink is milk and he keeps a goat aboard ship so that his supply is constant.”

But for the format hero whose career has been the most versatile and dazzling, we would have to go back to *The Bob Cummings Show*.

Early in life Bob discovered that he had a knack for journalism, and “Some of his more noted newsbeats were: carrying brandy to snowbound dogs in the Alps, tobogganning down the Pyramids on a sled of greased telephone poles, sailing the Red Sea in a junk and the China Sea in a dhow. . .

“After the War, Bob tried his hand at a number of hazardous occupations. . . bush flying in Alaska, mountain climbing in the Alps and a stint as a White Hunter in Kenya. . .”

So much for Bob’s everyday activities. The format, unfortunately, fails to tell us what he did for excitement.

Not *all* TV format heroes are supermen. Once in a rare while, blessedly, we get men like Don Corey and Jed Sills of *Checkmates* (1960). “It would be idle,” states their format, “to insist that any conception of ‘our heroes’ could be completely new. Nor should it be. Who wants a new, original flavor in a grilled steak? Let it be of prime beef, properly aged and seasoned, skilfully prepared and appetizingly served, and we will come again.”

But enough of grilled steak and prime beef. Once the format has briefed the

writer on the nature of the series and on the attributes of its running characters, it moves on into the nitty-gritty items, and they are usually more gritty than nitty.

Take the area of violence, for instance. Here it is possible to achieve some unanimity. *All* the formats, without exception, without equivocation, without flinching, take a firm, unswerving stand in favor of ambiguity.

“Although Jim Bowie was most famous for the Bowie knife, this weapon must be played down. The knife should appear in every story, but we cannot use gory fights or duels. . .” (*The Adventures of Jim Bowie* — 1956).

“This will not be an overly violent series. Chases, shooting and fist fights will only be used when necessary.” (*The Investigators*—1961)

“Violence, as such, will only be used where it furthers the story and will never be used for its own sake. However . . . gun fights, chases, fist fights, etc., will be integral parts of most stories. . .” (*Riverboat*).

From violence, it is only a step forward (or backward) to sex — and the TV formats have a lot to say on *that* subject.

Here again we find remarkable unanimity. Nearly all sex in TV formats falls into what I like to think of as the “I-am-a-virile-male-heterosexual-but-I-don’t-work-very-hard - at-it” syndrome.

We are always quickly assured by the formats that their heroes have he-man libidos, and are irresistibly attractive to and attracted by the opposite sex. But let a bed, or even a haystack, hove into view, and you will see a libidinous retreat that will make your head spin.

“He is fantastically attractive to women but never takes advantage of this to harm anyone.” (*Riverboat*).

“How Cord feels about her, she can never find out. How she feels about him, she would never betray.” (*Gunslinger*).

“He likes dogs and children and girls — not necessarily in that order — and is good to his aunts.” (*Bringing Up Buddy*, 1960).

“At no time will any risqué double-entendre vulgarities be permitted to find their way into the scripts.” (*Circus Boy* — 1956) (I have always liked the permissiveness of this taboo, for I interpret it to mean that any non-risqué single-entendre vulgarities are okay.)

“As confirmed a bachelor as J. Edgar Hoover, Steve is married only to his job. . . However, he looks at skirts, and what they cover, with more than passing interest.” (*The Investigators*).

“The underwater scenery is a great backdrop for wholesome feminine forms in swimming attire but without ever being objectionable. (Bikinis will be avoided.)” (*Flipper*).

“*Sugarfoot* kisses girls, not his horse.”

Having thus explored the hyperthyroid sex life of our TV format heroes, let us now move into an even more fruitful area — what I call the “Tell-it-as-it-is-or-Pity-the-poor-red-and/or-black-man” syndrome.

The format dicta in this area ranges all the way from the gentle permissiveness of the *Laramie* (1958) heroes (“They treat the Indians with respect and look upon them as human beings with a normal amount of both good and bad in their make-up.”) To the startlingly honest negativism of the *Zane Grey Theatre* (1957) format (“Questionable Story Elements: Indians who are among the leading characters. We prefer to avoid them because they generally come off either as red-skinned philosophers or mono-syllabic aborigines”).

In between we find varying degrees of telling it as it was, wasn’t or might have been.

