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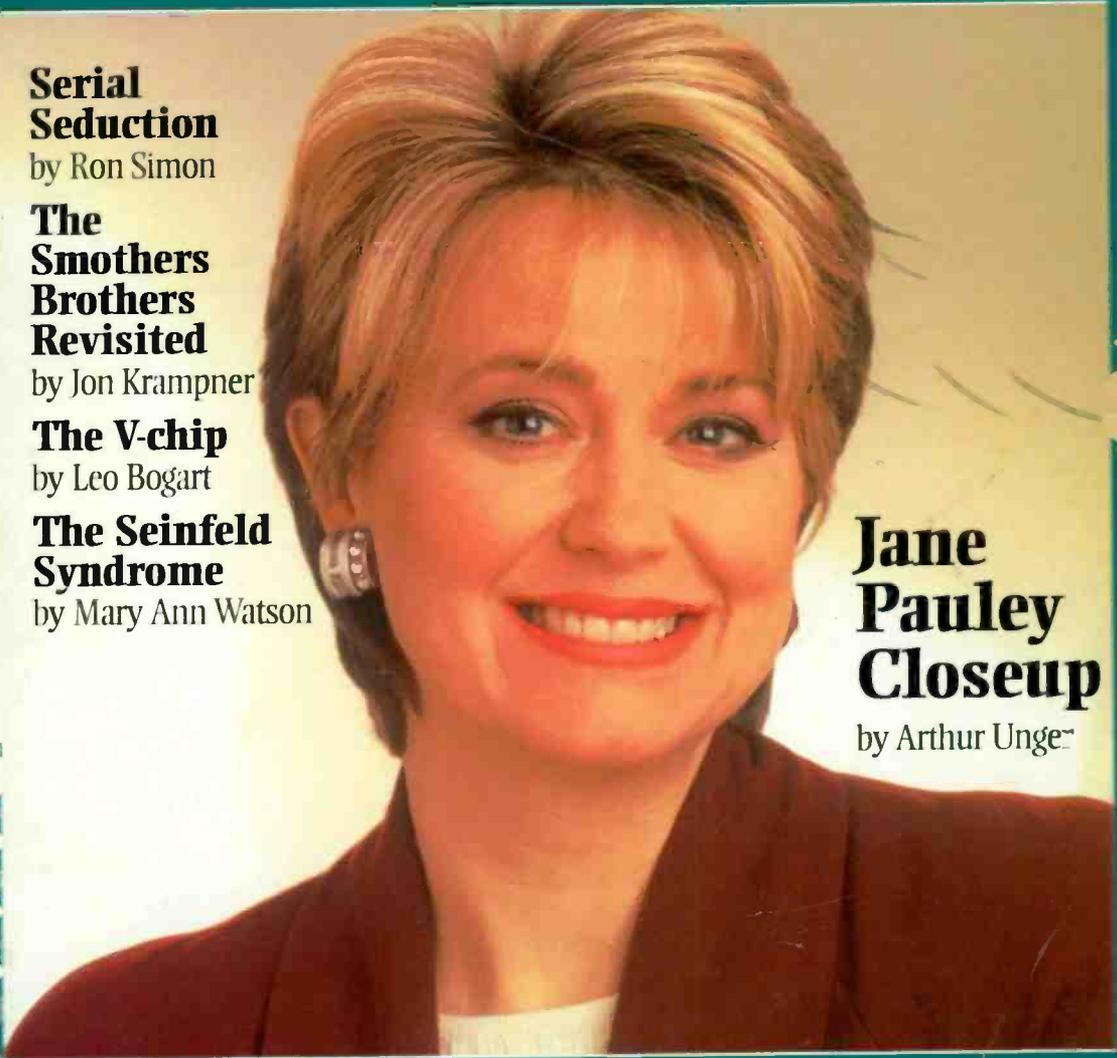
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VOLUME XXIX NUMBER 3

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Serial Seduction: Living in Other Worlds

By Ron Simon

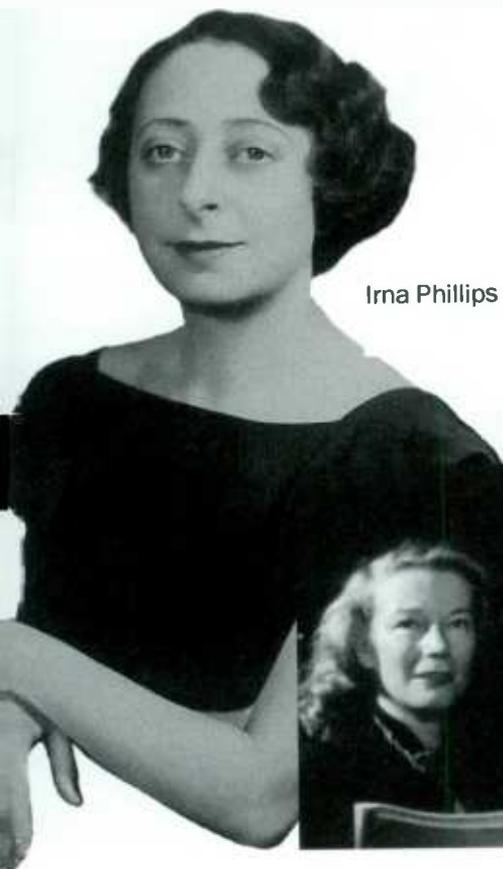
*What makes soap operas so popular, so compelling? Who created soaps, and why have they lasted so long? The television curator of The Museum of Television and Radio offers some answers as he traces the serial narrative form from TV to radio, to print and comic strips, and even back to Dickens, who used cliff-hangers and knew how to keep fans hooked from episode to episode. This essay is excerpted from the book *Worlds Without End: The Art and History of the Soap Opera*, commissioned by the Museum in connection with its three-month bicoastal exhibition of TV screenings, radio programs and seminars to celebrate the enduring tradition of the soap opera, phenomenon of modern culture.*

Is it possible that Irna Phillips, the former school teacher who became the doyenne of the soap opera, was somehow influenced by philosopher George Santayana's dictum, "another world to live in . . . is what we mean by having a religion," as she created and then developed the daytime serial over forty years? Phillips certainly approached the genre with a spiritual discipline and intensity, and in 1964 even titled one of her creations *Another World*. More than any other art form, the soap opera creates, an alternative world, where the characters and their environment seem to exist in a parallel dimension. Unlike individual works of art—a poem, novel, or film—which require Coleridge's temporary "suspension of disbelief," the serial demands ongoing belief and a daily commitment from the follower. Such

surrender to an imaginative universe has engendered a loyalty and devotion that supersedes all rules of engagement: perhaps that is one reason why the soaps and their enthusiasts have been treated with suspicion, and sometimes contempt.

The well-made classical work of fiction is conscious of its structure: exposition in the beginning leads to a well-reasoned middle, culminating in the catharsis of the denouement. The never-ending soap, however, is a relentless series of beginnings and middles, without any final resolutions. The soap's characters take on a life of their own, often growing beyond the intentions, and even the lifetime, of the original author. When *Guiding Light* turned sixty in 1997, the serial had already outlived its creator, Irna Phillips, by twenty-three years. As they say, "life is short, and art is long," but how did an art get this long?

Since the beginning of mass culture at the turn of the nineteenth century, authors and entrepreneurs have tried to hook an audience and keep it coming back for more. Magazines, books, comic strips, and films have all employed a serial narrative to actively engage consumers. The soap opera was an invention of American radio, perhaps the only new form created by the media. Critic Gilbert Seldes thought that the serial was "[radio's] single notable contribution to the art of fiction."



Irna Phillips



Guiding Light on radio. Lesley Woods, Staats Cotsworth

This new form offered writers no temporal restrictions and thus the ability to achieve a whole new way of storytelling with a realism unheard of in any other art. Over time, the daily soap exploited the defining quality that made radio and then television distinct from other artistic experiences: their pervasive presence in the home, day in and day out. Characters could live, love, and die, experiencing the same happiness and hardships through the years as their audience. No doubt this is why a special kinship arose between soap characters and the listeners and viewers, a relationship so intense that psychologists have been analyzing the bond for more than fifty years.

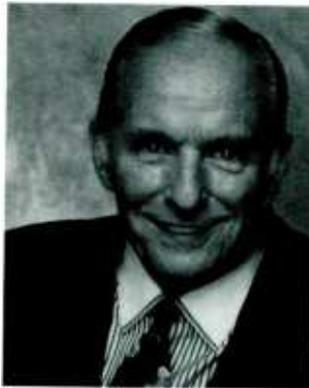
It is certainly not the nature of a genre to have a single inventor, but the soap opera comes close, having been suffused from the beginning with the philosophy of Irna Phillips. More than sixty-five years after her first serial aired on radio, most of the television soaps can be traced back directly to Phillips and her disciples. How Phillips came to engender the serial tradition in broadcasting is a story worthy of the master herself. Arid like much that she wrote, it still continues today.

The Serial Narrative Before Radio

One can date the start of the serial narrative as we understand it from 1836, when publishers Chapman and Hall offered fledgling newspaper columnist



Agnes Nixon



William J. Bell

Charles Dickens the opportunity to sustain a story in monthly installments to accompany the illustrations of popular cartoonist Robert Seymour. Dickens was asked to write about the comic exploits of a metropolitan club whose members would include character types that mirrored the new urban population. Publishers had issued completed stories in serial installments before, but this was the first time that a story was published without the ending in sight. *The Pickwick Papers* became the 1830s equivalent of a pop culture phenomenon. The publishers had at first set a print run of four hundred copies; by the end they were printing forty thousand. One contemporary commentator wrote that “needy admirers flattened their noses against the booksellers’ windows eager to secure a good look at the etch-

ings and to peruse every line of the letterpress that might be exposed to view, frequently reading aloud to applauding bystanders . . . so great was the craze.” From that point on, the serial narrative combining the word and the image has thrived.

In America in 1850 *Harper’s Monthly* magazine inspired the development of the serialized novel, and American readers found themselves immersed in the continuing tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, and Henry James. As in England, readers identified with the characters and actively sought out fellow subscribers to discuss what was going to happen next. In fact, many publications had a regular forum that allowed readers to offer their feelings on the developing action. Such

camaraderie has been part and parcel of the serial narrative ever since, as anyone in a soap opera chat room on the Internet can testify.

At the turn of the century, the serial narrative was further popularized in daily newspapers through comic strips, descendants of the drawings that accompanied the Dickens installments. One of the earliest "funnies," *A. Mutt* (later to become *Mutt and Jeff*), was conceived by Harry Conway "Bud" Fisher and began running in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1907, appearing seven days a week. Fisher understood the power of the comics to bring readers back morning after morning. Increasingly, he showed his protagonist, compulsive gambler Augustus Mutt, engaging in activities that could be re-

solved in future strips.

The next advance in comic strip serials involved a penetrating look at everyday family life. Cartoonist Sidney Smith and his publisher Captain Joseph Patterson of the *Chicago Tribune* conceived *The Gumps* to be a visual equivalent of Theodore Dreiser's social-realist novels. The Gumps were a typical American family yearning to experience the prosperity of the Jazz Age. Smith wanted "everyday things to happen to them," which found a resonance in the audience. When one of the characters died after her wedding was disrupted, there was an outpouring of emotion across the nation.

Print and pictures also coalesced in a serial narrative for the movies. Charles Dwyer, editor of *The Ladies World*, involved



The Guiding Light:
Glenn Walker, Charita Bauer,
and Lyle Sudrow (1954)



Search for Tomorrow:
Mary Stuart, Larry Haines and Melba Rae

his magazine readers in a contest to predict the fate of virginal heroine Mary, whose fictional story, featuring a portrait by Charles Dana Gibson, appeared in a 1912 issue. Dwyer joined forces with Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope Company, and Mary's adventures were soon presented monthly both in print and film. Noticing the public's enthusiasm, the *Chicago Tribune* combined a continuing newspaper scenario with a biweekly screen version of *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, spawning a cycle of women-in-peril imitations. The serial, thus, became a part of regular moviegoing, especially for adolescents, who enjoyed the continuing exploits of such heroes as Tarzan and Dick Tracy, who were also comic strip favorites.

The Serial Comes to Radio

Much of the mystique of radio derived from the compelling power of the individual voice. Think of the intimate chats of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the crooning of Bing Crosby, or the harangues of Father Charles Coughlin. But no single person, regardless of how artful, can sustain an audience day in and day out. Dialogue between two people, however, has been the basis of daily radio serials for many years. The roots of the serial lie in the intimate conversation of two characters eavesdropped on by an entire nation; Amos and Andy, Ma Perkins and one of her daughters, Reverend Ruthledge and a parishioner of the *Guiding Light*.

The serial first came to radio in 1926, when the *Chicago Tribune* decided to bring a comic strip and its daily newspaper audience to its station, WGN. *The GumPs*, those middle-class dreamers, were chosen. Two veterans of touring comedy and minstrel shows, Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, were approached to lend their voices. The two performers, however, proposed another series more in keeping

with their training. They suggested a serial about two poor black Southerners, Sam and Henry, who were forced to migrate to the big city. *The GumPs* went on the air without them, but for two years *Sam 'n Henry* was broadcast six nights a week in ten-minute episodes. In 1928 Gosden and Correll wanted to syndicate the show nationally, so they left WGN to create a similar series, called *Amos 'n Andy*, for a competing radio station, an NBC affiliate, owned by the *Chicago Daily News*. As audiences identified with the economic hardships of the two displaced Georgians, *Amos 'n Andy* became broadcasting's first mass phenomenon, a nightly ritual for most of the nation. Radio writers began to copy the *Amos 'n Andy* formula and created programs with fictional locales peopled with characters who reflected universal emotions: Paul Rhymer evoked the entire small town of Crooper, Illinois, through his characters Vic and Sade; Carlton Morse delineated the Barbour clan of Sea Cliff, San Francisco, in *One Man's Family*; and Gertrude Berg, creator of *The Goldbergs*, made millions of listeners care for a poor Jewish family on New York's lower East Side.

Nearly all of this earliest radio programming was scheduled in the evening, because executives were concerned that housewives would not be able to concentrate on a program while performing their chores. During the formative years, radio was, as one scholar has noted, an "evening, family, and father-controlled entertainment." That soon changed as the home products manufacturer General Mills looked for ways to integrate information about the home into an instructional program for women. In 1926 the food company created the character "Betty Crocker" to give daily hints on how to shop and take care of the home more efficiently. The late twenties saw a boom in these specialized programs for women. NBC created *The Women's Magazine of the*

Air to combine ideas and entertainment of “genuine inspiration and help.” Procter & Gamble became one of the main sponsors of the series and advertised three times during the week: health and beauty on Monday, underwritten by Camay soap; “Crisco Cooking Lessons” on Thursday, spotlighting “everyday dishes that are new, simple and different”; and Ivory Flakes’s fashion trends on Friday. The manufacturer encouraged listeners to request companion guide booklets, which further connected the audience to the program.



All My Children: Rosemary Prinz, Ruth Warrick and Richard Hatch



As the World Turns: Frank Runyeon and Meg Ryan

Irna Phillips

Now enters Irna Phillips, the former teacher who was struggling to break into radio as an actress. She began her career as host of the inspirational show *Thought for a Day* for the *Chicago Tribune*’s WGN in 1930. Station executives were not satisfied with her thespian talents and suggested that she take a crack at scriptwriting to create a serial along the lines of their previous successes, *The Gumps* and *Sam ‘n Henry*. Phillips melded several key elements in her work—the structure of the serial, the homey philosophy of the woman’s program, and aspects of her own lonely, introspective life—to create one of the most resilient genres of broadcasting, the soap opera. Few writers would have such an impact on the history of radio and television: Phillips’s disciples, Agnes Nixon and William J. Bell, have kept her paradigm go-

ing after more than sixty-five years. Despite this achievement, Phillips has gone largely unrecognized outside the scope of daytime radio and television broadcasting. She is not mentioned in Eric Barnouw’s sweeping history of the mediums, and her one-time bosses, David Sarnoff at NBC

Radio and William S. Paley of CBS Television, give no credit to one of their key moneymakers in their autobiographies.

Phillips’s first series, *Painted Dreams*, debuted unsponsored in the fall of 1930. In it, she formed the bedrock of all the soaps that followed—a core family surviving the

trials and tribulations of daily life. Phillips focused on the role of Mother Moynihan, a part she played herself, who oversaw a large family and ran a boarding house. The scripts emphasized the domestic sphere and personal relationships; Mother Moynihan’s biggest worry was the future of her youngest daughter Irene, who fancied herself a modern girl, ambitious for a successful career very much like the creator herself.

The tensions between the old and new ways of life were played out in a series of interlocking story lines as characters grasped for their own happiness. Phillips was also shrewd enough to develop ideas that might interest potential sponsors, arguing that for any radio series to be a “utility to its sponsor, [it] must actually sell merchandise; otherwise the object of radio advertising has failed.” Among other

story elements, Phillips conceived of an engagement and wedding that offered the possibility for product tie-ins.

With a good head for business, Phillips saw the national possibilities for her daily serial and wanted to sell it to one of the networks. She took WGN to court over their claim to the copyright of *Painted Dreams*, but lost the case. Then, acting as an independent producer, she retooled her concept for the NBC Chicago affiliate WMAQ and created *Today's Children* for national network broadcast. The program's opening epigram delineates a major principle of all soap opera:

"And today's children with their hopes and dreams, their laughter and tears, shall be the builders of a brighter world tomorrow." Mother Moynihan became Mother Moran, but in Phillips's mind both were modeled on her own mother. So closely were reality and the fictional world intertwined for the creator that when her mother died in 1938, a heartbroken Irna Phillips decided to do the unthinkable in the soap world—she canceled her own serial.

In 1937 Phillips, wanting to capture "life as most of us know it," created her never-ending saga, *The Guiding Light*, which has become the longest-running drama in broadcasting history. In the first incarnation of the serial—the life and times of a nonsectarian minister, Dr. John Ruthledge, and his flock in small-town Five Points—Phillips fully realized the essence of the soap opera: a continuous series of first and second acts, with a complex juggling act of dominant and secondary stories that never reach a final denouement. A year after the series began



One Life to Live: Erika Slezak

Phillips supervised publication of a companion volume for fans that traced the backstory (the unwritten history that exists before a soap goes on) of *The Guiding Light*, "authored" by the fictitious Dr. Ruthledge.

In it she made clear that each character's pain and confusion is interlocked with others in the community. Rose Kransky, for example, born of Jewish parents but refusing to define herself by orthodox rules (very much a reflection of Irna herself), was nurtured by her friendship with Mary Ruthledge, the Reverend's daughter. If Phillips felt the pain of Rose Kransky, her alter superego

was Ruthledge, whose philosophy was that "no matter how difficult your problems may be . . . others have been faced with the same obstacles, and with faith and determination and courage have managed to overcome them."

By the early forties Irna Phillips was assigned the mantle "Queen of the Soap Opera" by the press. She served as independent producer of her work, packaging entire programs for a sponsor, generally Procter & Gamble, the genre's leading impresario. Working on several serials at the same time, she was generating two million words a year, the equivalent of approximately twenty-five novels. When five serials became too taxing, Phillips hired assistant writers to fill in the dialogue after she blocked the story, but she continued to be the wellspring of plot devices, one of which became a staple of the genre, the amnesia story line. To get them to tune in again, she once said she liked to "cliff-hang" her audience.

There was such a defined universe to a

Phillips serial that three of her stories were programmed consecutively to constitute *The General Mills Hour*, which ran for one year in 1945. Within this larger narrative framework Phillips allowed her characters to drift from serial to serial. One of the remaining examples of this experiment of running together programs that are connected by the characters and themes of one creator is a remarkable self-reflexive deliberation on the nature of the soap opera. In the broadcast of May 7, 1945, the eve of V. E. Day, Phillips causes a character, a World War II veteran, to produce a radio drama about his own disability. The fictitious broadcast is listened to and discussed by the other characters in all three serials, who comment that radio stories "taken out of life" can help make "their own" lives better.

The Hummerts and the Serial Factory

Frank and Anne Hummert provide a fascinating contrast to Irna Phillips. Frank Hummert had been working in copywriting and advertising when he noticed "the success of serial fiction in newspapers and magazines." In the early thirties, he decided to translate that serial narrative to the infant medium of radio. He wanted his radio dramas to accommodate the daily pattern of the homemaker, but at the same time to offer a release into the world of romance and fantasy—very different from the "real" world of Irna Phillips. He worked with his assistant Anne Ashenurst (whom he married in 1935) and writer Charles Robert Douglas Hardy Andrews to devise fantasies to help alleviate the boredom and repetition of ritualistic housework. By the midforties the Hummerts were producing twelve serials a day and were operating what was derided as a soap opera mill, which now might be considered the prototype for a

television soap opera's writing staff, where various aspects of the scripts are written by different people.

Each Hummert serial answered a basic rhetorical question, around which multiple plots were woven. For *Our Gal Sunday* the question was "can this girl from a small mining town in the West find happiness as the wife of a wealthy and titled Englishman?" In *Backstage Wife* the audience learned what it meant for Mary Noble, the small-town Iowa girl, "to be the wife of a famous Broadway star, dream sweetheart of a million other women." Most of the Hummert plots focused on the gap between the wealthy and the aspiring middle class, bringing comfort to millions of listeners who were struggling with the reality of deprivation, first during the depression years and then World War II.

A notable example is the Hummerts' 1938 adaptation of the 1937 film *Stella Dallas*. In the Barbara Stanwyck movie, the self-sacrificing mother is resigned to wait outside the gates of a mansion, feeling she is not good enough to attend her daughter's wedding to the son of the wealthy family. The Hummerts reconcile that disjunction in their fantasy world, and the mother, still obviously from a lower class, feels right at home in the grand Grosvenor mansion and helps both the upstairs and downstairs characters with their problems. Thus, the Hummerts did not try to reflect reality, but rather to improve it, or, as Frank Hummert stated, to painting "against the canvas of everyday American life."

The Daytime Controversy

During the early forties there were more than seventy daytime serials on the air, listened to by approximately half of all women at home. Beginning in 1939, the genre was regularly referred to as "soap opera" by the press, mocking these sentimental tales that were

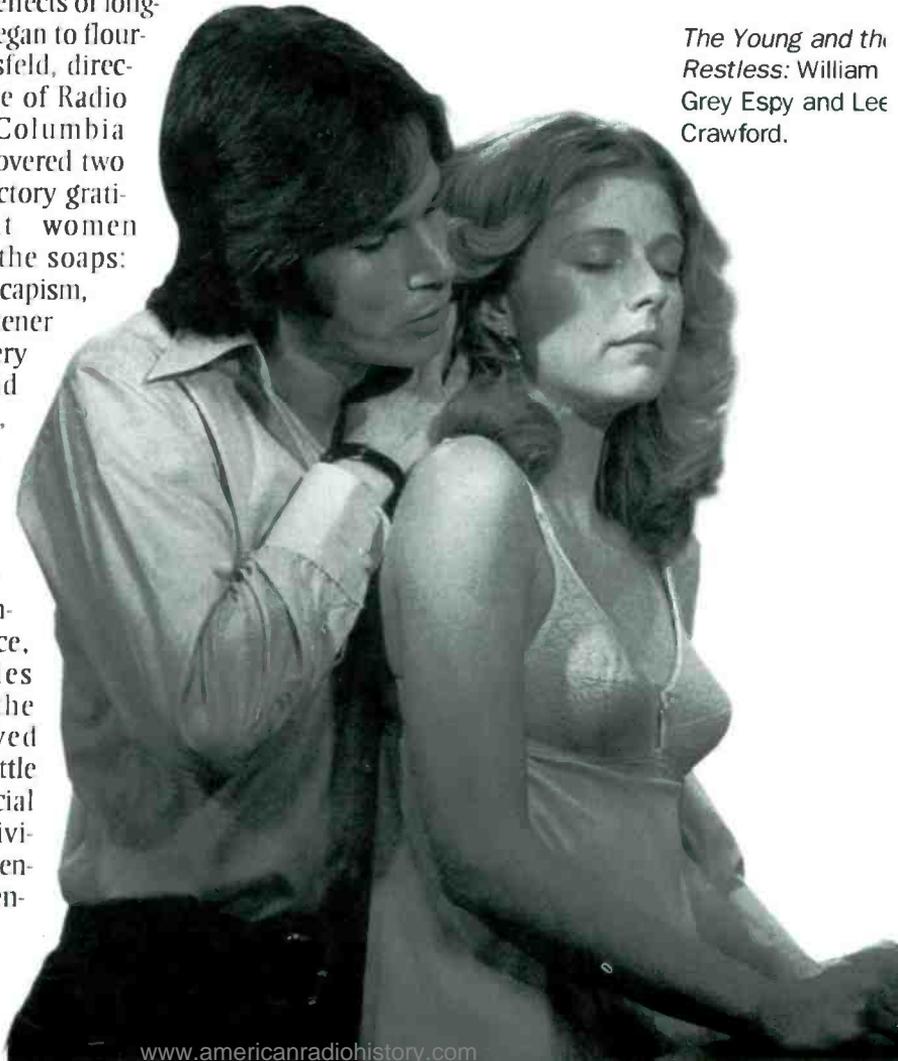
sponsored almost exclusively by manufacturers of household products, especially cleansers. Educators and psychologists were disturbed by the morbid content of the soaps, also called "washboard weepers," and tried to analyze why the audience was habitually addicted to endless stories of calamity and unhappiness. As the country prepared for war, cultural critics theorized that all the suffering on the airwaves was undermining the moral fiber of American womanhood. New York psychiatrist Dr. Louis Berg compared the repetitiveness of the soaps to Hitler's propaganda machine, claiming that each was corrupting the human nervous system.

In the wake of the widespread success of the soaps, a small industry trying to understand the effects of long-term listening began to flourish. Paul Lazarsfeld, director of the Office of Radio Research at Columbia University, discovered two almost contradictory gratifications that women received from the soaps: the first, pure escapism, removed the listener from the drudgery of daily life; and the second, moral guidance, helped the housewife solve her own personal problems. In examining the audience, various studies sponsored by the networks proved that there was little difference in social and cultural activities between listeners and nonlisten-

ers.

Although fantasy remained a consistent aspect of soaps, during World War II the radio serial matured to create more story lines about the realities of wartime. Stella Dallas worked in a munitions factory; one of Ma Perkins's sons died on the European battlefield. The real change in the radio serial, however, came after World War II, and not from reformers but from the television industry, when major daytime sponsors such as General Mills and Pillsbury were lured to the new medium, leaving a major vacuum in the radio schedule. Without the backing of a single advertiser, radio networks experimented with programs that attracted multiple sponsors, including talk and variety programs. By the midfifties, many broadcasting execu-

The Young and the Restless: William Grey Espy and Lee Crawford.



tives felt the serial was a product of depression America and had outlived its usefulness, although the radio soap lingered on until 1960.

Soap Opera on Television

Despite the serial's proven success in magazine publishing, at the movies, and on radio, there was genuine resistance by television executives to employ the form. One of the visionaries of early television, NBC President Sylvester "Pat" Weaver, felt that the old radio soap opera technique would not work in a visual medium "because of the higher absorption and tension demands of television over radio." Primetime entertainment first hit its stride in 1948 with the success of Milton Berle's translation of vaudeville to television; it would take at least three more years for the soap opera to successfully adapt to the new technology.

While the established networks, CBS and NBC, concentrated on weekly programs for their nightly schedules, it was newcomer DuMont that experimented with the low-budget serial. In 1944 Lever Brothers sponsored television versions of two radio soaps, *Big Sister* and *Aunt Jenny's True Life Stories*, on DuMont's New York affiliate, and two years later DuMont created the serial *Faraway Hill* especially for the network. Its producer, David P. Lewis, searched for techniques that would not require total viewer attention, allowing the housewife time "to turn away and go on peeling potatoes or knitting." He devised a stream-of-consciousness technique, an offscreen voice that probed the interior motives of the series heroine Karen St. John, a widow searching for emotional refuge in the country.

The most successful television programs immediately after World War II, however, were live remote broadcasts, especially boxing, and the studio-bound *Faraway Hill*

faded after three months. Even Irna Phillips failed in her initial attempt, a reworking of her first radio serial *Painted Dreams*, because she made no concessions to the visual medium.

One influential experiment from Chicago, a production center noted for its low-key realism, was *Hawkins Falls*, a self-proclaimed television novel about a typical small town that wistfully evoked an earlier America whose way of life was being transformed by the fifties flight to the suburbs. Although this rural community with a population of 6,200 was too far removed from the contemporary American experience to make the show successful in terms of the great soaps (*Hawkins Falls* ran three months in prime time and four years in the afternoon), the genre had finally found a template that would be developed further by co-creator Roy Winsor. In 1951 a veteran of the Hummerts' *Ma Perkins*, Winsor used the dominant heroine archetype from his predecessors' tradition to build the first viable soap, *Search for Tomorrow*, around one female character, Jo Gardner. (Jo was played by the indomitable Mary Stuart from day one until the serial ended in 1986).

Winsor insisted on a bare-stage technique for his series and emphasized the close-up to connect his characters to the audience. There was no need for elaborate sets or long shots, since most of the action took place in the living room or kitchen, key places in the geography of a soap. The critical importance of *Search for Tomorrow* is that it found an audience that was emotionally invested enough to make a daily commitment, which proved that the serial had a future on daytime television.

Ten months after *Search*, Irna Phillips brought *The Guiding Light* to television. Reverend Ruthledge and his family had been written out of the series years before, and "the guiding light" in the title no longer had religious connotations, but

rather the camaraderie of a loving family in times of upheaval. The core family was now the Bauers, a German-American brood trying to find a better life, first in Selby Flats, a fictionalized West Coast suburb, and later in Springfield, the prototype for the midwestern towns that would provide a haven for most of the soap world.

When Phillips first brought the show to television, the series followed the fifteen-minute format of the ongoing radio program. Up to this point, soaps had always run fifteen minutes, which came to formalize the way a story progressed. Then, in 1956, she created *As the World Turns* and threw out the rules of the radio serial. With this new series she pioneered the first thirty-minute drama, and in the process, reconceived the genre for the visual medium. Few people at the time realized that the thirty-minute serial revolutionized the dynamics of serial storytelling. The longer format allowed Phillips to underline two central tenets: that the heart of the serial is the exchange of feeling and memories between two characters; and that any incident should not affect a handful of characters but the whole community. Serial tellers now had the time to go beyond the core family and explore two families from different social classes, reflecting the search for the American dream of advancement and happiness.

Phillips's other groundbreaking work came in creating the visual look for the entire genre. She worked with her producer/director from radio, Ted Corday, to create an intimate style that emphasized the interior lives of her characters. Slow, lingering close-ups during intimate revelations became the visual paradigm of the serial and presented many possibilities for character revelation.

As the World Turns was structured around the patrician Lowells and the solidly middle-class Hugheses, a clan whose ambitions and frustrations would

be a motif for over forty years. It also provided the dominant story line of the late fifties, the romance between Penny Hughes and Jeff Baker, played by Rosemary Prinz and Mark Rydell, who later became a film director. The impetuous Penny and the spoiled Jeff, whom many consider soap's first "super couple," gave youth its own reasons in the television soap. Phillips, with a new generation of writers, was able to reflect the rebellion and disillusionment of the developing youth culture, while still keeping the family-oriented serial intact.

Daytime Versus Early Prime

Whatever the ultimate root of the critical prejudice against the television soap opera, it is interesting to note that it existed from the beginning, even when daytime and primetime dramas were much closer in tone and style. During the fifties, daytime serial and live drama shared many of the same aesthetic values: both emphasized psychology of character and the power of the revelatory close-up; both employed actors who had training in the theater and writers working in the realistic tradition of the Broadway problem play; both were performed live, solidifying their association with a theatrical experience. The phrase that defined the apogee of anthology drama, Chayefsky's "this marvelous world of the ordinary," could equally apply to the best of Irna Phillips. Yet whereas the masters of live drama—Paddy Chayefsky, Rod Serling, and Gore Vidal—were praised for their authenticity and depth, there was little critical appraisal of any kind for daytime.

By the end of the decade, serial and primetime television were on divergent paths. West Coast studios were producing the evening schedule, and television was no longer live but recorded on film, with Hollywood production values. (Soaps were

broadcast live until the late sixties and then performed as if live, on tape.) The first genre to conquer prime time, the western, underlined the rigid dichotomy between television in the afternoon and in the evening—the soap opera and the horse opera.

Daytime was the province of perceived feminine values, talk and negotiation; prime time was the arena for masculine resolve, on the range or in the streets. Soaps catered to character growth and memory—Bert Bauer matured from an anxious housewife into *Guiding Light's* philosophical matriarch—while prime time was an existential wilderness, where lead characters acted without the past as a guide. The new heroes of prime time, Cheyenne and Matt Dillon, discovered themselves anew each week, continuing characters without the benefit of the soap's connecting memories.

A Look at Sponsorship

Throughout the fifties, the most successful serials were put together by advertising agencies for a sponsor. This sponsor-originated formula had its roots in radio and ceded production control to the agency, which in theory better understood the needs of its intended audience. CBS dominated the daytime ratings because of its alliance with Procter & Gamble, which worked directly with the early soap auteurs, Irna Phillips and Roy Winsor. September 3, 1951, proved to be a defining day for P&G: it not only debuted *Search for Tomorrow*, but also marketed two new products, Joy and Spic and Span, to its largely female audience. With the sponsor owning the production, the network's role was passive, providing the airwaves and exercising little creative authority.

To compete with P&G's tightly controlled schedule on CBS, both ABC and NBC decided to package their own

soaps, assuming greater control over daytime programming. After several misfires by both networks, in 1963 ABC hired Frank and Doris Hursley, longtime writers of *Search for Tomorrow*, to create a "daytime *Ben Casey*," the popular evening series starring Vince Edwards. The hospital, that dramatic intersection where personal and professional spheres collided, had been a fixture on radio serials. Irna Phillips had remarked that doctors especially were, "an integral part of everything I have written," introducing the first serial surgeon on *The Road of Life* in 1937. It is ironic that in the early sixties daytime executives were looking to prime time for inspiration, instead of the soap's own considerable history on radio.

The Hursleys' creation, *General*

General Hospital: The soap opera's biggest wedding day: *The Marriage of Luke and Laura Spencer* (1981) with Genie Francis and Anthony Geary



Hospital, was produced at the ABC facilities in Hollywood and brought a new element to the soap. Until then most of the serials had been produced in New York, with roots in the city's performing arts heritage. Beginning with *General Hospital*, soap producers on the West Coast started their own tradition, using videotape, but searching for the more polished look and artful camera angles associated with the movies.

Casting directors now searched for actors who performed on film, whether in the movies or on television. The star of *General Hospital*, John Beradino, had previously been featured in the syndicated series *I Led Three Lives* and worked in such genre series on film as *Cheyenne* and *The Untouchables*. In 1965 the collaboration between Hollywood and the serial was further solidified when Columbia Pictures Television became a partner in another medical soap, *Days of Our Lives*. Although created by Irna Phillips and Ted Corday, an East Coast team, *Days* featured Hollywood leading man Macdonald Carey. It was the first serial to be broadcast in color, although for NBC, which had pioneered color technology in the early fifties, this was late in the game for bringing color to the daytime soap.

Agnes Nixon and William J. Bell

Irna Phillips taught her most gifted progeny, Agnes Nixon and William J. Bell (who were toddlers when the domestic soaps began), not only story structure and character development, but, more importantly, a respect for the métier. In Nixon's words, from this respect emerges "the ability and capacity to develop one's craft and perhaps even raise the standards of the form." Both Nixon and Bell served an arduous apprenticeship under Phillips, and emerged with the belief that soap opera had meaning and

relevance in the turbulent world of the late sixties.

Nixon began as a dialogue writer on Phillips's *Woman in White*, a radio serial about the checkered romance between a nurse and a fledgling surgeon. She wrote scripts for early television anthologies and developed the inaugural stories for *Search for Tomorrow*. Returning to the Phillips fold, she wrote for *Guiding Light* for thirteen years, eight as head writer, and co-created the defining television soap, *As the World Turns*. During these years with Phillips the Nixon touch emerges in her treatment of Bert Bauer, the "tentpole" character of *Guiding Light*. Bert, played by Charita Bauer for thirty-five years, had matured into the homey philosopher of the series by the early sixties, and viewers were stunned when she underwent treatment for uterine cancer.

Nixon had struggled with P&G executives and network censors to have Bert first undergo a Pap smear test. Capitalizing on the temporal quality of the serial, Nixon played the cancer story line out over many months, educating her public about the necessity of medical prevention. The soap form and the pedagogical story coalesced perfectly, and the positive viewer reaction suggested a more sophisticated audience than the industry had realized.

While she was head writing *Guiding Light*, Nixon had created the bible for what would become *All My Children*. Procter & Gamble was not able to find a slot for it, but offered her head-writing duties on a struggling show, *Another World*, which Phillips and Bill Bell created in 1964. Much has been written about Nixon's ability to dramatize topical issues, but here she displayed her mastery of traditional soap fundamentals. Nixon revived *Another World* with a romantic triangle that sustained itself for more than seven years.

With the success of *General Hospital* on ABC, the network allowed Nixon to create



Guiding Light:

Robert Newman and Kim Zimmer as Josh and Reva

duced in New York facilities, her work has made creative use of videotape. (Two important examples are the exploration of the fantasies and desires of lead characters, notably the split personality of Victoria Lord, and going on location outside the studio, as for the unscripted Odyssey House sequences for *One Life to Live*.) Most importantly, she sustained the moral seriousness that characterized Phillips's creations. When her story of a peace activist was debated in the *New York Times*, Nixon brought daytime to a critical plateau it never had reached. Her examinations of the generation

a signature series, *One Life to Live*, allowing her to realize a personal ambition to take soap operas out of WASP Valley. She conceived a multicultural community of ethnic types and challenged her audience to confront their prejudices. While prime-time television was receiving congratulations for starring Diahann Carroll as the innocuous black nurse on *Julia*, Nixon developed a black character, Carla Gray, who was passing for white. In superb use of dramatic irony, the audience was clued in to her heritage before her suitors, a white doctor and a black intern.