“Except in rare instances, slaves as such cannot be used. We will use Negro servants but should avoid reference to the buying and selling of slaves.” (*The Adventures of Jim Bowie*).

“Negroes will be seen on the docks and the streets of town as passersby or singers — but not as slaves or laborers.” (*Riverboat*).

“We do not wish to destroy the legends of great Americans for the sake of drama. (Samuel Adams was a fiercely unscrupulous man but it is not the purpose of the Great Adventure to say so to the children of America.)” (*The Great Adventure* — 1963).

These are just a few of the important TV format syndromes. There are countless others, of course, and on each of these the format takes a firm, guiding stand, covering such areas as: God (for); sin (against); horses, dogs and children (for); snakes and coyote (against); virginity (for); loss of (against); new-fangled inventions like telegraph poles (against); conformist Indians: sub-category Sitting Bull (for); non-conformist Indians; sub category Geronimo (against); progress (against); shoot-outs (maybe).

Best of all in these TV formats, however, are the items that defy categorization, that appear once and once only in an isolated instance, and, for that moment, bring sunshine into the drab life of a TV writer.

Take, for instance, the format for *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1964). To aid would-be script writers for the series, it poses a list of 25 questions as a Standard Test for New “Voyage” Scripts. Question 16 is: “Does Casey Stewart get a chance to do things (whatever they may be) which would appeal to the young bikini beach party gang of kids?”

Well, does he?

Or how about this bit of helpful analysis re the cattle drive in *Rawhide* (1961)?

“Drive is always going *right to left*. When you go ahead of the herd, you go *right to left*. When you return, you come back *left to right*. If you leave to go to a town, you leave *left to right* and rejoin the herd *right to left*.” That clear?

The format hastens to assure us that these particular notes are intended mainly for directors, not writers. Be that as it may, *this* writer was going right to left, left to right, *and* in circles before he got through.

And, finally, who can resist this gem of wild life information from one of the old *Lassie* formats? “That ants have an organized society and even keep little cows in the form of aphids (i.e., plant lice) should be fascinating information to our viewers if properly presented.”

Which goes to prove, I suppose, that one man’s cow is another man’s plant louse.

But enough of this nostalgia. I still need that storage space.

Or do I . . . ? Does one throw out old Rembrandts?

* * *

TOM SELLER has been writing for television and motion pictures since 1939. He has over 100 television credits on more than 25 different series. In addition to his assignments Mr. Seller has spent the last two years working on a novel, a book of humor and an original teleplay. He is a graduate of both Stanford and Yale Universities.

* * *

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THE UPSIDE DOWN APPROACH

By William Hillier

Graven in my memory is an earnest conversation between a black militant and the general manager of a local television station. The dialogue was not new. The militant was arguing that television should stop pandering to the profit motive and devote more time to exploring the great issues of our times.

The general manager retorted that television would be pleased and proud to explore public issues, to educate, to provide a platform for all cultural and political minorities. But how could a station — to say nothing of a network — pursue such a course when the public has demonstrated, over and again, that it would rather be amused than instructed?

Certainly minority groups are entitled to a share of the air. Certainly special tastes and interests, from folk dancing to demonstrations of Chinese acupuncture, deserve a hearing. But how many people would stay tuned in? Are we not, in the ad man's unchanging charts, a nation that will always choose *Bonanza* over Shakespeare, and a quiz game over a panel discussion?

That general manager, knowing how the ratings go, was hooked on the horns of an old dilemma. That is, how to reconcile television's need to draw the masses and turn a profit, with television's no less powerful need to focus on real life and serve the community.

It's a dilemma considered beyond solution by most station managers. The one cited above took the well-worn path. He found a non-critical time period for the militant's program. Of course, there was a small constituency for the program. There's always somebody watching. The show may have been top-quality. It might even have won some awards. A sponsor with a high sense of public service might have agreed to underwrite it.

Whatever happened, such programming certainly made a handsome exhibit in the manager's next license renewal brief.

Despite all the foregoing splendors, it's a safe bet that when the rating books came out, the general manager's thesis proved correct. The mass audience tuned to the light-minded entertainment on the competing channel. Thus do general managers grow wary of special programming for special minorities. It matters not if they are music lovers demanding an hour of home-town chamber music, or anti-war groups who feel their candle-light peace march deserves live coverage in prime time. Results are the same.