Nixon consolidated soap traditions and advanced the respectability of the genre. While she maintained the theatrical base of her mentor, having all her serials pro-

gap and sixties politics predated by several years prime time's breakthrough series, *All in the Family*.

Bill Bell was in advertising before Ina Phillips made him dialogue writer on *The Guiding Light* in 1957. Working in the same room with Phillips he co-wrote *As the World Turns* for nine years, where he developed the ability to capture an audience with expansive storytelling, and to allow stories to go on past the traditional breaking points. Remaining in Chicago, Bell was appointed head writer of *Days of Our Lives* on the West Coast in an effort to salvage one of Phillips's floundering co-creations. Sensing a potential

audience fascination with abnormal psychology, Bell ventured into sexual territories hitherto unexplored anywhere in television. His signature story line for *Days* was the return of an amnesiac Korean War veteran, whose looks had been horribly disfigured in captivity. Having undergone plastic surgery, he returns unrecognized to the nurturing community of Salem and falls in love with his sister. Integrating such sexual taboos as incest and rape into the narrative of the soap has remained Bell's specialty.

Where the center of Phillips's soap universe had been the kitchen and the living room, Bell staked his claim to the bedroom. His first creation with his wife, Lee Phillip Bell, *The Young and the Restless* took for granted the sexual revolution that was sweeping America. Although he appropriated from Phillips the two-family schemata that he knew so well, Bell focused on the sexual desires and entrapments of the younger characters.

The Young and the Restless, packaged by Columbia Pictures Television, furthered the integration of Hollywood production values into the serial. Bell and his production team cast glamorous model types for lead roles and photographed his stars in sensuous lighting. There was no mistaking a Bell close-up; its lingering caress would have made Garbo or Dietrich proud. In 1987 Bell underscored the Hollywood connection with his next creation, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, by setting the serial in Los Angeles, one of the few specific sites in the soap world, and by concentrating on the chic fashion industry.

One of the many defining legacies of the Phillips-Nixon-Bell collaboration is the soap archetype that transformed and defined the entire genre: the bitch goddess. Since the sixties no character has energized more plots than the girl from the wrong side of the tracks who will stop at nothing to achieve material happiness. The once-passive Cinderella of radio seri-

als, a lowly commoner waiting to be swept off her feet, was transformed in the early sixties into a hurricane of lustful desires. Phillips and Bell conspired with actress Eileen Fulton to create the prototypical homewrecking villainess of unlimited ambition, Lisa Miller on *As the World Turns*. Nixon revitalized Phillips and Bell's *Another World* with the Bitch of Bay City, Rachel Davis, who lusted after power and privilege.

Rachel was modeled on a character that Nixon envisioned for her own soap, which took five years to find a sponsor. When that serial, *All My Children*, was finally produced in 1970, Nixon unleashed Erica Kane as a conniving teenage vixen. After years of amorous escapades and serial marriages, Susan Lucci's character has become the femme fatale incarnate. For Nixon and Bell, who have led the way in exploring family problems, the avenging goddess archetype borrows from the Hummerts' tradition an element of pure fantasy, thereby giving their work the possibility of outrageous fun and exaggerated melodrama that is missing from their mentor's.

The Monty Revolution

By the midseventies most soaps had expanded into an hour every day. As production became more costly and complex, the role of the executive producer became as crucial as the head writer's. It fell to the producer to fuse the writing and production teams into a unified whole, sustaining the look and rhythm of a specific soap world day in and day out, fifty-two weeks a year. Producing the equivalent of more than 100 movies, the executive producer was like the mogul of old, overseeing a highly coordinated studio.

The producer who epitomized this new power was a longtime veteran of the field, Gloria Monty. A director of Roy Winsor's

The Secret Storm for sixteen years, Monty left, and experimented with ways to make daytime drama less studio-bound. She directed the first daytime special shot entirely on location, *This Child of Mine*, but when she was put in charge of *General Hospital* she changed all the rules. During her first meeting with Tony Geary, the actor confessed, "I hate soap opera." Monty replied: "Honey, so do I. I want you to help me change all that."

Monty subverted all the strictures that she had learned during her live television days in New York. For one thing, she wanted the pacing of a primetime program, so she eliminated the long pauses of the serial and ordered more than twice the number of scenes per episode of the average soap. In addition to redesigning the sets and costumes, she challenged the form itself. She romantically paired troubled teen Laura Vining with the street-wise, antihero Luke Spencer. United by a problematic rape scene, which Monty labeled a "choreographed seduction," but which others saw as unmitigated violence, Luke and Laura spent the summer of 1980 on the lam, an unprecedented story line that liberated the characters from the established community. Monty enlivened the escapades with homages to Hitchcock and, particularly, to Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night*. With the new look capturing a youthful and collegiate audience, *General Hospital* became a cultural happening, a phenomenon equal to anything in the history of television.

The Serial Memory

For almost fifty years, beginning in radio, the techniques and strategies of the daytime serial were rejected by evening entertainment. Prime time's major experiment with the serial, *Peyton Place* (1964-69), had limited appeal; only the heavily promoted first season reached the Nielsen top twenty-five programs.

Nighttime's most successful use of the genre was parody, epitomized by "As the Stomach Turns," a series of sketches on *The Carol Burnett Show*, and the almost surrealistic serials *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* and *Soap*.

In the late seventies, with competition from the cable industry, network producers began looking for new ways to capture an audience. They reconsidered the form of the soap opera, a genre that they had derided for years. Both *Dallas* and *Dynasty* employed the cliff-hanger to engage an audience in the continuing sagas of greed and lust in a core family, the Ewings and Carringtons respectively. In the eighties, the writers of episodic television, wanting to find more dimensions for their characters, experimented with stories that lingered over many episodes and with characters who had a consciousness of their own histories. Several primetime series did pioneering work in employing the serial structure, including *St. Elsewhere*, *Cheers*, and *L. A. Law*. But the place it really all began for nighttime was *Hill Street Blues*.

Whereas Joe Friday of the fifties *Dragnet* seemed to have neither a personal life nor any memories of his previous cases, Captain Frank Furillo entered the landscape of *Hill Street Blues* with a complicated backstory: a son and an ex-wife, a job in turmoil, and a budding romance with the district attorney. Importantly, Furillo's history was not just a premise. Co-creator Steven Bochco used the details of the character's life to spin story lines that explored the private and public turmoils of Furillo's life each week, interlocking those situations with equally rich vignettes of ten or more characters. This soap opera structure forms the basis for the powerful storytelling that characterizes Bochco's series. The audience is drawn deeper and deeper into the world of the Hill Street station, gathering memories of the series and its characters over many

years.

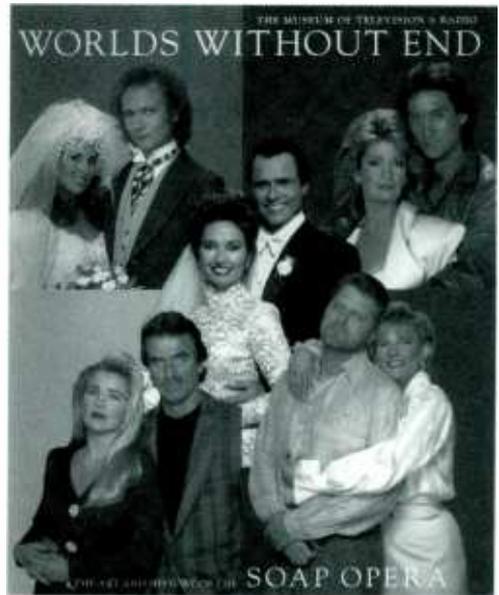
Time and memory for both the characters and the audience are at the heart of the soap opera. While prime-time programming since *Hill Street* has incorporated the serial as a sustaining narrative element, there is no way that evening drama can match how familiar a character can become to a soap opera viewer: the combined run of *Hill Street Blues* and *Cheers* equals approximately one year's worth of any hour-long soap. Moreover, the very narrative structure of the soap demands that the viewer bring memories of the pain and joy and subtle emotional nuances to each scene.

When characters with such rich, penetrating histories as Victor Newman and Nikki Reed on *The Young and the Restless* or Alan and Monica Quartermaine on *General Hospital* confront each other, the viewer fills in the sustained silences and piercing reaction shots that characterize the genre with a keen knowledge of their pasts, thus becoming an important partner in the scene. This deep, emotional, involvement in a story that is unfolding day by day over years is ultimately the triumph of the soap opera. No other art form can achieve, much less sustain, this kind of connection with an audience for so long in such a deeply satisfying way.

The audience for the daytime serial is following in the footsteps of Dickens's passionate admirers, who likewise embraced fictionalized characters as another family: that has been the essential quality of the serial, linking story with audience. The history of the soap opera on radio and television, lasting more than sixty-five years, is in itself a continuing story, with the work of Irna Phillips being carried forward by Agnes Nixon and William J. Bell. As new creative forces enter the world of daytime, whoever carries on the work of Nixon and Bell well into the twenty-first century will by lineage have some connection to Irna

Phillips, no doubt reaffirming her vision that "we do not live in this world alone, but in a thousand other worlds." ■

RON SIMON is curator of television at The Museum of Television and Radio. Previous exhibitions he has organized for the Museum include *Jack Benny: The Radio and Television Work*; *Witness to History* and the *Television of Dennis Potter*. He serves as an adjunct professor at Columbia University and has lectured and consulted at the Smithsonian Institution, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art. His research for this essay included visits to the sets of every soap opera produced in Los Angeles and New York and interviews with the casts and production staffs.



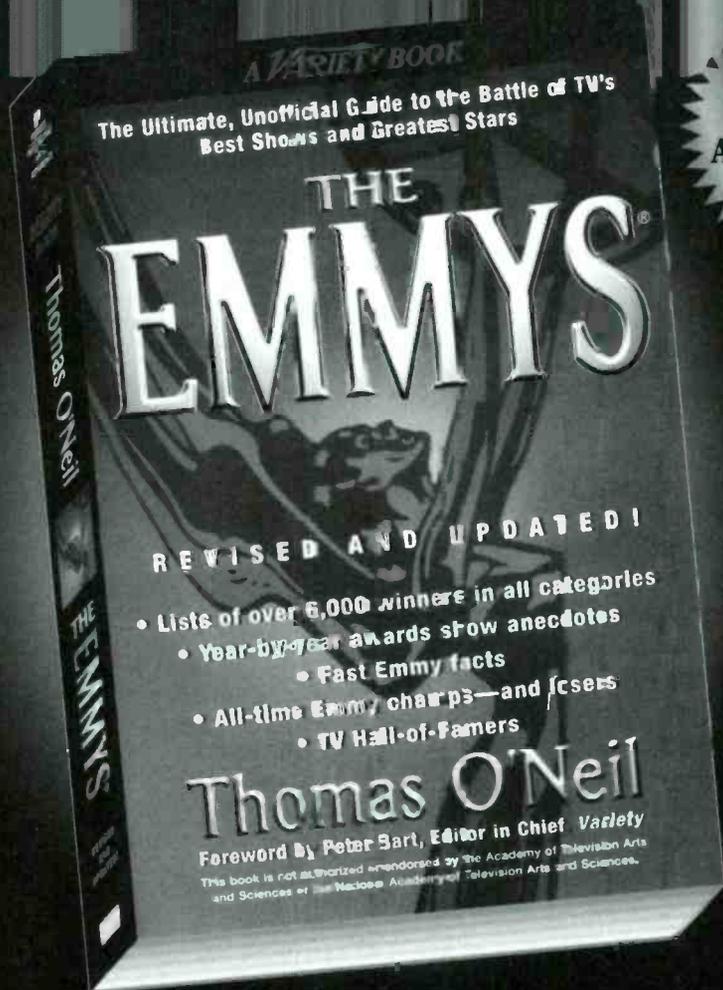
Worlds Without End: The Art and History of the Soap Opera.

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On the Cover, left to right, clockwise: *General Hospital*, *Days of Our Lives*, *Guiding Light*, *The Young and the Restless* and, center, *All My Children*

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The Realities of Media Concentration and Control

They are not myths says the author of a classic study. Here's his reply to a critical challenge to his ideas. He also warns about the dangers of what he calls "technology euphoria."

By Ben H. Bagdikian

In a recent *Television Quarterly*, Professors Eli Noam and Robert Freeman, of Columbia University, argue against what they call "The Media Monopoly... Myth," citing my *Quarterly* article which was based on findings in my book, *The Media Monopoly* (5th Ed.). They state that media ownership concentration has actually declined in the last decade and will become even more so in the future, thanks to new media channels and the authors' own expectations for the cyber-media evolution.

I have no doubt about the accuracy and honesty of the numbers they use. But by depending on bare statistics of market shares and numbers of corporations, obviously significant, nevertheless they miss fundamental points about communication channels and mass media evolution. By using their method they have, unfortunately, created a myth of their own and clouded the realities on which a reform of media policies and practices depends.

The methodology of Professors Noam and Freeman sidesteps fundamental problems in

present mass media concentration. Some of the predictions that buttress their argument display a surprising naïveté about the dynamics of the real world of broadcasting and other media. In the end, they take back much of their sweeping initial generalizations but do so only as mere afterthoughts.

Even if one accepted the authors' simple statistical method, they display some of the sins they attribute to others. "Mass media" is universally defined as content designed for the "mass," that is, the general public. The authors' inclusion of "the information industry" is sensible, but under the rubric they sweep undifferentiated items like creators of computer software and manufacturers of computer hardware. This is the equivalent of calculating concentration in newspapers by including manufacturers of printing presses.

Their exclusive use of quantitative statistics without context becomes a crucial weakness. Their analysis ignores the realpolitik that sways the "information industry" and every other technology of any magnitude, an historical and almost inevitable process under which every industry tries to influence public opinion and legislation, and thus conditions (and sometimes governs) its fate in the marketplace.

General Electric, for example, owns NBC, and radio and cable networks, important mass media. But GE also is one of the largest non-media manufacturers in America, making, among other things, nuclear reactors, electrical equipment, and much else. When it lobbies the Congress, FCC and White House, it does so not just

with its media clout but with its full economic power in other industries. Rupert Murdoch has used his media power, always a powerful lobbying political weapon all by itself (politicians are kind to controllers of their public images), to obtain stunning exemptions from U.S. law and forgiveness of taxes denied less powerful owners.

Murdoch was permitted to ignore the legal limit of 25% ownership of broadcasting stations for foreign firms (his parent firm, News Corp. is still Australian). Without this exemption he could not have formed the FOX network and become a major multi-media force in the country. GE and Murdoch are only two examples of

many that make the one-dimensional statistical approach far too limited. Industries with that kind of political power do what they can, and historically have done to prevent entry of serious new competitors.

The authors seem unaware of the powers of very large media firms to impose corporate censorship that affects a significant portion of public thought and discourse. For example, in March of 1998, Murdoch's HarperCollins canceled its contract to print a book by the former British Governor of

Hong Kong, Chris Patten, after the book house editor, Stuart Proffitt, had said it was the most lucid and intelligent book by a politician he had ever read and was sure to be a best seller. When Proffitt refused to cancel the book, he was suspended.

Murdoch clearly canceled the book, as he had the BBC World Service from his satellite broadcasts, because the Patten

The authors see new "cyber-media" as introducing new techniques and channels. They are not alone, and not yet proven wrong, but like most people they display what public reaction has always tended to be with an ingenious invention . . . "technological euphoria."

book, as did the BBC World Service, displeased authorities in China where he has large media investments scheduled for enlargement.

More significantly, according to the *New York Times*, a number of the major media book house editors admitted they practiced self-censorship when it came to accepting or rejecting books that might affect their owner's parent firm. Phyllis Grann, president of Penguin Putnam, said she was told she was the decision maker, but the owning firm's other industrial interests "was in my head." Albert Vitale, head of Random House, said it made "common sense" to cancel a book that parodied one of the house's most profitable authors. An executive of Simon & Schuster, owned by Viacom, said that when a book touched on Viacom's other large interests "we are smart enough to be sensitive to potential problems." And it is taken for granted in the Disney book groups that no book critical of Mickey Mouse will get past the gate.

Typically, Rupert Murdoch made bold and obvious what is a silent process throughout the conglomerate-owned book industry, which is to say publishers of the largest numbers of books—and TV programs—that reach the public. Later, after a settlement with Patten, Murdoch's lawyers issued a full apology on the publisher's behalf, about which the *New York Times* commented that Murdoch is not "known for publicly admitting mistakes . . ."

Simple counting channels and market shares displays another weakness. Just one conventional existing medium, television, is a powerful self-protecting filter, and the average U.S. home TV set is on seven hours a day. It is a powerful socializing force on the whole population. You cannot count this social and political power by simple channel and market data.

Simple quantitative counting of market shares makes no distinction between

marginal trivia and major conventional channel content like news that powerfully influences the country's political and regulatory agenda. Publicly distributed news is not just another program and channel. It is crucial to informing people, helping them decide how to vote, and whether to retain or alter the status quo. (Americans say they get 56% of their news from television, 24% from newspapers, and 14% from radio, the remaining 6% from "other".) Control of news and its market share is very different from market share of say, "Roadrunner" cartoons or "The Three Stooges" re-runs. News that would materially alter the power of existing media is faint to non-existent in commercial broadcasting. But quantitatively by the authors' measure, that power to resist change and buttress the status quo doesn't enter the picture.

Furthermore, when the authors predict even less concentration in the future, they are probably correct in a limited time scale, but their thesis about the present nature of a major medium like commercial broadcasting and cable is naive in ignoring the history of technological innovations that have commercial possibilities.

They say that where markets are competitive, "vertical integration makes little sense." Since vertical integration has been the media investment world's major strategy for the last 20 years, one must conclude either that the investors are stupid or that markets are insufficiently competitive. They concede that the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which was sold politically to increase competition and dilution of control, did the opposite and produced what they call a "spurt" of increased mergers and concentration. But they predict that "in time" the Act will undermine the economic power of the newly merged firms. But the "spurt" continued with even greater magnitude in 1997. The Act's highly touted lowering of household telephone rates has yet to mate-

rialize. How long must the public wait?

The authors see new “cyber-media” as introducing new techniques and channels. They are not alone, and not yet proven wrong, but like most people, they display what public reaction has always tended to be with an ingenious invention. In an earlier book, I called it “technological euphoria” (*The Information Machines*, Harper & Row, 1971)—exaggerated expectations that every substantial new invention will have exclusively beneficial social effects. History tells us that we cannot take for granted who will end up controlling most of a new technology and what its ultimate impact will be.

Like others, the authors see the Internet as emblematic of this new salvation. They are correct that it will bring serious changes and already has. But at the moment, it is not clear how much of the Internet will be a point-to-point non-mass medium (personal and in-house corporate messages and highly specialized professional data) and how much intended for mass consumption (web sites of newspapers, magazines, new zines, etc.). At the moment, the Internet is analogous to handing out on a street corner everything from handbills for a coffee house to mathematical monographs to instructions for blowing up your local post office. And it still is not clear through what imminent governmental or dominant commercial funnel all this will be required to pass.

New industries often start with a large number of entrepreneurs and usually, though not always, end in concentrated hands. William Gates' Microsoft is already

more than a small cloud in the cyber skies.

The Noam and Freeman thesis provides a statistical snapshot of the present generation of modern channels. Someone could have taken a similar statistical snapshot of the auto industry anytime during the first third of this century when 239 firms entered the auto-making industry. But from 1930 to the 1960s their snapshot would show that two of these original 239 firms, GM and Ford, dominated the market, with Chrysler a poor third.

Closer to technological home, in 1902 there were 3,000 individual telephone companies. There was inevitable consolidation needed to create an integrated national network and AT&T-Western Electric became a legal monopoly. But here, again, size and qualitative factors became important. AT&T's political power delayed innovation and rate reductions until the 1960s when, for the

first time, consumers could attach phones by other manufacturers onto the system and from that time on, we have benefited from added features. Here again, Microsoft is an echo of that history.

The authors' view of the dynamics of the present broadcast world is naive. They write, “Disney should not earmark its best programs for ABC if other networks offer more money . . . [or] force its lemons on . . . ABC.” If ABC did this, the authors' state with certitude “centrifugal forces” will breakup the company. NBC offer first-run *Seinfeld* to a competing network at any price? Never, and for hard-nosed reasons.

“Local” is where people live, and in the United States voters learn from local media what they need to govern themselves, because no other industrial democracy leaves so many central decisions to local jurisdictions.

Big hits are multipurpose assets. They not only attract big ratings and ad revenues, they are audience builders for subsequent programs on the same network the same night; they become ideal carriers for promos for the networks' upcoming shows and sports, and they bring big money for rerun syndication and foreign sales (half of TV show and movie revenues).

The authors ask, "And what about all those famous synergies?" The synergies—clusters of different companies under common control with each company presumed to be helpful to the others—survive in some cases and not others. The classic Gulf & Western mish-mash collection—auto parts to lingerie—made lots of money and was a power in the marketplace, but was unwieldy for investors to analyze. But the new media conglomerates have a coherence that make them work more often than not. GE is a massive conglomerate that has learned, as do other modern synergistic conglomerates, to decentralize units and has centrifugal force all the way to the bank.

Synergy works better in the mass media because, among other reasons, digitalized content can easily transform newspaper features into magazines and consumer computer services. It permits TV programs to be reused in other media, like movies, cassettes, commercials, etc. Murdoch puts the obscure "stars" of FOX's weak programs on the cover of his *TV Guide*. *Time* puts on its cover singers from the Time-Warner-owned Warner records. Disney Tours and theme parks get endless open and sly promos on ABC and Disney cable channels.

I guess every writer is entitled to some hubris. The authors get theirs by saying "we have gotten our hands dirty by collecting the actual numbers," implying others have not. Alas, fellows, there is no other way and other ink-

stained wretches have come before you. They add, "This is probably the most detailed study ever made of media concentration in America." Too bad. Landmark encyclopedia studies have been made for years, by Congressional committees, government agencies, anti-trust challenges, civil suits between major media firms, and joint works like the 1978 two-volume, 761-page compendium, "Proceedings of the Symposium on Media Concentration," issued by the Bureau of Competition of the Federal Trade Commission.

In their closing, the authors take much of their best thesis away in an almost offhand manner. They state that while there is no problem nationally, there is in the local markets. They write that "98.5% of American cities have only one newspaper . . . 98% of homes have no choice of cable provider." (I'm sure the authors meant 98.5% of American cities *that have any daily paper at all* there is only one paper—there are more than 19,000 cities, so with 1500 dailies, more than 17,000 cities have no daily at all.)

Relegating the serious problem exclusively to local ones overlooks the fact that "local" is where people live, and in the United States voters learn from local media what they need to govern themselves because no other industrial democracy leaves so many central decisions to local jurisdictions. With only brief headline news on our national broadcast media, and local TV news a national scandal of nightly visits to fires, shootings and happy talk, local newspapers become important. But now Wall Street pressure for lowered costs and quick returns has caused major dailies to shift from designing themselves more as entertainment rather than news carriers.

There are, as the authors say, 12,000 radio stations, but about seven standard formats are used by most of them and each of these formats is exactly duplicated in all

their cities, so Kansas City gets pretty much the same computerized programs as Bangor, Maine.

One ends with the feeling that after the initial sweeping assertions, by the end, the authors have taken back too many exceptions that in fact are major and that dramatically weaken their "Myth" assertion. This happens in the manner of Haydn's Farewell Symphony that starts

with the full ensemble but as players start leaving by twos and threes, by the end the stage consists of two lone violinists. ■

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Viewpoint

From the earliest moments of the Clinton crisis, the press routinely intermingled reporting with opinion and speculation—even on the front page—according to a systematic study of what and how the press reported. The study raises basic questions about the standards of American journalism and whether the press is in the business of reporting facts or something else. As the story was breaking, the two source rule for anonymous sources was not dead, but it was not the rule. A large portion of the reporting had no sourcing.

The study, designed by the Committee of Concerned Journalists and conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, involved a detailed examination of the 1,565 statements and allegations contained in the reporting by major television programs, newspapers and magazines during the first six days of the crisis. The goal was to find out what this cross-section of the news media actually provided the American people and what the level of verification was. Among the findings...

Four in ten statements (41% of the reportage) were not factual reporting—here is what happened—but were instead journalists offering analysis, opinion, speculation or judgment. Forty percent of all reporting based on anonymous sourcing was from a single source.

The study raises such questions as: What are the standards for American journalism in this new competitive atmosphere? Are we watching them change? Was the standard in the early days of this story, "do we think it's true?" Or was the standard "How can we get it?"

—From *The Clinton Crisis and the Press: A New Standard of American Journalism?*
Issued by the Committee of Concerned Journalists, February 18, 1998

“Lady” Jane Pauley: *The Dateline* Anchor Who “Has It All”

After almost 25 years in television Jane Pauley logs more hours on camera than anybody except Larry King. This unpretentious newsreader has blossomed into a mature, though still unpretentious, newswoman. TV Quarterly’s special correspondent agrees with the universal opinion of her among her colleagues: “What you see is what you get!”

By Arthur Unger

The first time I interviewed Jane Pauley, she was stewing about her IQ. It seems a Chicago TV critic had written that she had the IQ of a cantaloupe.

“What *is* your IQ?” I asked insolently.

“I don’t know, but you can bet it’s more than a cantaloupe!”

The year was 1976 and twenty-five-year-old Jane Pauley was in her first week

as co-anchor with Tom Brokaw on *The Today Show* and she was very nervous. So insecure that she kept returning to the cantaloupe insult.

Finally, feeling sorry for this lovely, lively, intelligent, but vulnerable young newcomer, I advised her not to tell future interviewers about the cantaloupe description. “It will just give us an opportunity to start with a smart-ass lead: “Jane Pauley

has a higher IQ than a cantaloupe, despite observations to the contrary." I already had that opener written in my mind (and I actually used it in my column the next day).

On the way out of NBC News, I stopped by the office of *The Today Show* producer Paul Friedman. "How's she doing?" I asked.

"She's doing a good job," he said, "but we're not overly praising her. She knows she's doing well."

"May I give you some unsolicited advice?" I asked. "Stroke her a little!"

I remember that rather vividly because when my piece was submitted, a copy editor at *The Christian Science Monitor*, where I was the TV critic, decided that "stroke her a little" was somehow risque

and changed it to "praise her a little."

Next time I saw Jane was a few months later at a "press tour" in Los Angeles where the nation's TV critics met to preview the season's new shows and new stars. NBC brought Jane to the meeting and I saw her enter the room with a young man in tow. I was the only familiar face. She introduced me to her escort, a young reporter from an Indianapolis newspaper, her boyfriend of the moment. Then, she pulled me aside. "May I ask a favor of you?" she whispered. "I've been told I must circulate and my boyfriend doesn't know anybody here. Could you make sure he meets some of your colleagues?"

I've had a soft spot in my heart for Jane ever since. *TV Guide* recently beatified her



as “Saint Jane” but I prefer to dub her “Lady Jane,” polite, thoughtful, proper. Just about everybody who has had any personal contact with her agrees that, despite her enormous professional success, she has managed to remain a warm, compassionate human being. “What you see is what you get,” is the almost universal cliché.

What do you get? A tiny, compact, handsome-on-the-cusp-of-beautiful, knowledgeable, mature woman who has managed the seemingly impossible task of balancing a full-time career as a journalist with the full-time responsibility of wife and mother. Married to cartoonist/satirist/playwright Gary Trudeau, Jane Pauley co-presides over a reputed \$2 million-a-year job, their three children (15-year-old boy and girl twins and another boy, 12), an apartment in Manhattan and a country house in New England. She makes it clear that, although she enjoys her work, her husband and children remain her first priority. While other major TV personalities are often out gallivanting at social events, Jane Pauley is at home having dinner in front of the TV set with her devoted husband and children. If she doesn’t “have it all,” is there any woman in the world who does?

Now, 22 years after that first interview, we reminisce about those insecure early days. She is dressed (the fourth costume of the busy taping day) in a cinnamon-colored pantsuit with a simple T-shirt underneath. She exudes self-confidence; only now and then allowing flashes of insecurity to bubble up as she expounds on TV news. She is the smartest girl in the class . . . who managed to make good on her early promise. Lady Jane Pauley has become a secure woman, certain of her place in the world of broadcasting as well as in society. The insecurity of the early days has been replaced by self-assurance, which just manages to avoid arrogance by a saving dose of self-deprecation.

Unlike our earlier interview in a borrowed cubby-hole office, she now has a corner office in NBC’s 30 Rockefeller Plaza headquarters. She overlooks the ice-skating rink, *The Today Show* outdoor location and fellow anchor Stone Phillips’ non-corner office (she is no more “the lesser of two equals” as she once described her relationship on camera with co-anchors Brokaw and Gumbel). The beige-carpeted, beige-upholstered office is lined with bookshelves on which she displays three Emmys and other prestigious awards. On the walls are pictures of her with Bryant Gumbel and the Pope, and on Rome’s Spanish steps, one of her own paintings, a photo of her twins and “my very handsome husband.” There is also a group photo of TV newswomen taken for *Life* by Annie Liebowitz—“we call it ‘Blondes in Broadcasting;’ notice Lesley, Diane, Jessica and others.” In the place of honor, facing the door, is a painting by one of her children.

Jane Pauley of Indianapolis graduated from Indiana University in 1972, having majored in Political Science. She then volunteered for some Indiana political campaigning, got a job as a TV reporter for a year before she became a news anchor at WISH-TV Indianapolis, moving quickly to co-anchor at Chicago’s WMAQ where she was seen by NBC News talent scouts and asked to appear temporarily with Tom Brokaw in *The Today Show* co-anchor spot being vacated by Barbara Walters. Pauley did not know she was being auditioned for the permanent spot. She has been at NBC News ever since.

Her co-anchorship with Bryant Gumbel was abruptly terminated when somebody got the bright idea to replace her with another “perky” newcomer, Deborah Norville. There was an outpouring of indignation from Pauley’s fans and Norville quickly faded from the scene. But meantime, according to Pauley, this seemingly negative move in her career turned

out to be a triumph for her in that suddenly she was propelled into the lime-light, viewed for the first time as a charismatic star, whereas before she was always categorized as a competent team player.

Her popularity ratings soared and she went on to anchor a short-lived documentary series—*Real Life with Jane Pauley*—and then as a principal anchor of *Dateline NBC*, on camera four or five nights a week, as well as anchor of MSNBC's nightly *Time and Again*. Besides serving as introducer-narrator, she often gets to do interviews and investigatory work. She has won many awards from varied news organizations, including Emmys and a Gabriel from American Women in Radio and Television, and even a Maggie from Planned Parenthood.

She speaks honestly about *Dateline's* early near-disastrous scandal, when it was revealed that the show had fire-bombed a pick-up truck being tested in order to expose its vulnerability. "We learned that you have to divulge pertinent information to the viewers. In that case, nothing we did was wrong except for the fact that we didn't tell enough . . ."

She doesn't pull any punches as she explains that since that scandal, NBC News has changed dramatically: "The individuals in charge have left as a result . . . It's pretty much a rebuilt operation."

Jane Pauley walks me to the door; it is 6 pm and she still has another *Time and Again* to tape.

"Does it every get boring to succeed by just being yourself?" I ask provocatively, hoping to elicit a brusque response from the always-a-Lady Jane.

Instead she smiles serenely: "Listen, that's the only trick I have in the book!"

What follows is the conversation with Jane Pauley. Although the chronology has been changed here and there for reasons of continuity and there has been some editing due to space requirements, all the

answers are verbatim.

Unger: *Do you really have it all?*

Pauley: [giggle] I'm losing it all at my age.

I don't think of myself as having it all, but I don't have anything missing in my life. I clearly knew all along that you have to make choices, which is the understanding that most women do arrive at. The idea of having it all has been pretty well supplanted by a notion of balance and choosing from the array of opportunities, including the responsibilities. I think I have a very balanced life.

Unger: *But you have beauty, money, a career, a family. Most women would say you do have it all, that you somehow managed to do all the important things.*

Pauley: At this point in my life, I certainly don't look back on a career that I didn't tend to or frittered away. I don't look at my children's lives and think the things I've accomplished were at their expense, or that I missed anything.

Unger: *Do you have any regrets?*

Pauley: Hair-dos [laughter] *Time and Again*, with its old clips is coming back to haunt me. After all those years of bad hair that probably dominated my mail at an early point in my career, when I finally cut it all off and the issue was moot, no one commented on my hair anymore except to ask where I got it cut. Then *Time and Again* comes on the air with clips of the old hair and my hair is a focus again. I thought I lived that down.

Unger: *But are you happy with it now?*

Pauley: Yeah! I don't think about it anymore. It's gone. And that is a legacy of the baby boomer era, I suppose. We were all hair-obsessed, and I had hair that was far too long—really ridiculously long hair for a long time. One of the hair-dos was described by a critic as "lying like a dead

squirrel on my shoulder.”

Unger: *Actually, the first interview we did, you were very upset about the fact that a critic in Chicago had said that you had the IQ of a cantaloupe.*

Pauley: And I am very proud of my rejoinder which was that fortunately I had skin as thick as a cantaloupe. Yeah . . . I outlasted him.

Unger: *There was a period when nastiness was a very important part of TV criticism.*

Pauley: Vitriol was the stock in trade, definitely, and it wasn't just Gary Deeb.

Unger: *Do you think of yourself as the quintessential baby boomer?*

Pauley: I do think of myself as a baby boomer. There is an inescapable awareness that we share an unprecedented commonality of experience . . . our pop culture, music, television wouldn't have existed in a comparable way for prior generations. News events, especially those that touched boomer lives, the roar of civil rights—were very, very formative for all of us, and we went through those experiences together.

Unger: *Do you think that baby boomers now constitute a definite part of the market—I mean, an identifiable, coagulated part of it?*

Pauley: I don't know that we do so much any more. But I suspect that we probably do. You hear a lot about retirement, saving for retirement in commercials. I've never seen that before in my life. But boomers are there, putting money away for their children's college, all the ads you see for luxury cars—Cadillacs, and Lexus, and so forth. I think that's for a generation that never before associated luxury with an American car. And now, Cadillac probably thinks that baby boomers are primed to invest in a luxury car like their parents did.

Unger: *TV Guide called you “Saint Jane.” How do you react to that? I think of you more as Lady Jane.*

Pauley: Well, you know, either one. The effect is the same. I know it's not true, but you do sort of want to try to aspire somehow to live up to a reputation—and I don't literally leave here and think, well, I must do good or I must be good—but it probably has influenced my sense of my image and the work I do, and the context of that image has been changed for having been labeled that way. And it's not a bad thing. It's good to get a booster shot of that from time to time.

Unger: *How would you describe yourself professionally? Are you a newswoman, an anchorperson, a narrator?*

Pauley: I think of myself as a newsperson. I spend—these days, especially—an awful lot of my life sitting in front of a camera in the anchor role, but I also spend a lot of my life on the editorial side as well, looking for stories. NBC hires me for two things—to appear on the air in an anchor role for *Dateline* and to fill in on the *NBC Nightly News*, but also to be out collecting important stories. So I have those main hats.

Unger: *Don't you tend, though, to do the softer-edge stories?*

Pauley: You know, I never in my whole career, made the distinction that apparently you do, that there are softer and harder-edged stories. And frankly, I think the industry is kind of coming around to the same idea. If you watch *Nightly News* and *CBS Evening News* and *World News Tonight*, a lot of stories that you would have called softer news are lead stories or middle-of-the-book, not even back-of-the-book stories.

Anything that had to do with women used to be considered a soft story; that's not true anymore. Anything that had to do

with education was back-of-the-book. To a degree, even crime—unless it was police blotter hard news—could even be soft stuff.

You know, the kinds of stories that I do have a lot to do with families and women sometimes, with crime, a lot of cultural stuff that is very soft. The movie stars and whatnot—that clearly is soft. I wouldn't describe that in any other way. Yeah, my specialty is not—has never been—investigative.

Unger: *To go back to what you were saying about news and soft stories being lead stories these days . . .*

Pauley: But I don't call them "soft."

Unger: *Do you think that's good? Do you think that's a good direction for news to go?*

Pauley: I think there's been good and bad. No, I don't like every turn the industry has taken, though the fact that when I began in the news, you know, all the executives looked like you—all white, silver-haired men. And they were a pretty erudite bunch and came from a tradition of "the news is what's good for you."

And they took for granted that the public agenda could be defined by them and given to us. Not to say they didn't do a pretty good job. I watch it on *Time and Again* and that historical archive is courtesy of those individuals, but in making choices of what to cover, a lot of choices of what not to cover were also made. And women weren't covered. Poor people were covered in important documentaries from time to time, but news was really that which was made by heads of state, and generally in Washington, D.C., or perhaps on Wall Street. Entire segments of the population were really off the radar scope. That's not true anymore. On the other hand, you miss some of the erudition of that group of men who had been trained for decades with a very serious respect for the traditions of journalism that I don't

see today and that I miss a lot.

Some years ago when we were starting the news magazine *Real Life with Jane Pauley*—that didn't last so long—David Browning was the executive producer who had come over from CBS. He was special for having been a writer. He is a writer. And I knew, to my credit, that for that position I wanted someone older than I was, because people older than I were still trying to write and appreciate the written word. People my age and younger, that becomes a very iffy proposition. And if you don't respect the words, that's sloppy thinking that is married to sloppy writing; and to not know the difference is frightening. And I do see that.

Then, there are competitive pressures that nobody decided would be better; they just evolved to the degree that it's kind of hard to tell the *Nightly News* from *Dateline*, from some of the tabloid news magazines sometimes.

Unger: *Is the trend toward softer material as lead material true in the magazine shows as well as the evening news?*

Pauley: CBS has had more than 30 years of the news magazine lion, *60 Minutes*. They call it a news magazine, but it never supplanted the *CBS Evening News*. It's not a weekly news program. These are features. Sometimes harder, sometimes softer—Barbra Streisand, or an expose of the Pentagon misappropriations, whatever, but it was different; it had a different mission than the nightly news programs. Just as the morning talk shows had a totally different mission yet again—of interspersing the news of the day with lifestyle features and movie reviews, and so forth. There was plenty of room on the clock for all of that, and that's never been more true than it is now with 24-hour news. So *Dateline* doesn't have to meet the test of a mix of hard news, soft news, current events.