"I tell you it won't get a rating", moans the general manager. And that statement may be what's wrong with our thinking about public service forms. They are self-fulfilling prophecies. We expect them to fail and they do so. We produce the programs, we place them where they will hurt us least, and all the time we are concentrating on reaping our profits from the livelier arts.

But maybe there's another way. Maybe there's a way that will permit us to enjoy the best of both worlds. Is it foolish to seek a format that will attract a mass audience, earn a profit and also serve the community?

No doubt you have heard this impossible dream before. But you've heard it mostly in terms of upgrading the old, worn-out public service forms. You've heard, "If we make this documentary a little grander, a little more expensive, then lots more people will watch." I can't recall many cases to substantiate that theory. But what if we were to begin with an entertainment format and make that *public service* rather than trying desperately to make public service *entertainment*?

All our experience tells us that the ordinary viewer would rather watch *Marcus Welby* than the Royal Ballet performing "Swan Lake." We accept that it's the people who need to know a great deal more about their government, about medical science, education, mental health who will reject programs dealing with these subjects to watch cowboys, gangsters or old musicals.

The basic longing in the viewer, it seems, is for programs featuring people he can identify with, moving through situations he finds comfortable and familiar. But where is it written on stone that these comfortable, familiar programs cannot instruct, inform and stretch the mind of the beholder?

All in the Family and *Maude* have already dealt with such current problems as abortion, women's liberation, sex education and racial prejudice. *Sesame Street* has demonstrated, with great impact, that television can amuse and beguile while imparting basic instruction. It is not inappropriate here to remember that the classic Greek dramatists first staged a spectacle that lured people into the amphitheatre, then told them about war and politics and the nature of their gods.

At WJZ-TV in Baltimore we have given considerable thought to this problem. What developed from our discussions is a public service show that is fascinating to the viewer and commercially competitive in the prime time access period.

Our first step was to list the formats we knew to be successful in prime time. The winner, hands down, was the dramatic human interest format. We decided to emulate it.

But we had a problem that the best writers in the business would have found daunting. We had to devise a dramatic series that would serve some unmet need

in our community, the Baltimore and Washington area.

Happily, we had just completed a list of community problems for our license renewal application. The list was fairly typical: crime, drugs, delinquency, housing. But in all our interviews with community leaders and the general public, we noticed one repetitive theme. That was: a feeling that life for the ordinary American had lost its traditional values, its old meaning and purpose. Moral codes were disintegrating, family life was rotting at the seams, and the crime and drug statistics were obviously the price our city was paying for this deep erosion of family life.

We could not put down the feeling that people needed help in simply holding their lives together. They needed the values, the moral framework that used to be provided by family tradition, by a stable society.

We now had our TV format and our community's most serious unmet need. We combined the two and the result was *Family Counselor*, a half hour drama presented each Wednesday evening at 7:30. By virtually all valid criteria, we have a hit show.

In *Family Counselor* we offer dramatization of typical problems. Our "plots" are taken directly from the files of our local family counselors and welfare agencies. We deal with adultery, drugs, adolescent conflicts, pre-marital sex, fathers who desert their families and discipline problems.

The Counselor on the screen who advises our actors is, in real life, a professional family counselor who knows whereof he speaks.

On the entertainment level, the program has the appeal of good soap opera. We are, after all, presenting the stuff of life: rage, tears, love and hate, money worries. The fascination lies in the question: how will these people find a solution to their problems? And why do they behave as they do?

The ratings reflect the show's emotional appeal. It runs number two in its time period, challenging *To Tell The Truth*. It has the second highest audience of women 18 to 49 of any access show of our station.

On the public service level, the program is fulfilling the function of a good educational show. It is instructing people, widening their knowledge, helping them to *cope*. We don't know precisely how many families have been eased over a rough time by taking the advice of *Family Counselor*. But we do know that the program has stimulated a 100 per cent increase in the number of people seeking help from the Baltimore Family and Home Society.

The program is still a modest experiment. But it has attracted sufficient viewers to make it commercially viable, while serving the community. Had we been content simply to *discuss* family problems, in an abstract way, we would have an infinitesimal audience. Our approach may be upside down, but it's working.

* * *

WILLIAM W. HILLIER is program manager of WJZ-TV in Baltimore. He was graduated Magna Cum Laude from Harvard in 1962 and holds both a Master's Degree and a Doctorate in theatrical arts from the Carnegie Institute of Technology. He was an ABC Fellow at Yale in the academic year 1965-66. Prior to his present assignment, Mr. Hillier was a producer director at KING-TV in Seattle and public affairs director at WBZ-TV in Boston.

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MUST WE ACCEPT GOVERNMENT INTIMIDATION?

By Robert W. Sarnoff

As a regulated industry, broadcasting has learned over the years how to live with government. The first three letters of our alphabet are FCC. We also deal with the FTC, the Department of Justice and other government agencies. And from the very beginning, the industry has maintained a dialogue, mostly a constructive one, with committees in both houses of Congress. I think it is second nature for us to be alert to the special nature of our public stewardship — and I don't think we're particularly thin-skinned about our regulated status.

But the growing intensity of government assaults on broadcasting must give us new and genuine concern. Most visibly, we have had the unprecedented spectacle of high federal officials attacking the national news media in general and television network news in particular. It is plainly an effort to impair the credibility of the news and to influence how it is reported. It seems aimed at a state of public information fed by government handout and starved by official secrecy on matters that are the public's business.

The effort to discredit television news has coincided with another development — the emergence of a new official voice that speaks for the White House on broadcast policy. The Office of Telecommunications Policy has some antecedents as a technical unit in the Executive Branch, but now it has become an activist agency — something new not only for broadcasters but for the FCC and the Congress to contend with.

Here are some of the policies the OTP has been pushing. The agency seeks to force-feed cablevision beyond its natural growth in order to offset broadcasting. It wants to limit repeat programming with no comprehensible justification in the public interest. It has assaulted network news with colorful generalities that defy definition. It has sought to turn the stations into censors of network news by linking such a role with proposed licensing arrangements we all seek.

This latter device was so transparent that an explanation seemed necessary, and so we have the new rallying cry of “localism.” Freely translated in this context, “localism” means “divide and conquer.” Only the national media have the resources for intensive reporting of major national and international events and issues — in other words, the arena in which the federal government operates. Demeaning and diminishing the national media — whether they be the television networks or the nation’s leading newspapers, magazines and wire services — is an effort to stifle the most relevant channels of public information.

In the name of localism, the federal government would prefer to put the primary burden of reporting and analyzing national and world issues on a fragmented multitude of local media, which lack the resources for such a task.

Localism is a pretext. What the government wants is a tamed press. Thus, in non-commercial television, we have been witnessing an interesting variation. There, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, controlled directly by government appointees, has been dismantling national news and public affairs programming. Individual stations have been seeking a role in the decision-making process at the national level. But the Director of the OTP, who proclaims localism for commercial television, opposes giving local non-commercial stations a voice in programming through their own representatives in the national organization.

The government’s efforts to make the news media docile and accommodating rely heavily on the technique of intimidation. This technique works only against those who are willing to be timid. But there is another threat that is not sufficiently recognized. That is to strike at national broadcast journalism through actions and proposals attacking the economic capability of networks. I am not suggesting that the government has adopted such a design, but I am concerned that an atmosphere has developed where networks are perceived as fair game.

Whatever may be the motives of this growing pressure on broadcasting, it is important for us — and even more important for the public — to recognize an essential fact: weakening the economic structure of networking could impede the flow of independent information to the people.

And in our society, which depends on an informed electorate and an open market of ideas, that would be a calamity.

Some of the economic threats, such as the proposal for countercommercials, are aimed at the whole broadcasting industry. But significantly, the networks are the major target.

For example, the Department of Justice recently dusted off an anti-trust suit against the television networks. It revisits areas already under FCC

examination. It proposes actions paralleling steps already taken by the FCC. And it seeks changes that could only disrupt the complex process of program development, selection and scheduling.

Another example is the rerun issue I have cited as one of those pushed by the OTP. During last year's political campaign, the Administration suddenly came to the support of another campaign — one conducted by Hollywood production unions — to cut back network program reruns in prime time. This is a proposal designed for private — not public — interest. Incidentally, no such restrictions have been proposed for stations, where local entertainment programming consists largely of reruns.