Unger: *How does a magazine show like Dateline compare to the tabloid shows? Or is there a difference?*

Pauley: Well, we don't pay for our news sources for one thing, and that's a huge thing. We operate under NBC News. The same rules that apply to news coverage and news footage apply to us. The tabloids are not news; they can pay for news.

Unger: *Has the line between real news and fictionalized news been blurred by some of the magazine shows?*

Pauley: Well, I think it was pretty much always the case that the responsibility has always been up to the folks at home to determine who their information provider is and the quality. We call ourselves a news organization.

Dateline, for instance—you'll recall from our early painful experience—had an opportunity to pull out our standards and practices and to see clearly where rules—NBC rules of news coverage—had been broken in the GM pick-up truck episode.

Unger: *So what did you and Dateline learn from that experience?*

Pauley: That you have to divulge your information to the viewers; you cannot withhold pertinent information from them. And in that case, nothing we did was wrong except for the fact that we didn't tell enough. I had nothing to do with it until after the fact NBC had broadcast it.

Looking back on it, this is what we learned: that igniters had been attached to the pick-up truck. So that we could determine what the effect of a fire would be in a crash. Igniters are used in automotive testing routinely. If you're trying to measure the effect of a fire, you've got to have a fire, and not all crashes produce explosions. So igniters are there just to make sure you get what you want. Had we shown the viewer—here we are attaching igniters; we bought a car, we're going to crash it in this

pick-up and these igniters will make sure that this crash—that if there is a spark produced in this crash, this gas tank will reach thus and so. We didn't tell them that. Our intentions or the intentions of the producer were probably quite honest. The effect appeared dishonest. The viewer should have been told!

Unger: *Isn't it rather unusual that Dateline has managed to overcome that very negative start?*

Pauley: Well, I think it's a lot more than unusual. It's extraordinary. We're new management in every respect. The individuals who were in charge of *NBC News* and in charge of *Dateline* left as a result.

So, Andy Lack is here; Neil Shapiro is here. It's pretty much a rebuilt operation, and it's enormously successful. But the viewers' reaction was no surprise here. In fact, in the history of television, investigative journalism has often worn the halo of "we're on the side of the downtrodden and the under-represented" long before *Dateline* attached those igniters. Others probably practiced the very same techniques to no complaint.

Unger: *Is there some kind of interview that you would not do now? What I am thinking of is the recent "20/20" situation where Barbara Walters interviewed Marv Albert and Hugh Downs refused to participate?*

Pauley: I think Hugh's decision not to participate in that show was simply, "This is very awkward for me." But I don't think that he meant to single out Barbara. Barbara was not alone in doing that story. There probably wasn't a news magazine that wouldn't have.

Unger: *Early on when you were coanchoring The Today Show with Tom Brokaw and then Bryant Gumbel, I asked you about the part you played as co-anchor. Your answer was: "Well, the truth is I'm the lesser of two equals."*

Pauley: *[Laughter]* That's pretty good!

Unger: *How about your situation with Stone Phillips these days?*

Pauley: We're equals.

Unger: *You're equals. No "lesser."*

Pauley: No. I don't even know—sometimes they say "Stone Phillips, Jane Pauley" or "Jane Pauley, Stone Phillips."

Listen, I am not being disingenuous here. I don't know if they always say his name first or my name first, or switch around—I don't even know. It simply is a non-issue. I don't know whether it's a non-issue with Stone, but it's a non-issue with me, and I am comfortable in saying it's a non-issue because I feel completely comfortable in the balance that frankly can be a very delicate balance.

I can see innumerable ways it could be disrupted; two people who work well together suddenly are counting seconds and air time, face time, whatever. That's never, ever been the case here.

We don't sit together. You know, it's not like with Bryant Gumbel where we were oftentimes on camera together simultaneously as he did all the time. You know, I was just smiling and looking and nodding and waiting for my turn to say, "And we'll be right back." That could be very awkward. There aren't any of those equivalent moments, now. And we trade off—today is Tuesday, I think I'm anchoring—I intro the Tuesday night show, but Friday night, it might be Stone; Sunday, it might be me; Monday it might be Stone again.

Unger: *What is the night you're not on?*

Pauley: They haven't invented that night. *Dateline* is on Monday, Tuesday, Friday, Sunday. But this Wednesday we're on also, so its sometimes Wednesday.

Unger: *Is it possible you are moving toward a seven-day schedule?*

Pauley: Not seven days, but I hear five

days is talked about, though that may simply mean that we're on four nights a week, and a lot of extra fifth nights, if not regularly. Now, ABC is moving in that direction too, so there's more, not less.

Unger: *That brings up Roone Arledge's "star quality" comments. . . . He said that the ABC people are stars but you are just part of a team. Do you feel that you are not a star?*

Pauley: I know what he meant. There probably is some level of star lustre, glamour that one does not associate with Jane Pauley. I complained at the time—I don't know if anybody ever listened to me, but you're here, so I'll tell you. One of the things about that episode that surprised me was that nobody reported it, complaining about the attitude of attaching star quality to journalists. This might have been old-fashioned of me—but if he had said that in 1977, critics like yourself would have been down this throat. Stars? These are journalists—not stars! It's bad enough they're paid all that money! And critiquing a newswoman for not being a star passed without notice.

That made me very sad. Not that I wasn't described as a star, because if anything, I probably have cultivated an image of not being a star, but being pretty much a regular individual. NBC has historically been a producer culture. Roone invented at ABC the star culture, and he's been enormously successful, and the fact is all of those people that he has are stars. I mean, that's how indisputable they are. Barbara, Peter, Ted, Diane—they do have a lot of very dynamic, well-known important anchor-types. But Roone invented that concept of building an organization around personalities and personas.

NBC has always been very nervous of that. Even as ownership changed through the years—RCA through GE. You know, Dick Wald, Larry Grossman, Bill Small—it didn't matter who the head of the organization was. Bill Small came from CBS;

Andy Lack came from CBS, Michael Gartner came from print. The culture of NBC emphasized the primacy of the executive producer—the news producer. And that the program was “the thing,” not the talent, which is what we’re called universally in the business.

The Today Show was always bigger than any of us past, even those of us who were there 13 years—Gumbel 15 years. Today, Matt and Katie are so successful on *The Today Show*, but even so, *the Today Show* was the thing, not the individual stars. It’s the culture I have been raised in. David Brinkley was a legend when he left NBC; he became a star when he went to ABC. It’s a way of looking at the world. If you look at Katie, Stone, Jane, Brokaw, Russert, Williams—NBC anchor people—was it a coincidence that they could also be defined as basically real people with real lives and real families?

Unger: *I would say that the episode of your being replaced on the “Today Show” by Deborah Norville somehow made you a star. I would say that that was kind of a turning point because it was so much focused on personalities and charisma.*

Pauley: Yes. It takes that kind of a crucible, that kind of public heat to transform someone. Yeah, definitely. I couldn’t agree with you more that something happened that boosted me in whatever they measure when they do those Q-ratings, whatever. My Q soared and I don’t know how high I stayed, but I stayed at that level until I became the anchor of a program that is on four nights a week in prime time, not to mention *Time and Again* on MSNBC.

Unger: *Is there anybody on the air more than you are, though?*

Pauley: No, I don’t think so. Well, Larry King does a lot. You know it’s hard to think of someone who is on the air as much as I am. But quantitatively, I am there; qualita-

tively, there is something that I am not going to argue with Roone.

I will maintain a career in the major leagues in spite of it. And I will be able to go home and be a normal person in my household.

You know, it takes an enormous amount of energy to be a star. I don’t have to have the trapping that come along with stardom. I don’t have a personal publicist. Gosh, if I started thinking of myself as a star I would probably have to hire a whole staff of people to maintain me. *[Laughter]*

Unger: *There’s a story which you’ve told about trying to be more aggressive in getting interviews. Katie Couric was interviewing Anita Hill.*

Pauley: Oh, I’m dying of embarrassment!

Unger: *Tell that story.*

Pauley: Well, Anita Hill was on *The Today Show* commenting on some news event, but we all knew that Anita Hill was writing her autobiography. And at the time, I was trying to aggressively make *Dateline*’s case. You know, “Anita, we need to talk.”

I know in part it’s who gets your ear first. I needed to make a personal connection with Anita Hill. I’m in my pajamas, I’m home, I’m watching *The Today Show*. Katie is interviewing Anita. I log in on my computer at home; I find out that Anita Hill is being interviewed from a hotel room in Philadelphia. I get into *The Today Show*—I identify the hotel. I call it up. I’m leaving a message for Anita Hill to call me before she leaves town. The switchboard rings me right through to her room. Who knew that *The Today Show* was doing the interview in the very room they booked for Anita Hill. I’m watching; the kids are eating breakfast. Katie’s interviewing Anita. There’s a telephone by her side, and it rings! *[Laughter]* And I, holding the phone, can hear ring, ring. I remember screaming to my kids, “That’s me!” I hang up in terror.

Now, later that day, you know no one would ever have known, but what if someone did know? What if someone did find out? What if someone said, "Who rang that phone?" and went to the switchboard, and the operator said, "I think she identified herself as Jane Pauley."

Whatever reason. I confessed "Katie, I'm so sorry." And then I also confessed to Anita. And within a year or two later when she finally finished the book, I did get the interview. So, the happy ending to that story is that I did confess, that I was forgiven, and I got the interview.

Unger: *But do you think this business of blurring the line between news and gossip stems from the fact that a lot of people in the business do not have the training for it.*

Pauley: The people who are doing it are as likely to come out of J-school as anywhere. They didn't get taught it.

Unger: *Do you feel you missed something by not studying journalism?*

Pauley: Oh, I missed a lot by not studying French or Spanish. It was a very incomplete education, but I also feel very strongly that there are many routes to a career in journalism, and journalism school is only one of them, and that the industry is best served for the diversity of our experience. I think that if you are taught—and this is one of the complaints that people made back in the era when all of the networks were pruning our staffs and letting the somewhat more expensive, experienced people go—was that we were losing that generation bridge, the tradition that says, "This is how we do it." And so, ideally, you are taught on the job that the culture we work in holds to these values and these standards.

Unger: How did you manage to jump from your psychology degree into journalism?

Pauley: Well, let's go back to high school

if we can. A key part of my professional education took place between the ages of 15 and 18. My high school was not an athletic powerhouse, but we had the largest speech-and-debate program in the country, and a state powerhouse in Indiana. My event was extemporaneous speaking, which meant that I gave competitively extemporaneous speeches on current events topics. Generally, they were topics taken from *U.S. News and World Report*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*, which meant that I was reading the news magazines. I was very, very good. I was a state champion and went to nationals, where I was a semi-finalist, which is a nice way of saying I came in seventh from the top—the final seven. For years, this was just an extracurricular activity for me, but I liked winning ribbons and trophies, and stuff. And I liked being good at something. I was small and had very long, blond, Alice-in-Wonderland hair like all of us did, and I was not somebody with a physical aura that would intimidate. I opened my voice and I said things, and I got people's attention.

Now, by the time I got to college, I was done with that. I mean, good and done, burned out. And I did nothing of note in college except graduate a semester early. I worked also in politics for the Democratic State Committee during the summer. At one point, I even wrote and planned to give a god-awful speech, and then at the last minute, they decided the mayor of South Bend was more important. So, they gave him my speech! This terrible speech was quoted in the newspaper. It was thrilling. They were my words, and they were pathetic, but I didn't know that at the time. I was on the front page of the *Indianapolis News*. It was my first experience as a writer, and having the feeling that never mind that nobody knows I wrote those words, I did it! It was pretty thrilling. Bottom line, then, that training in reading current events and organizing the thoughts in coherent and persuasive

seven-minute speeches, the experience that I had in politics, I'd majored in Political Science, all of it went together to leave me fairly well prepared.

Unger: *Your first job was at WISH-TV Indianapolis?*

Pauley: I was a general assignment reporter, eventually promoted to anchor of the *Saturday News*, which was the most-watched newscast in the state of Indiana because it was on CBS and it followed *M*A*S*H*, *Carol Burnett*, *All in the Family*, *Mary Tyler Moore* and then *ME!* [laughter]

Unger: *And you auditioned for "The Today Show?"*

Pauley: No! Unbeknownst to me, I didn't know it was an audition. Barbara Walters was gone, signed a million-dollar contract, which was to start in the fall. NBC basically took her off the air, three months prior to her debut on ABC. Betty Furness pretty much took over for her while they decided who would be her permanent replacement. At one point I was asked in Chicago, "Could you do *The Today Show* for a few days?" I assumed because Betty Furness needed some time off. I was 25 years old. So, I got to New York, checked into the Dorset Hotel. My sister called to say that her newspaper—a Pittsburgh paper—included me in a list of women auditioning for Barbara Walters job. First I'd heard of it. I did not sleep at all that night. None. Zip. And I got the job eventually.

Unger: *I remember talking to Betty Furness, as a matter of fact.*

Pauley: She was my heroine.

Unger: *And we discussed why she was not going to get the job. Her age!*

Pauley: Age, yeah.

Unger: *Do you think that still holds true now? Or do you think that in today's climate*

Betty Furness might get the job?

Pauley: No, because she was the wrong generation. I don't think attitudes toward age have changed that dramatically, but nor do I think that NBC could get away with putting a 25-year-old—forgive me—girl as I was, on *The Today Show* today. For one thing, there are thousands of women with a great deal of television news experience, and that wasn't true then. I, for my young age, probably had more on-air anchor-type experience than the women my senior who had been correspondents, but who had not had anchor experience. I was better on the air. But I was not as well qualified as a journalist.

Unger: *But you had an air of authority, somehow, even though you were very young. You are also very insecure.*

Pauley: My children saw one episode of *Time and Again* and one of my kids said, "Mom, You're trying too hard." And that's what I was doing. I was trying too hard.

Recently I looked at a tape of an interview I did on the eve of leaving Chicago for New York. It was a hometown-girl-makes-good kind of story. I sound like I'm channeling Grace Kelly. The accent is—I can't place it. Philadelphia mainline. I'm from Indianapolis—where did that accent come from? And it's shocking to me. I can only assume that I was a young woman astute enough to know that being myself was not what was called for here.

Unger: *At what point did being yourself become the route to success?*

Pauley: Some of myself would turn up now and then. I see transcripts from time to time, or *Time and Again* episodes where I'll say something funny, and I recognize that was me. You know, that was me feeling confident enough to say something irreverent, because you can't overthink a spontaneous joke—that was me.

Tom Brokaw is a dear friend of mine today, but I don't think I ever really

emerged until Bryant came, because Bryant was my contemporary. Brokaw had covered Watergate; he was ten years older than I, and he just cast such a long shadow. I think he reinforced my sense of my lack of qualifications. When Bryant came, we had pretty comparable backgrounds. Then I began to relax.

The family ensemble on *The Today Show* was like nothing else on television. That was very comforting. I really did feel safe in that studio, almost from the beginning. These were people I liked being with, and that sense of ensemble gave me the confidence that on any given day I wasn't carrying the whole show. It was a wonderful place to grow up.

And then there was the separation issue. I left and Deborah took over. That was the period where I just recognized that at some point—don't know when it had happened—I had completely developed confidence in my profession.

Unger: Whenever I talk to people about you, one phrase comes up all the time: "What you see is what you get."

Pauley: Yeah.

Unger: And they mean it as a compliment. What they mean is, "she's a natural and doesn't put on any airs or have any pretensions."

Pauley: You know, it's been such an advantage—it's the only way I could be because I don't have the skills to reinvent some other persona. Not having to second-guess how I'm doing. I don't edit as I go, I just go. I think in the beginning, what you saw was a little studied and not that successful. I got away with it until I grew into a greater level of confidence. But that's why I talk about not being a star. I didn't start a star. I wasn't raised in Indianapolis with some special quality. I was a champion orator, who was somewhat opinionated. I had a voice that was deeper than it looked like I should have, so I had

credibility. And that package was absolutely appropriate for the anchor I grew up to be.

Unger: *What would you like to do in television news that you haven't done already? Would you like to be anchor on the evening news?*

Pauley: Not really. Number one, I like what I'm doing. I like it a lot. I have the best job in television on *Dateline* and don't expect to change it. I expect to be here five years from now.

But before I retire, I'd like to have some kind of talk show—kind of invent a form. I have original ideas of the way I would construct a program. It might combine with some kind of do-goodery [*chuckle*] in my more-or-less retirement years. I would look forward to that.

Unger: *Now that your children are getting towards an age where they . . .*

Pauley: . . . they can support me . . . [*laughter*]

Unger: *Or leaving home, will that free you to do things that you haven't been able to do?*

Pauley: I think so. Already, there became a dramatic shift in my commitment, if you will, to work—an integration of my personal life and my work life really became one in a way that you might not recognize because I think a lot of men always have that, and don't know what I'm talking about.

Women might understand that we tend to compartmentalize, either I'm at home or I'm at work, and if I'm at work I probably should be at home, and if I'm at home, I am probably needed at work. And that friction, that tension was very wasteful in terms of energy.

As the children became older and it was literally not a matter that they need me here, they don't need me there. I can talk to them here, and I can also get this done, and they're doing their homework and so

am I. Then suddenly, this integration happened. And that was profoundly liberating. Also I just think that becoming a mature woman has potency to it. My friends, when I say that, they all nod. "Yeah, I know what you mean." You almost feel a little reckless. You feel powerful.

Unger: *When you say "mature woman", what do you mean?*

Pauley: Well, middle age is great. I do feel more focused and more committed to the work than I have ever been.

Unger: Would your husband's work interfere with anything you wanted to do?

Pauley: Never. Never. I mean, he can put up and go. Gary's always been just extremely supportive. I married brilliantly in that regard. Unlike most men, he does know the name of the kid's dentist, does know the kid's teachers. I'm just so blessed. And because he's self-employed, he doesn't have the pressure of his boss saying: "You have to go out of town."

Unger: *You tend to be kind of soft-edged, while his work is hard-edged.*

Pauley: Well, as Gary would put it and has put it, he's paid to be unfair as a satirist. That 's his job. And I can't help myself; I have opinions and wouldn't expect you to believe otherwise.

I have very strong personal opinions, but in the context of my mission as a journalist, I'm frighteningly objective. I'm so fair. During the Nancy Kerrigan/Tanya Harding episode, at dinner one night—I have to confess, okay, the news is on while we eat dinner, but we eat dinner as a family—one of the kids said: "Did she do it? Do you think she did it?" speaking of Tanya Harding whacking Nancy Kerrigan.

Gary gave this wonderful measured response: "Well, many people think she did, but we just don't know." And the kids

get up and leave, and Gary says to me: "If you hadn't been sitting there, I would have said, 'You bet your life, she did!'" But he knew I would want him to be a gent.