Again, it is the networks that have been singled out to their disadvantage in the matter of CATV ownership. Here, it seems to me, they are being doubly penalized. On the one hand, only the network companies have been barred from owning cable television systems anywhere in the country. On the other, we have seen the calculated effort to build up CATV as a competitor to the networks.

With the stations openly courted by the government, there could be a short-sighted temptation for you to say: "It's happening to the networks; it isn't happening to us." This would be like saying that the front end of the boat is sinking but we're sitting in the stern.

In television, we are all very much in the same boat — stations, program suppliers and networks. Damage any part and you damage the whole. What is also damaged is a broad program service of news and entertainment, free to the public, and a selling force that helps power our whole national distribution system.

Network news and sports are services of particular value to the public — services that the stations could not otherwise supply. They involve enormous costs with little or no financial return. If the networks' economic resources are drained by repressive government measures, news and sports would certainly be vulnerable to cutbacks. And, indeed, so would the entertainment service, which requires continuing and costly program development, culminating each year at the point where the three networks put close to a half billion dollars on the line in high-risk commitments. It is those commitments that support the prime-time program schedule that attracts your major audiences and a good deal of your revenue.

So these are the threats we face in this prosperous year of a promising decade: threats to journalistic freedom joined with threats to television's economic base. They overlap and intertwine. Without freedom to fulfill our responsibilities as a news medium, we *might* hang on to our profits at the cost of our souls. Without a viable economic base, we could hang on to neither. We must meet both threats at the same time and in much the same way — by taking

a stand and making common cause with all those who have a stake in freedom of the press and a vigorous system of broadcasting.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough that this is not a matter of partisan politics. What we must resist is not peculiar to any single Administration. It represents a continuing and accelerating trend, begun many years ago. It consists of actions proposed by the well-meaning who do not recognize the side-effects of their prescriptions; it also consists of actions calculated to injure, advanced by men of ill will who seek to cut down the role of broadcasting. Whatever the intention, these attacks on broadcasting are equally dangerous. And do not think that harmful measures, if they are adopted, would not carry into future administrations — and indeed provide the basis for still further turns of the screw.

We should all be grateful to the OTP's pot shots at network news for a couple of things. For one, the effort to tie desirable licensing arrangements to demands that stations become watchdogs over network news was so obvious that it backfired and was thoroughly discredited in legislative hearings.

Secondly the OTP's attacks prompted a remarkable outpouring of support for broadcasting from many of the nation's newspapers and magazines. They helped focus the country's attention on the fact that an attack on one news medium is an attack on all. By the same token, many broadcasters have helped make the public more aware of governmental pressures on the print media.

I believe we could and should do even more. Let me offer two examples of issues on which broadcasters should make themselves heard. One is an economic issue on its face, but is bound up with freedom and diversity of expression. The nation's magazines have borne heavy postal increases. *They are now threatened with a rate hike of 142 per cent over the next five years.* Some magazines will die as a result; they will be just as dead as if they had been censored.

Another issue on which broadcasters should rally with newspapers and magazines is one that affects the essential function of all the news media. It is the effort of government to put self-serving restraints on the free flow of information to the people. This can take different forms. One is outright prior restraint on publication of news. Another is the increasingly common device of subjecting investigative reporters to subpoenas and the threat of jail sentences — an abusive practice that results in drying up news sources.

Still another is the use of official secrecy as a cloak for official mistakes and derelictions. This is an abuse that has been demonstrated again and again. It is the reason for widespread concern over the government's current efforts to rewrite the sections of the Federal Criminal Code dealing with disclosure of classified information. Whichever of these different means of suppression is employed, the effect is to deprive the public of what it needs to know in a free society.

In a free society, the government is the servant of the public, not its master, and information about government policy belongs to the people as well as the government. The rights guaranteed by the First Amendment were intended to give the public its due. That is common ground on which broadcasting and the print media must stand together to fight side by side.

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The preceding article is based on an address by ROBERT W. SARNOFF, chairman of the board of RCA, delivered to a gathering of NBC Television Network Affiliates in Los Angeles, May 7, 1973.

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“Television watching became an addiction comparable only to life itself. If the set was not on, Americans began to feel that they had missed what was ‘really happening’. And just as it was axiomatic that it was better to be alive than dead, so it became axiomatic that it was better to be watching *something* than to be watching nothing at all. When there was ‘nothing on TV tonight’, there was a painful void. No wonder, then, that Americans revised their criteria for experience. Even if a firsthand experience was not worth having, putting it on TV tonight might make it so.”

—Daniel J. Boorstein
in “The Americans:
The Democratic Experience”

* * *

“It is better to try something new than not to try it and wonder what would have happened if we had. We have the right to be wrong as we seek new ways to be right. . . . Through trial and error, we want television once again to be the center of attention.”

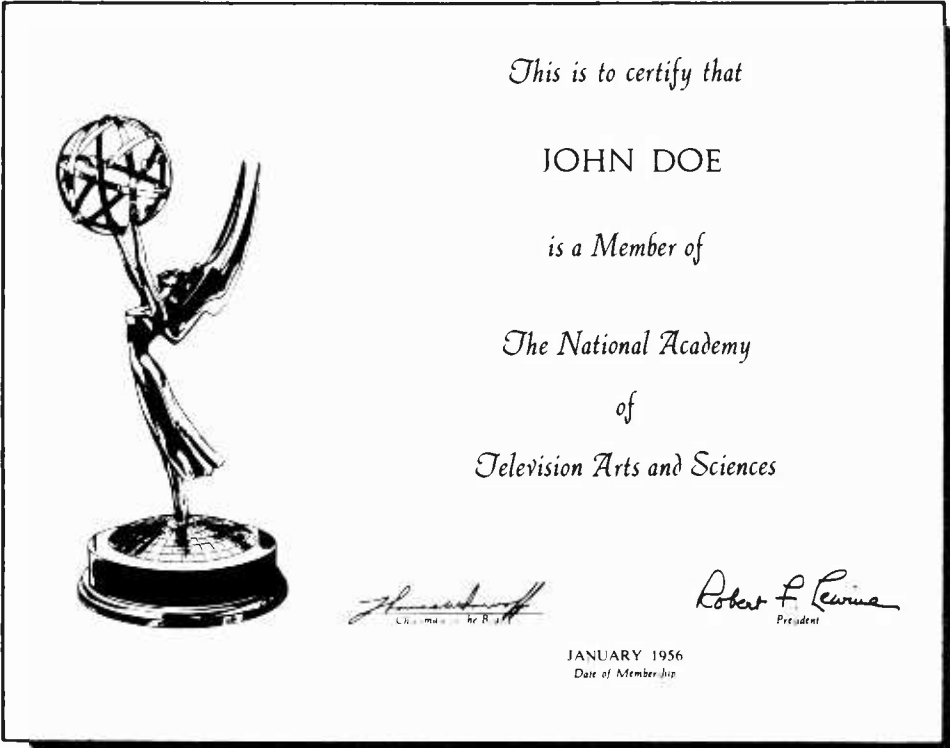
—Robert D. Wood,
President, CBS Television
(Address to the Network Affiliates, May 15, 1973)

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“The real irony is that at the time *An American Family* (the Louds) reared its head on public television, rising up on commercial television came . . . *The Waltons*. Look at both these series. A Depression family with nothing. An affluent family with everything. And then ask yourself: which one had nothing and which one had everything? Ask yourself, in other words, not what the country has gained in the past 40 years, but what we have lost.”

—Cleveland Amory,
TV Guide

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—*Blair Sabol*,
The Village Voice, May 24, 1973

* * *

“ . . . My hackles rise when I hear it suggested that we’re *not* responsible. We in broadcast news have ethics we defend and maintain as strongly as a doctor or a lawyer does; in fact, a lot more strongly than some doctors and lawyers I know.”

—*Walter Cronkite*,
Playboy, June, 1973

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“I am not objecting to (the Fairness Doctrine) as a principle. I am objecting to the fact that the power to decide whether we have been fair — that is, professional — resides in seven government officials, none of whom has any competence to make such a judgment.”

—*Richard Salant*, President CBS News
The Center Magazine, May/June, 1973

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