Unger: *Jane, do you consider yourself a happy person.*

Pauley: I am capable of being very happy and I'm capable of being mindlessly joyful. I had that experience today—a burst of energy and a recognition that feels very good. Yesterday was not that way. So, no, I'm not. I'm too much of a worrier to say I'm happy. I'm not optimistic. You know, when I get sick, I go for the worst-case scenario. You're sick? Tomorrow, you will be sicker? No one is more surprised than I when I wake up perfectly fine.

Unger: *About being happy, I think it was Beverly Sills who I once asked the same question, and she said, "I am content. That's very different from being happy. I am content with what I have."*

Pauley: I can be happy. And when I am unhappy, I do seem to recognize it is temporary—I prize resilience. In my family, my parents had a lot in life to be unhappy about, and I knew them both capable of being happy, but what both of my parents had was incredible resilience and evenness, no matter at what point in life they happened to find themselves.

I aspire to that. Being content with what you have and looking at me, who wouldn't be? *[laughter]* I know good fortune comes and goes because in my parents' generation, it came and went. And my father was so concerned that I didn't understand, that life could have its dark times too, and that you're better off if you know about them in advance, that if you aren't surprised when misfortune or tragedy—it can't sneak up on you. I always tried to reassure my father, "Daddy, I know that misfortune is right around that corner, and if it came I will not be surprised. I promise you, I'm ready."

Unger: *Do you feel that way today?*

Pauley: Yes, oh yes.

Unger: *I play this game at the end of an interview—I name people and asked for a quick reaction.*

Pauley: I seize up in panic at the thought, but I'll play a little bit.

Unger: *Katie Couric.*

Pauley: Friend. Energy, Dynamic.

Unger: *Barbara Walters?*

Pauley: Powerful.

Unger: *Diane Sawyer.*

Pauley: Smart.

Unger: *Connie Chung.*

Pauley: Energy, again.

Unger: *Deborah Norville.*

Pauley: Tenacious.

Unger: *Geraldo Riveira.*

Pauley: Strong-willed.

Unger: *Roone Arledge.*

Pauley: Visionary.

Unger: *Andy Lack.*

Pauley: The boss. That's good. A visionary, too. You know, he was the one who thought of the *Dateline* shows.

Unger: *Stone Phillips.*

Pauley: Solid.

Unger: *Mike Wallace.*

Pauley: Pro. Ageless. Sexy.

Unger: *60 Minutes.*

Pauley: The beast. *[laughter]* I don't know where that came from!

Unger: *20/20.*

Pauley: The competition.

Unger: Prime Time Live.

Pauley: More competition.

Unger: *The other game is the adjective game. Are you defined by what people say about you? "Network's most attractive female news personality."*

Pauley: Very good. *[laughter]*

Unger: "A star in the best sense of the show-business terms."

Pauley: I could live with that.

Unger: "A sense of elegance and intelligence."

Pauley: That's hyperbole.

Unger: "Self-deprecating sense of humor."

Pauley: Bingo.

Unger: "Strong-willed."

Pauley: Bingo.

Unger: "More than just a pretty face."

Pauley: I hope so.

Unger: "Late bloomer."

Pauley: Yeah.

Unger: "Only a team player, not a star."

Pauley: There's some truth to that, but I don't know. Okay.

Unger: "Hard-working."

Pauley: When focused.

Unger: "The quintessential cheerleader."

Pauley: Naw. Not at all. I wasn't a cheerleader; I was on the speech team.

Unger: "High-handedness is not Pauley's game."

Pauley: No. I couldn't justify that to my father's memory.

Unger: "Has an old-fashioned work ethic."

Pauley: I do admire hard work. That's

what I so admired about Betty Furness: How did she put it? "Work is it."

Unger: *"Is always courteous to her sources and her subjects."*

Pauley: Yes.

Unger: *"Strangers immediately warm to her."*

Pauley: Sometimes I can be awkward with strangers.

Unger: *"A role model."*

Pauley: Yeah, I don't see how you can avoid that. I think that was unavoidable.

Unger: *"Impeccably polite."*

Pauley: I'm not that thoughtful a person. I mean well, but you might or might not get a timely thank-you note from me.

Unger: *"Midwestern reserve."*

Pauley: Yes.

Unger: *"Never tries to be in fashion."*

Pauley: Sometimes I try to be, but the results aren't particularly good.

Unger: *This one comes up all the time: "perky."*

Pauley: Not at all. Perky is a word that some TV critics who have limited adjectives in their bags will apply to any female who is under 5'6 on TV.

Unger: *"Doesn't play the game socially, or otherwise."*

Pauley: Probably not.

Unger: *"Diamond-hard resolve."*

Pauley: I like that, but it's not true.

Unger: *"Tries to hard to be profound."*

Pauley: No. Maybe a little pompous.

Unger: *"Slight superiority complex."*

Pauley: Oops!

Unger: *"Haughty."*

Pauley: Eeuw!

Unger: *We're going into the negative now. I save them for the last.*

Pauley: Yeah. I think that in a woman, if you change the angle only slightly, powerful can reflect haughtiness. I think that's how that happens.

Unger: *"Heartland values."*

Pauley: Yes.

Unger: *"Lacks an edge."*

Pauley: Possibly.

Unger: *"Professional, but not rabidly so."*

Pauley: Right. yeah.

Unger: *"Does the stories best where she can really connect with people."*

Pauley: Definitely.

Unger: *"Earns two million dollars a year."*

Pauley: There's some truth to that.

Unger: *"Late bloomer."*

Pauley: Yes.

Unger: *"Insecure."*

Pauley: Sometimes.

Unger: *"Judgmental."*

Pauley: Oops!

Unger: *"Saint Jane."*

Pauley: She sounds too good to be true."

Unger: *How about "serene."*

Pauley: When I was channeling Grace Kelly, possibly . . . No, I am not serene.

Unger: *"The matriarch of NBC News."*

Pauley: Whew! Yuck, but okay [laughter]

Unger: *"Team player."*

Pauley: I love that.

Unger: “*Simply plain Jane.*”

Pauley: Used to be.

Unger: “*More driven than she’d like to admit.*”

Pauley: Possibly.

Unger: “*Vulnerable.*”

Pauley: Yes.

Unger: “*Very tough, very smart, and a lot more demanding than meets the eye.*”

Pauley: Yeah, yes—the demanding part.

Unger: “*Not comfortable being confrontational.*”

Pauley: No. I am suspicious of TV confrontations. In life, I don’t mind being confrontational.

Unger: “*A strong commitment to work . . . as long as family is factored into the planning.*”

Pauley: Yes.

Unger: “*As exciting as a warm cup of cocoa.*”

Pauley: I don’t know about that. My husband finds me a little more appealing than that. But warm cocoa does have its appeal

Unger: *The truth is it has been very difficult to find negative comments about you.*

Pauley: That’s probably why I don’t have edge. I think to be really tough, you’ve got to have some kind of edge. I am going to work on that. By gosh, I’m going to find me an edge. I’m going to get one before it gets me. ■

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During many years of covering television for *The Christian Science Monitor*, Arthur Unger won national recognition as one of television’s most influential critics as well as for his revealing interviews with theater, movie and TV personalities. He is now preparing a book of memoirs. The Arthur Unger Collection of 1,200 audio tapes is now housed at the Performing Arts Branch of the N.Y. Public Library and at The Center for the Study of Popular Television at Syracuse University, New York. All interviews, including this one, will be available for listening shortly.

Quote...Unquote

“Time always breeds respectability when it comes to bad taste, and these days less and less time is required . . . Once the most lame-brained television sitcoms enter the land of reruns, they also enter a kind of museum and become part of an endless cultural retrospective. And the show doesn’t have to belong to what is now called the Golden Age of Television. It doesn’t have to be *I Love Lucy* or *The Jack Benny Show*; it can be *The Partridge Family* or *Good Times* (David Cassidy and Jimmie Walker; what better subjects for whiteness and Afro-American studies?)”

—Margo Jefferson, “Critic’s Notebook,” *The New York Times*.

Should the V-chip fall where it may?

By Leo Bogart

This may be hard to believe, but television programming is about to get much worse. Starting in 2000, all new television sets will be equipped—at an added charge—with a silicon “V” (for violence) chip that will allow parents to eliminate children’s access to unsuitable programs. Unsuitability is to be gauged by a dual system of labels that activate electronic triggers to black out selected kinds of shows. The V-chip was mandated by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 in an effort to clean up the medium. It is likely to have the opposite effect, by encouraging more use of violence, explicit sex and foul language in the endless pursuit of larger audiences. Though the advent of high definition television in 1998 may accelerate the purchase of new TV sets, it will take many years before most television sets are equipped with the V-chip. Long before it affects viewing patterns, it will have an adverse impact on programming content.

The broadcasters initially opposed the

V-chip on First Amendment grounds, pointing out that voluntary controls of the sort that they have now set up could be a precursor of censorship. The law requires identification of “video programming that contains sexual, violent, or other indecent material about which parents should be informed before it is displayed to children.” Although the television industry originally opposed any such identification, it gave way to overwhelming political pressures. As Ted Turner put it at the 1996 White House meeting where program labeling was announced, “We are voluntarily having to comply. We’re either going to do it or we’re going to be done for.”

Labeling program content is a popular idea, which is, no doubt, why politicians love it. Three-fourths of the parents questioned by the Pew Center for Democracy feel there is too much violence on television. Over half say they are concerned “a great deal” by violent and sexual content and by “adult language” in the shows their children watch, though curiously almost

half are concerned only "somewhat," "not too much," or "not at all." Three in four claim they usually or always know what their kids are watching. Just under half say they have specific rules about when viewing is permitted.

How do these opinions and practices carry over to the use of program labels? Only two in five had actually noticed the age designations a month after they had been introduced, but half said they understood the new "ratings system" very well or fairly well. Seven out of ten adults in households with children (according to a Roper poll) say they would block certain programs; but so do six out of ten in households without children! How much faith can one put in these well-meaning assertions?

What Kind of Labeling?

Three out of four parents prefer a labeling system that would allow them, rather than the industry, to judge the suitability of programs for their children. Presumably that would mean giving them a considerable amount of detailed information. Representative Edward J. Markey, who led the fight for the mandatory V-chip, thought it could work with any kind of program indicator; he felt that a single uniform code was unnecessary.

How much information about a program can the public reasonably be expected to use? Tim Collings, who invented the V-chip, has tested a complex system that scores violence, sex and language for each program on a six-point scale. This, he believes, makes it easier for parents to customize the selection of programs to be blocked out. But does the

average parent have both the will and the skill to master the procedure for doing this?

Since last January, the broadcast and cable networks have carried age-suitability designations: TV-Y for programs that are deemed OK for children of all ages and TV-Y7 for children of seven and over. There

are also TV-G, TV-PG, TV-14 and TV-MA ("mature audiences," a euphemism for unbridled mayhem and lechery); these familiar terms are derived from those used by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). In Hollywood television programs and feature films are produced by the same people and organizations, making it logical

for the MPAA's president, the golden-tongued Jack Valenti, to chair the industry task force that negotiated the labeling agreement.

Child-advocacy organizations considered the age labels an inadequate guide for parents and insisted on more specific identifiers for offensive content. The industry resisted anything but the "clear and simple" age-based system. Richard Heffner, who formerly directed the film industry's rating system, pointed out that Valenti "similarly stonewalled against more information about content in [that] system on the specious grounds of 'creating confusion,' but fundamentally for the same reason, that it might turn away customers."

In the end, Valenti lost the fight. Since October 1, 1997, the networks (except for NBC and the Black Entertainment Network) have been marking program content: D (for suggestive dialogue), L (for coarse language), S (for sex) and V (for

Television managements over several decades have spent large sums in a futile fight to discredit the mounting and conclusive evidence of the harmful effects of televised violence.

violence). These icons are applied to specific programs by their producers. Robert Gould of the National Coalition on Television Violence calls this "the fox guarding the chickens." But who else is equipped to handle such a formidable assignment? There are 2,000 daily hours of programming to evaluate (even with news and sports exempt).

How meaningful are the indicators? The effects of violence can be assessed only in relation to its context, its realism, the plot, the motivation of characters, the consequences. Anxiety can be acutely aroused by suspense, music and sound effects, without any on-screen violence at all. Children aged 7-11 have only a limited notion of probability, so they can be affected even more by the fear of a threatening event than by its actual depiction.

The difficulties have been understood for a long time. A quarter-century ago, the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior commissioned the Social Science Research Council to look into the possibility of setting up a "violence index." After much study and debate, a blue-ribbon committee of psychologists, sociologists and educators concluded that "it is questionable whether the production of a violence profile would contribute to a reduction in actual violence." That understatement applies to the labels that have just been put in place.

How violent is television?

Violent episodes occur in three out of five programs (not including news, sports, game shows, religious broadcasts and infomercials). Evidence of this was recently gathered as part of a three-year National Television Violence Study funded by the National Cable Television Association, and conducted by researchers at four universities. A team from the University of California, Santa Barbara,

analyzed the content of 2,757 programs for the 1995-96 season. They found violence in 54% of the shows on broadcast networks, and in 86% of those on premium cable (where only 3% of the films shown were rated G).

The level of violence in TV fiction exceeds that in "reality," or nonfiction programs, including news, "tabloid news," public affairs, and documentaries, which were studied by a separate research group at the University of Texas, Austin. Nearly two in five of those programs include some element of visual violence, with higher proportions in evening hours.

Although graphic or gory depictions are rare on television, violence is condoned and often glamorized by association with attractive characters. The perpetrators are often almost as attractive as the victims, in fact. Three-fourths of the violent actions are unpunished, not even by a show of remorse on the part of those who commit them. Perhaps this is understandable, since in over half the instances, the victim appears to suffer no pain or physical injury. (Only 13% of violent programs show suffering or other long-term consequences, and only 4% have an anti-violence theme.) Violence is typically shown as part of a pattern of repeated behavior. A large part of the time (in 43% of the episodes), it is associated with humor. It's fun!

The California researchers took pains to note that "not all violence is to be treated equally." They identified 800 "high risk" scenes in which the perpetrator was attractive, the violence apparently realistic (to viewers under seven), justified and unpunished, and the victim suffered minimal consequences. These scenes occurred most often in programs addressed to children, especially cartoons.

Through the years, the broadcasters have steadfastly ridiculed studies of television content that apply the same criteria to the doings of cartoon characters as to

those in Westerns or detective stories. Child psychologists counter that Santa Claus is a real-life being for very young children in their most malleable years. The distinction between fiction and reality does not become very clear before the age of seven. There is ample evidence that cartoon violence makes young children more aggressive, just as realistic violence affects older viewers.

Is Violence Bad?

Mass media producers have always insisted that they merely reflect society's values and have no part in shaping them. The debate over the effects of film content has been under way since the 1930's, when social scientists investigated "Our Movie-Made Children" under the aegis of the Payne Fund. The adoption of film ratings in 1968 represented the industry's reluctant acceptance of its critics' premise that content has consequences.

Do the fictions on the TV tube really make a difference? Of course they do. The National Television Violence Study corroborates previous research which shows that repeated exposure to televised violence desensitizes viewers and increases their fears of real-life violence. Nevertheless, television managements, over several decades, have spent large sums in a futile fight to discredit the mounting and conclusive evidence of the harmful effects of televised violence, using many of the same arguments that the tobacco industry has used in its defense against the medical evidence on smoking. As the Council of the American Psychological Association put it in 1985, "Viewing televised violence may lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior." These changes carry over into adulthood.

Although television viewing has been trending steadily downward among children under 12 for the last decade, it

remains a powerful component of their lives. They spend 61% more time watching TV than doing homework. And what they're watching isn't always *Sesame Street*. At 10:30 on a weekday night, about one in seven is watching the tube, almost half as many as at the peak of prime time. Five-sixths of the programming that children watch is main line programming aimed at adults, and adults account for a large chunk of the audience to what might be considered kiddy shows.

CBS, NBC and ABC have been television's main protagonists in the continuing battle over children's viewing, yet they now account for only a quarter of the time spent by those under twelve. The bulk goes to cable channels, which carry some of the steamiest films.

A fifth of all households account for two-fifths of total viewing time. The acute problems created by televised violence are concentrated in those impoverished, disorganized families already characterized by rage and aggressive behavior, where viewing levels are highest and where parental control is weak or absent. That is precisely where being banned by the V-chip would make the most effective program promotion.

Will Parents Use the Labels?

Central to the concept of the V-chip is the idea of "parental control." The MPAA's Valenti talks about "a renaissance of individual responsibility." President Clinton, meeting with industry leaders, announced that "they're handing the TV remote control back to America's parents!"

What possible reason is there to assume that parents who have until now failed to steer their kids away from the wrong kinds of programs will suddenly start to exercise discipline? The TV producers and broadcasters who resisted content labels were absolutely right when they said these would complicate life for the typical

household. The V-chip is a technological nuisance that will tax the average person's ability to program and manage, especially as, in case after case, they find themselves second-guessing the standards that the programmers apply.

NBC president Robert Wright points to "one cable network's made-for-television movie which included nudity, vulgar language and gratuitous violence. The movie was inappropriately rated TV-14, even though it had further content labels." Labeling any program is an arbitrary matter. A group of experts at the Media Studies Center reviewed segments of four programs and applied both the age and content-based labels to them. There was "an almost complete lack of consensus."

As the Wisconsin scholars observed, "there is little indication of what type of content to expect in a movie rated PG or PG-13." While two-thirds of the films in those two categories contain what is euphemistically called "adult language," half have violent scenes and two-fifths are sexually explicit. Until what age should the juvenile audience be protected, and against exactly what?

Young people are invariably present at any matinee showing of an R or NC-17 (formerly X-) rated film in a suburban multiplex theater, and they will be in front of the TV set when the V-chip is in place. How long will it take any resourceful eleven-year-old to figure out how to bypass it?

Hollywood's Forbidden Fruit

Any teenager can testify that it's simply not cool to see a film rated less than R. Violence and vulgarity have increased enormously since the present system of movie ratings began in 1968. A third of the films that year were rated G, though a few years earlier, almost all movies were aimed at a general family audience. In 1996, only 21 of the 715

films rated got a G, and two out of three carried an R (or restricted) rating. Violence, foul words and bedroom scenes are routinely introduced to lower the rating rather than to advance the plot or delineate character. The reason is simple: there is a payoff at the box office. Sit through the "approved for all audiences," trailers in any movie theater. What does the exercise of film craft have to do with their characteristic brutality and licentiousness?

The transformation of Hollywood's output over the past thirty years had complex origins: The Vietnam era brought angry reactions to any inhibitions on free expression. The Pill brought changes in sexual mores. Movies faced competition from television by stretching the limits, going where television then could not go. But the film-rating system played its own part in modifying standards of speech and behavior, dangling the prospect of forbidden fruit before a youthful audience drawn to the movies as a place to date in the dark. The changing rules of conduct depicted in feature films gradually worked their way into television, where incest and masturbation are now accepted subjects for prime-time comedy.

In television too, as in the movies, there is an irresistible lure in what is placed out of bounds. As part of the National Television Violence Study, a University of Wisconsin, Madison, research team led by Joanne Cantor, tested a number of different types of labels: the age-groupings used by the MPAA, and three sets of content indicators—those used by the premium cable channels; by the Recreational Software Advisory Council for video games; and by Canadian broadcasters. "Advisory" notices ("parental discretion advised" and "contains more violent content") were also tested, as were "simple recommendations of age-appropriateness" and mentions of merit awards for programs.

What attracts children is not the presence of violence (as in the label "contains

some violent content”) but the expectation of restrictions. No added attraction came from age suitability indicators that did not imply parental controls. The MPAA restrictive labels (PG, PG-13 and R) made older children more eager to see programs, while the G label diminished their interest. Among younger children, the warning, “parental discretion advised,” made boys more interested, girls less; both boys and girls were turned off by the premium cable codes of “MV: mild violence” and “GV: graphic violence.” The lure of the “forbidden fruit” was especially strong among children of all ages who watched the most television and who were most aggressive to begin with.

The presence of icons may not significantly alter children’s viewing habits, but it will provide the rationale for lacing run-of-the-mill television programs with ever more questionable elements. After all, the kiddies will have been warned away.

Can Television Change?

The V-chip is destined to be even less commonly used than the VCR’s recording capability, while a growing proportion of programs are rated V, S, D and L. It will not be very long before new complaints are raised about rising televised violence and sex.

By accepting the V-chip and the labeling system, the television business has bought some time and deflected attention away from the real problem, which is its steady descent from the decorum that should prevail in a civil society. To criticize existing practices raises the spectre of a threat to freedom of expression. The V-chip opens the gate to other forms of automatic screening for content. Might it be appropriate to label programs that harbor politically controversial topics? How about blocking those that carry commercials for products in which a viewer may not be interested?

The big stick has been shaken directly at Congress and by special interest groups that lobby both government and the advertisers who keep TV going. Senator Ernest Hollings has proposed legislation to bar violent programs before 10 p.m. John McCain, chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, has cited surveys that demonstrate public concern. Attacking NBC’s “inexplicable intransigence” in not going along with the content labels, he overtly threatened license renewals for its owned-and-operated stations, and perhaps for its affiliates too. (Refusing to concede, NBC has promised to make its age-based icons larger, to selectively flash “advisory” warnings, like “parental discretion advised,” to air more public service announcements urging parents to guide their children’s viewing, to conduct more frequent audience surveys, and to post program labels on NBC’s Web site!) TV’s intimate political connections make direct government intervention into content unlikely, as well as horrendous to contemplate. Men like Hollings and McCain may be moved by personal conviction, but they are also influenced by forces whose efforts to change TV’s formulas go well beyond children’s programs.

Will the new labels, as some advocates hope, steer advertisers away from programs that are labeled unsuitable for children? A few may withdraw, but lots of others stand ready to replace them. Complaints about a specific show may not be worth bucking, but a whole category is hard to avoid. Advertisers look first at the number of viewers they can buy for a buck, and secondly at who those viewers are. The obsession of media buyers is with the imaginary category of “18- to 49-year-olds,” considered prime customers for many consumer goods.

The younger half of this heterogeneous age group, more than any other part of the population, is attracted to programming

loaded with violence and sex. Advertisers will follow them wherever they go in the audience ratings race, and broadcasters are not likely to take a chance on departing from their slam-bang formulas just because the output carries a label. That label merely provides the excuse to go farther beyond what was previously considered the permissible edge.

The debate over the V-chip has centered on children. The really wide-scale damage done by video violence and vulgarity, however, is not to children, but to adults. Americans are swathed in audiovisual fictional experience on a scale that would have been inconceivable to previous generations. The values, the heroes, the language and the models of human relationships that Hollywood presents to us are a powerful formative influence on our characters, not only in childhood but throughout our lives.

When President Clinton met with broadcast and movie industry leaders, he asserted that "they recognize that their creativity and their freedom carries with it significant responsibility." It's not just their creativity and their freedom that demand an acknowledgement of the public interest. It's their free license to use the public airwaves and right of way to coin incredible sums of money. ■

Leo Bogart is the author of *Commercial Culture*, *The Age of Television* and other books. He has been president of the Radio and Television Research Council and of the Consumer Psychology division of the American Psychological Association. He was a member of the Social Science Research Council Committee on Television and Social Behavior.

Budgets and Bureaus

"The worst budget cut of all was in 1971. That September, Robert Sarnoff, the new chairman, took RCA out of the computer business and RCA wrote off a \$250 million loss . . . which the organization had to make up . . . We were given quotas. The process was as before, but more intense and prolonged and, having cut fat, cut muscle; and having cut muscle attacked bone. It was during this process that I closed the NBC News bureau in Moscow . . . I closed the Moscow bureau with regret. . .

"The bureau stayed closed for several years, but NBC survived. I was told years later that the always insecure Russians felt insulted, and that in high reaches of the Foreign Ministry I was known by name as the unfriendly man at NBC who closed the Moscow Bureau."

—From *Out of Thin Air*, by Reuven Frank, a former President of NBC News.
(Simon & Schuster 1991)

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The Seinfeld Doctrine— “No Hugging, No Learning”— Imprints the 1990s

As the decade wanes, the postmortems begin on the real meaning of a show about nothing . . . Why has it been so immensely popular?

By Mary Ann Watson

It's been called “the defining sitcom of our age.” Let's hope that's hype.

But, sadly, there's probably a big kernel of truth in it. Plenty of evidence confirms we're living in a self-absorbed, cynical era in which real creeps are often elevated as colorful nonconformists and the good-

hearted and hard-working are dismissed as dull chumps.

For most of television history, the conventional wisdom has been that television characters were surrogate friends and family. Therefore, they had to be people we cared about enough to worry about. In the



1980s, for instance, Gary David Goldberg, producer of *Family Ties*, explained that three things had to happen for his show to be successful: "One is the audience has to want to be part of that family. Then, the second thing is, they have to see themselves in that family. And, the third thing, and a very important thing, is that the audience has to begin to want to watch because they think they can learn how to be a better family."

Seinfeld totally rejected that mode of thinking. It is intentionally a series without a moral center. In 1983, when *Buffalo Bill* broke the basic rule of episodic TV—that the lead character must be likable—there were supporting characters whose warmth juxtaposed with the caustic star and conveyed the message that core values count. But when it comes to *Seinfeld*, well, just call Western Union.

It's almost always a funny show but never a humane one—kind of like a really well-told offensive joke. It's easy to appreciate it on one level yet naggingly troublesome on another. A recent article in the *National Review* speculated that the phenomenal popularity of *Seinfeld* is "an explicit rebuke to PC pieties."

I'll buy that explanation. All of us—even those who feel we make genuine efforts to put ourselves in other people's shoes and see the world from their perspectives—have been stung by a charge of insensitivity at one time or another. The knee-jerk reaction is to complain that political correctness has run amok rather than try to understand an unfamiliar point of view.

When George takes Kramer's advice to park in a space reserved for the handicapped, a disabled woman who needed that space ends up in an accident. Their inconsiderate act is small potatoes, though, compared to the angry mob that destroys George's father's car. The PC dogooders are the real villains. They cramp our style.

Seinfeld gives viewers who are tired of walking on eggs license to laugh at deaf people, midgets, and the "boy in the bubble"—a child with an immune deficiency. Only the self-righteous and humorless would take offense. Screw 'em if they can't take a joke.

The lives of the principal cast members are regularly inconvenienced by immigrants, aliens, and people of different

cultures. Why can't they just ladle the soup, clean the sidewalk, park the car, empty the trash baskets, and show us to our table pleasantly? Wouldn't it be nice if they would just do their work and disappear? *Seinfeld* gives expression to feelings we've all had. But instead of feeling ashamed of our arrogance and intolerance, we're validated by the callousness of the prime-time gang.

The Encyclopedia of Television describes *Seinfeld* as "one of the most innovative and inventive comedies in the history of American television." I'll buy that as well. The humor drawn from the quotidian and trivial is groundbreaking. I've enjoyed many good hard laughs of recognition and have great admiration for the talent and skill involved in producing the series.

But, for me at least, the laughs that felt right became overshadowed by the ones that didn't. Some people will argue that there's no such thing as a bad laugh—or a bad orgasm. Beware of anyone over thirty who still believes it.

The *Seinfeld* season finale in May 1996 made me feel physically sick. George's fiancée Susan dies after licking toxic envelope glue on their wedding invitations. George is relieved since he was trying to weasel out of the marriage anyway. Upon learning the shocking news at the hospital, Elaine, Jerry, and Kramer are unmoved. They shrug in "that's life" resignation and urge George to join them for coffee.

I know, I know, it's supposed to be absurdist farce. I took "Intro to Theater," too. But I just decided I didn't want any part of it. Maybe I'm not sophisticated enough to appreciate it. So be it.

I always thought a good litmus test for gauging the value of a friendship is whether or not you're a better person for spending time together. I want my friends in real life and on TV, to appeal to my better angels. And for those who don't—no matter how funny, attractive, or popular—I haven't the time.

So I didn't watch *Seinfeld* for a couple of seasons. Occasionally I'd be left out of coffee-break conversation in the office lounge, but never missed those guys. They certainly didn't miss me or the handful of other viewers I've met who made the same decision to stop watching the show because it just made them uneasy.

The popular press has kept us all abreast of the raises the stars received, the phrases they introduced to the American lexicon, and the scores of web pages they inspired. And now, the end of the show's nine-year run is generating a tidal wave of copy, commentary, and ballyhoo.

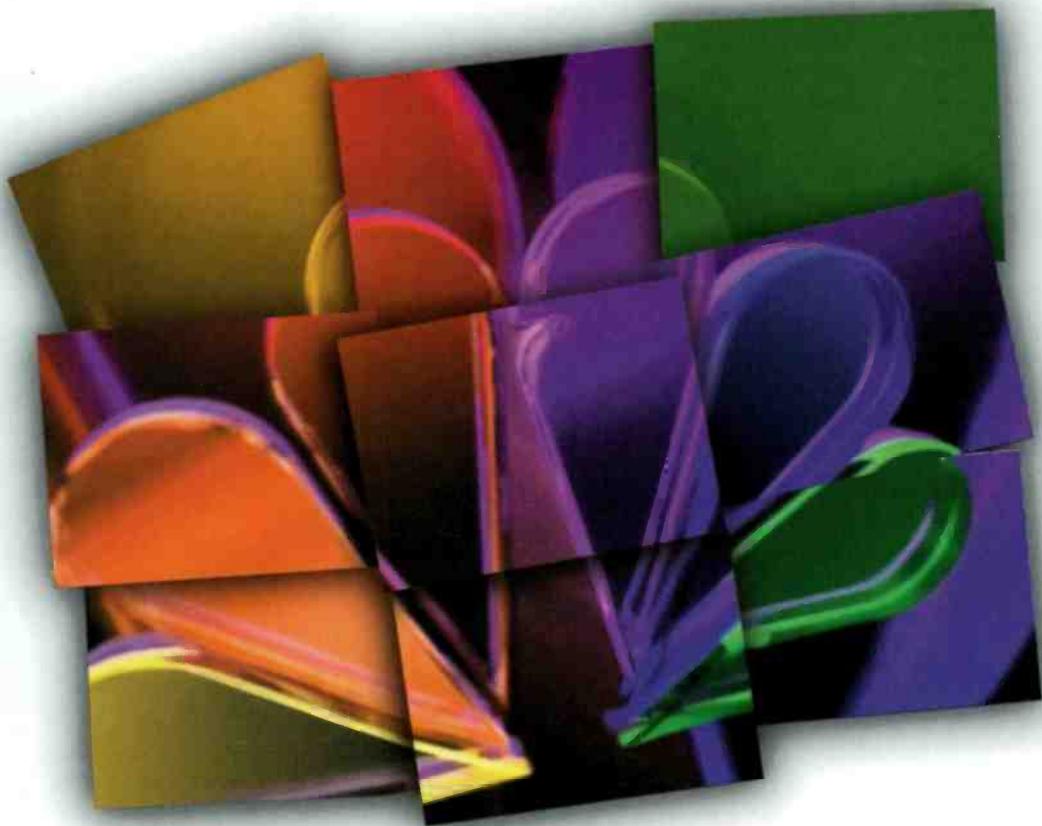
The NBC affiliate in Detroit, WDIV, ran a sweeps weeks series called "*Seinfeld* Extravaganza." A very good reporter, who could have been investigating a story of real importance to the station's viewers, was instead sent off to New York City to be a cheerleader for the network's two-million-dollar-per-thirty-second-spot final episode.

The first of the five installments included an interview with the man who inspired the character of Kramer. When asked to give a hint about the sign-off plot, he would only guarantee with a smile "there's not going to be any moral message here. It's just going to be four despicable people living their despicable lives, even more despicable than you ever saw before them."

Long after we're gone, when historians analyze America in the 1990s, the good ones won't overlook *Seinfeld* as a clue to what contributed to our collective character. Larry David, co-creator with Jerry Seinfeld, summarizes the show's guiding principle as "no hugging, no learning." It's the perfect formula for an empty life turned into "Must See TV." ■

Mary Ann Watson is a professor of Telecommunications and Film at Eastern Michigan University and the author of *Defining Visions: Television and the American Experience Since 1945*, published by Harcourt Brace.

THE GOLDEN AGE



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IT'S RIGHT NOW.
IT'S MUST SEE.



Classroom Confessions: The Media Business and Learning from Autoworkers

by Richard Campbell

The year 1995 was not a good time for news in Southeastern Michigan. As a bitter newspaper strike developed and raged in Detroit, in Ann Arbor the University of Michigan—my former employer—decided to kill its journalism programs at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

With the demise of journalism, I was out of a job. Although I had landed a good contract to write a college textbook on

mass media for St. Martin's Press, I missed the classroom. That summer, the head of the communication program at the University of Michigan's Dearborn campus called to see if I was interested in teaching a media criticism class to autoworkers at Ford's Rawsonville plant, the company's electrical and fuel injector division near Ypsilanti. Aimed at veteran workers who had entered the auto industry right after high school, the class was part of a college program established by

Ford and administered mostly by Dearborn faculty. The program allowed workers to earn a liberal arts degree part-time by taking in-plant courses or attending classes at the Dearborn campus.

It turned out to be one of my best teaching experiences.

There were 10 guys in the class, mostly skilled tradesmen—millwrights, electricians, and tool & die makers. Nine students were white, one was black. Working at Ford since they were 18 or 19 years old, most had between 20 and 30 years experience. They were looking at early retirement and planning second careers, some as writers or teachers. They were also well paid and did not complain about the four required books for the course. Many of them had children in college. One even planned on receiving his degree in the spring—at the same time his daughter earned her bachelor's degree from Wayne State.

Most of the students were in their 40s and 50s and it was the first (and probably last) time I had ever taught a class in which most of the students were older than I — and earned more money. We talked a lot about television. And I had students who actually watched *Maverick*, *Sgt. Bilko*, *The Life of Riley* and *The Jackie Gleason Show* back in the 1950s. Their affection and enthusiasm for these old shows matched my own.

They also had strong feelings about TV today. Most of them were partial to news programs. Unlike their younger cohorts, these workers all read newspapers and watched TV news, but most felt that news media were biased or sensational. They almost all disliked Detroit's local news programs, especially when they led with what one student called "murder-of-the-day" stories.

We also discussed sitcoms. They all had slightly different tastes but ABC's now defunct *Roseanne* was one program they wanted to talk about. The class liked John

Goodman's character but were divided over *Roseanne* herself. (In my experience, discussing this program has always energized the class in an interesting way, making middle-class students feel nervous and working-class students feel important.)

To a man, these guys disliked the personal focus of most day time talk shows. One millwright, an ardent opponent of political correctness, called these shows, "Miracle Whip for the mind—imitation women's food." Macho guy that he was, his preferred the rugged political discussions of late-night talk radio.

"The thing that bothers me the most about the current media is the way daytime talk shows deal with defining our culture by holding up unusual and sometimes fabricated behavior as common and normal," wrote Bruce, a veteran electrician, in an early assignment (and this was a year before Jerry Springer took these shows to a new low).

They brought in old magazine ads to class and we swapped stories about rock'n'roll and Motown's impact on teenage dating rituals. We also talked about the strike-breaking tactics going on in Detroit at Gannett's *News* and Knight-Ridder's *Free Press*. The largest-ever government-sanctioned JOA (joint operating agreement) had ended newspaper competition and, according to a few of my students, made management even greedier. One student said he thought it was hard for reporters from the Guild (one of six striking union groups involved) to support a strike over the long haul because they belonged to a different social class than the teamsters and other union workers, a more elite and more formally educated class.

In the Ford class, we critiqued a 1971 *60 Minutes* episode about a British Rolls Royce plant, featuring Morley Safer. The episode valorized the "local craftsmen" at Rolls and demonized the Detroit auto

industry as a symbol for “the tyranny of machines.” I have shown this episode to a number of classes over the years, always asking students how they might tell the story differently. What questions might they ask the British workers that *60 Minutes* did not ask? I got different questions from this class than from my much younger students. Traditional-aged students usually want to know how much the cars cost, while the auto guys pointed out inefficiencies at the Rolls plant. But mostly the Ford guys wanted to know why Safer never asked whether the workers could afford to buy the cars they were building. The Ford students knew the answer; younger students never asked the question.

With a class of autoworkers, I decided to focus a lot of attention on media coverage of labor and union issues. The previous year I had helped organize a national conference on labor at the University of Michigan. We had a number of distinguished speakers, including judges, economists, reporters, and union activists. But when more autoworkers showed up than academics, I realized that this elite university—despite all its leftist rhetoric—was not very interested in labor and worker issues.

In the Ford class a year later, after spending the first few weeks discussing current media industries—from television and sound recording to newspapers and publishing—we targeted the mass media’s coverage (or lack of coverage) of labor issues. The class critiqued a seven-day series in a local paper and raised a number of issues that I had not previously tackled with younger college students. Below I’ve listed some of the more compelling topics addressed during the second half of the semester, most of them suggested by the students:

- why the network news devotes so much time to Dow Jones averages without ever explaining what they mean or why so many business stories focus on stocks when so few Americans (less than 7 percent) buy stock in any given year and so few (less than 23 percent) actually hold any stock at all.

- why PBS, “so-called *public television*” as one student put it, has no “labor hour” but plenty of “nightly business reports” hosted by “slick business studs” who usually invite only their “corporate buddies” to appear.

- why so few “expert” sources in business/economic stories (featured on the network news or programs like *Nightline*) include actual workers in addition to the usual managers, CEOs, and corporate spin doctors.

- why traditional labor beats at most newspapers have been replaced by workplace or “lifestyle” sections that emphasize white collar professionals. (Even the usually reliable National Public Radio got rid of its labor reporter several years ago.)

- why the networks (and the *New York Times*) failed to cover the September 1989 United Mine Workers takeover of a coal-processing plant in Virginia, the first major takeover of a plant since the 1937 sit down strike by autoworkers in Flint. (I told the class that this was actually nothing new. As Walter Lippmann wrote in 1922: “If you study the way many a strike is reported in the press, you will find very often that [strike] issues are rarely in the headlines, barely in the leading paragraph, and sometimes not even mentioned anywhere.”)

- why workers, particularly males, were stereotyped on television sitcoms as inept or buffoonish. The class could identify

only a handful of male working-class role models on prime-time television, and two of these were cartoon characters. They included Ralph Kramden from the 1950s, Fred Flintstone from the 1960s, Archie Bunker and Fred Sanford from the 1970s, and Homer Simpson from the 1980 and 1990s. The students offered only John Amos' character on *Good Times*, Charles Dutton on *Roc*, and John Goodman on *Roseanne* as rendering positive portrayals of working class men. They also noted that Brett Butler's *Grace Under Fire* on ABC was one of only a few shows on TV that located dramatic action in working-class spaces; whereas most programs, even about working-class families, seldom acknowledge such workplaces.

- why the more than 1.5 million Teamster members, who include thousands of men and women who work in warehouses, were stereotyped as mobsters or racketeers. (I told the class that I once asked an undergraduate class at Michigan to define a teamster based on their media knowledge. More than one student wrote, "organized gangster.")

- why television and other news media, so seemingly focused on health and nutrition news, generally ignore safety and public health concerns, even though between 60,000 and 70,000 workers die each year from cancers or heart and lung diseases related to on-the-job hazards and another 10,000 die in work-related accidents. (Compare this to TV's saturation coverage of the "drug wars" in the late 1980s, when 3,500-4,000 people were dying each year from cocaine and crack-related incidents.)

The best thing about my experience at the Rawsonville plant was the chance to look at the world through other sets of lenses. The Ford class also gave me insights into my media textbook.

These were the first students to read drafts of various chapters of the manuscript, and they made suggestions that affected the way I wrote about a number of mass-communication topics.

The class (and later my textbook) took particular interest in the rise of the large global media conglomerate such as Disney, Bertelsmann, Time Warner, Westinghouse, Sony and Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. We discussed whether such ownership patterns would allow enough different voices and views into the market. My autoworking students were sensitive about these issues, quite certain that voices like theirs would appear even less often as fewer and fewer companies took control of the media.

In one assignment, Fred, a 17-year tool-and-die veteran, attacked the media on this point: "News media in general have been dedicated to pleasing corporate money and creating an unfair overview of the average working person."

This discussion led to a couple of classes on commercial culture and the ubiquity of advertising. We looked especially hard at automobile ads, both in print and on television. We concentrated on a well-researched and apparently creative 1980s Oldsmobile campaign, designed by the giant Leo Burnett agency. This campaign attempted to transform the image of "Olds" into a hip, stylish car for younger people. The clever slogan, "It's not your father's Oldsmobile," was repeated in a series of hopefully persuasive, musically powerful, and artistic commercials.

However the campaign failed. Among several problems, as my students pointed out, the ad did not attract young buyers—hard to do when a car, driven by one's father, is nicknamed "olds." But the ads also alienated older customers who felt abandoned by GM and the campaign's emphasis on youth. The Olds division almost shut down in late 1980s.

In bringing a number of magazine ads

to class, the students noted that American car ads usually showcase automobiles in bucolic settings, on winding back roads that cut through rugged mountain passes or across shimmering wheat fields. These ads rarely contain images of cars on congested city streets or in other urban settings where most driving really occurs. Rather, the new car—on the cutting edge of the latest technology—uses the natural world as its backdrop, where the technological merges effortlessly with the cultural. One student said, “A lot of these ads make cars seem like pets.”

While most American, and citizens of other developed nations, clearly have options among a range of consumer products, these students said they had limited power in deciding what kind of media products get created and circulated in a society. (These workers did defend Ford and said that the longer they had been there, the more that management made efforts to educate them in classes like this one and to solicit their ideas. But they still said more could be done.)

But my students countered that these gestures were offset by multinational greed in which many companies were only concerned about the bottom line, sniffing out the cheapest global labor situations possible. They thought that internationalization of unions was one way to combat this, but that since World War I unions and workers tended to think of themselves only locally, less interested in the global

picture, therefore ensuring that control of that arena stayed firmly in the grip of managers.

One of the biggest concerns that developed in class was over a key paradox of the information era. For economic discussions

to be meaningful and democratic, they must be carried out in the popular media as well as in educational situations and institutions. Yet promoting public debates about the fundamental business structure of media industries is often not in the best economic interest of those who own them. Nonetheless, in some places where citizens and workers feel excluded from the new economic arrangements, local groups and consumer movements are addressing issues that affect individual and community life.

For example, a number of local municipalities are starting their own cable and Internet operations to counter price gouging by local cable monopolies, now deregulated under the

Telecommunications Act of 1996. Such movements may be united by geographic ties, common ethnic background, or shared concerns about technology. And Internet technology—by erasing geographic borders—has made it possible for groups to converse globally, about such issues as censorship, international unions, or multinationals.

In that Ford classroom back in late 1995, we had such conversations, lively ones. We ended the course discussing

In the Ford class, after spending the first few weeks discussing current media industries—from television and sound recording to newspapers and publishing—we targeted the mass media's coverage (or lack of coverage) of labor issues. The class critiqued a series in a local paper and raised a number of issues I had not previously tackled with younger college students.

First Amendment issues and citizenship. The class felt strongly that they did not feel like citizens with a stake in the political process, but simply consumers who were in the world to make and buy goods. They argued that the proliferation of new media and news sources, especially on television, had made them feel more and more like spectators in the political process—without a voice. But they did have solutions. A couple of students in the class had become involved in local activist groups. One student said he made sure he attended all public hearings on his local cable monopoly, but that too often, he was the “only public” there.

John, a 30-year Ford veteran and 25-year UAW rep, said that his alienation from the political process had led him back to education—to this class—and to writing. He thought that through writing he

could make a difference and insert his voice into the larger public conversation.

John had strong feelings about his voice. As he wrote in one assignment: “I am excited about the proliferation of alternative voices in newer media. I hope to use these resources to defend the First Amendment. I own a weapon: my word processor. Let no S.O.B. try to take it away.” ■

Richard Campbell is the director of the School of Journalism at Middle Tennessee State University. He is the author of *Sixty Minutes: A Mythology for Middle America*, and *Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, recently published.

So What's So Funny?

President Clinton was the chief target of TV's late-night comics in 1997, accounting for more than one-third (37%) of all their jokes. Failed presidential candidate Bob Dole was the main whipping boy for comedians in 1996, but in '97 Clinton outdistanced his nearest rival, O.J. Simpson, by a margin of more than three to one (810 vs. 260). Almost a third (315) of all Clinton jokes focused on changes in sexual impropriety, while one in six (15%) ridiculed his eating habits. Another hundred jokes about the president revolved around questionable campaign finance practices.

Trailing well behind on the list of comic targets were Vice President Al Gore (103 jokes), Attorney General Janet Reno (91), and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton (83) who rounded out the top five.

—from *Media Monitor*, publication of the Center for Media and Public Affairs, which monitored all the jokes from the monologues of late-night comics Jay Leno, David Letterman and Conan O'Brien during 1997.

Mom Always Liked Them Best: The Smothers Brothers Story Revisited

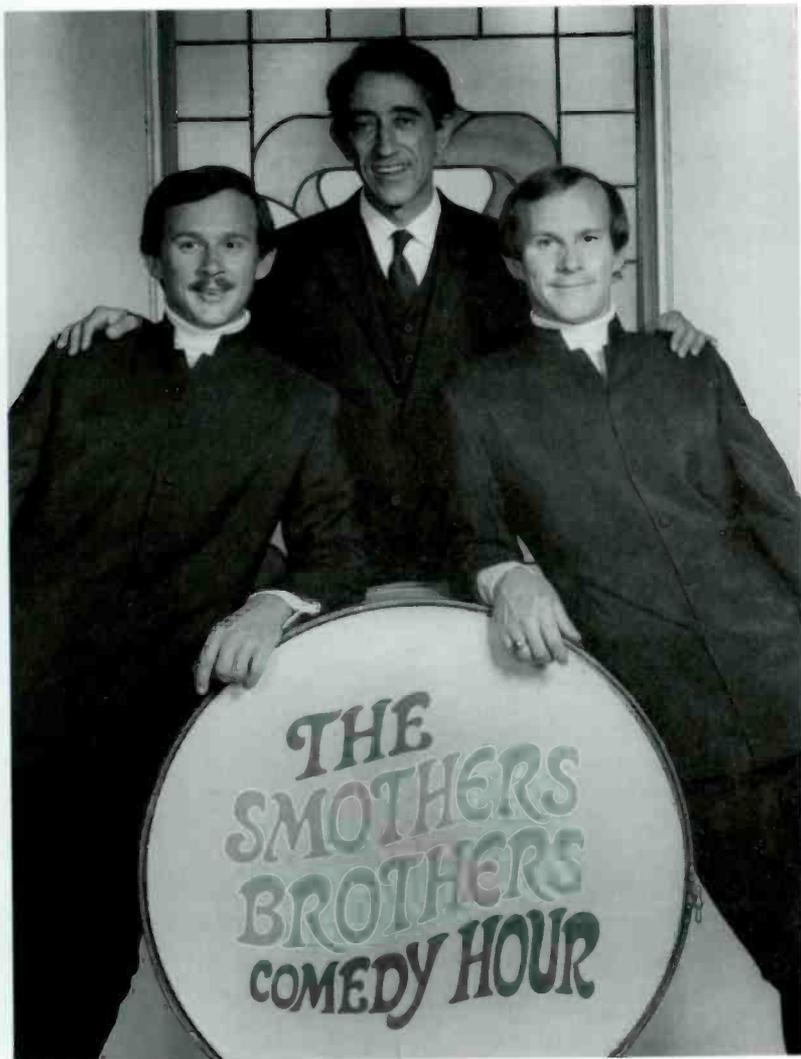
By Jon Krampner

Variety shows are an endangered species on network television, with political satire rarer still. Nearly thirty years ago, the mixture proved combustible.

On April 4, 1969, several weeks after renewing *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* for what would have been its fourth season, Robert Wood, president of the CBS Television Network, abruptly took the show off the air among a swirl of charges and counter-charges about censorship and a network's right to determine the content of what it put on the airwaves.

The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour aired 72 episodes over two and a half seasons between February, 1967, and April, 1969. But despite the brevity of its run, it was a television landmark:

- It was the first successful comedy show to deal with social criticism and satire, setting the stage for *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*, *Saturday Night Live* and *All in the Family*.
- It raised the issue, as no TV show has done before or since, of the extent to



Dick, "candidate"
Pat Paulsen, and
Tom Smothers

Knave Productions

which First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech apply to television performers.

- It aired rock music, including acid rock, at a time when there was little rock on the tube, and that of the polite, well-mannered variety.

- It gave exposure to many black performers, such as Harry Belafonte and Nancy Wilson, who were largely ignored or typecast by network television.

CBS began airing the *Comedy Hour* in February 1967 as a mid-season replacement for *The Garry Moore Show*, the latest in a long line of sacrificial offerings to NBC's *Bonanza*. Since 1961, the men of the Ponderosa had dispatched eight CBS shows, including *Perry Mason*, *The Real McCoys*, and the *Judy Garland Show*. At CBS, Sunday night from nine to ten was known as "the kamikaze time slot."

Tommy, who played the guitar, assumed a childlike persona ranging from prankishness to irascibility, while brother Dick was the bass-playing voice of moderation.

They originally debuted on CBS in the fall of 1965 in *The Smothers Brothers Show*, a sitcom starring Dick as a young executive and Tommy as his well-intentioned but inept guardian angel. The Brothers had no creative control over the program, which was off the air in one season.

However, CBS was still interested in them, and, when Garry Moore faltered early in 1966-67, CBS proposed their doing a variety show. Ken Kragen and Ken Fritz, their managers, would serve as executive producers of *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. Kragen recalls that Tommy, who took a more hands-on approach to the show than Dick, had a choice.

"CBS wanted to put the show on against *Bonanza* which was the No. 1 show (in the ratings) and bring it in at mid-season," Kragen told me recently. "Or we could wait until the following fall and possibly get a better time slot. I'll never forget Tommy Smothers saying, 'Look, if we go against *Bonanza* and fail, nobody'll blame us. But if we win, we'll be heroes, because we'll have knocked off the show no one else has been able to knock off.' Everyone else was a bit ambivalent, but I really credit Tommy with having the guts to do that."

To produce the show, CBS selected Saul Ilson and Ernest Chambers, who had met as writers for Danny Kaye. They made some astute decisions, such as hiring bandleader Nelson Riddle.

But Ilson and Chambers who had a more traditional approach to

comedy than Tommy and Dick, hired comedy writers Hal Goldman and Al Gordon, who had written for Jack Benny for 30 years. Goldman and Gordon were not part of the youth culture the Smothers came to embody, which would increasingly bring Ilson and Chambers into conflict with the Brothers.

Tommy Smothers turned 30 two days before the show's premiere on Feb. 4, 1967; Dick was 28. Despite their relative youth, both were accomplished comedians and musicians, with 10 comedy albums and live appearances at college campuses and theatres. Their act was built around a mixture of American folk music and sibling rivalry. Dick might admonish his brother to behave, using patient, reasoned arguments and elegant syllogisms, only to be met with a taunting "Oh, yeah?" or Tommy's signature line, "Mom always liked you best!"

The Smothers' troupe featured Pat Paulsen, the deadpan comedian who did the show's editorials and who ran for President in 1968 on the slogan "We Can't Stand Pat." As a candidate, Paulsen displayed sardonic wit and the charisma of a depressed mortician.

Leigh French was the stoned benevolent hippy earth mother whose "Have A Little

Tom and Dick Smothers on their show with Barbara Bain and Martin Landau (*Mission Impossible*) and Sonny and Cher.



Tea With Goldie" featured as many marijuana jokes as the Smothers and their writers could sneak past CBS censors, formally known as the program practices department.

Other key members of the company were Mason Williams, one of the show's top writer-performers (Pat Paulsen's run for President was his idea), Allan Blye and Bob Einstein were also lead writers on the show, with the latter appearing on camera as the humorless policeman Officer Judy.

Almost from the start, *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* was a ratings hit, dethroning *Bonanza*. The show was also a critical success: *Newsweek* called it "a rare taste of anti-establishment irreverence." They were also compared to Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, and Martin and Lewis. Before the show became enmeshed in controversy, CBS Chairman William Paley and CBS Inc. President Dr. Frank Stanton would meet Tommy and Dick when visiting Los Angeles, and Stanton helped Tommy when he had problems with the network bureaucracy.

One of the show's assets was its sharply drawn political humor. When several American hydrogen bombs were lost over Greenland, Tommy quipped, "Now two Eskimos have joined the nuclear club. That's really spreading Democracy." And when it was reported that President Johnson wanted to restrict the travel of Americans overseas, Tommy looked into the camera with wide-eyed innocence and proclaimed, "Alright, you guys in Vietnam, come on home!"

What enabled the Brothers to express themselves so pointedly was their disarming appearance. Columnist Murray Kempton observed they could not have accomplished what they did if they had not originally been so appealing to nice old ladies.

"The funny thing is, the older people would all say, 'They're such sweet boys,'" Ernest Chambers told me recently, "'But they make them say those terrible things.'"

Although a folk musician, Tommy Smothers was hospitable to rock music in general and acid rock in particular. Introducing the Blues Magoos on one show, he cautioned, "They're going to play their far-out brand of psychedelic music . . . So hold onto your chairs, do not adjust your sets, for you're about to take a trip."

CBS nervousness about rock music, Ernest Chambers recalls, extended to relatively mainstream musicians.

"The Who and Simon and Garfunkel and the Buffalo Springfield and all those acts had never been seen on television," says Chambers, today a senior vice president with Merv Griffin Entertainment. "The network was terrified that somehow America would go insane watching this stuff. When they wanted to book Simon and Garfunkel, the network refused. We found that Simon and Garfunkel had done a guest shot on Red Skelton's summer show. We got a clip of that and screened it to reassure the network that they were not sicko druggo hippie wackos."

In June 1967, at the end of the show's first season, CBS acknowledged its success by giving the Brothers their own suite of offices at Television City. That summer was marked by riots in black inner-city neighborhoods across the country. Paradoxically, it was also the summer of love, when the youth culture began to flower. But contention would increasingly bloom between the Smothers Brothers and CBS.

Exultant over the show's success, Mike Dann, then CBS's vice president in charge of programming, had visited the set and asked if there was anything he could do to help.

"We want Pete Seeger," Ken Fritz volunteered.

Folksinger Seeger had been blacklisted from TV since the early 1950s, when he was charged with being a Communist

was charged with being a Communist sympathizer. Dann knew of Seeger's controversial past, but opposed the blacklist. Dann recalls that Seeger appeared on *Camera Three*, a CBS Saturday-morning public service series, singing children's songs, and that he used that as a lever to get Seeger approved. Even before Seeger appeared on the *Comedy Hour*, it was deluged with mail, opposing his appearance. Ken Krage is convinced the letters were part of an orchestrated campaign.

On the show, Seeger sang "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," ostensibly about a foolish, obstinate World War II infantry sergeant who leads his men across a river too wide and deep, causing several to drown. In fact, the song was a thinly veiled criticism of President Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam War, as the sixth stanza made plain:

*Now every time I read the papers,
That old feelin' comes on:
We're waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool says to push on.*

CBS refused to allow the song on the air. But in the face of public criticism over this act of censorship, CBS allowed Seeger to appear on the program later that season, performing the song uncut.

The Brothers did not always win their battles with the censors, however. Among the material that was cut:

- The line "Ronald Reagan is a known heterosexual."

- A skit featuring Tommy and Elaine May as movie censors who decided the word "breast" could not be used in a film. "Tell them they can substitute the word 'arm,'" May said. "But won't that sound funny?" Tommy rejoined, "My heart beats wildly in my *arm* whenever you're near?"

- When Joan Baez appeared on the show, she dedicated a song to her husband David Harris, who had been convicted of resisting the draft. "He is going to prison

for three years," Baez told the television audience. That stayed in. But her next sentence, "The reason is that he resisted selective service and the draft and militarism in general," got cut.

Program practices' endless cuts and revisions forced the show's writers to spend as much time responding to blue penciling as developing new material. At one point, program practices assigned recent Berkeley graduate John Kaye to the *Comedy Hour*, hoping those around the Brothers would identify with his youthfulness. But that's not how it played out.

On one show, Mason Williams wrote a skit with two guys talking about an attractive girl. "What do you think of her?" one asked. "I don't know," the other said. "But she's 'rowing into Galveston.'" Staff members laughed as if it were an in-joke with sexual connotations; in fact, it meant nothing.

Kaye spent several days trying hard to find out what it meant, but everyone maintained a cabalistic air of secrecy. When the script was submitted to program practices, it was returned with the phrase 'rowing into Galveston' deleted for its "clearly salacious content."

William Tankersley, then head of CBS program practices, says 30 years later on about the *Comedy Hour*, "it drew more complaints than any show we ever had." The program evidently tended to irritate viewers. Although it outdrew any other CBS series in mail by a ratio of about 50-1, most of it was adverse.

Despite frequent pitched battles between the show and the censors, there were good personal relations between the two camps. In 1968, the *Comedy Hour's* summer replacement was *The Glen Campbell Show*. There was a dispute between Tommy and program practices over a now-forgotten line.

"Tankersley and I played two out of three ping-pong games to leave the line in," Tommy recently told me. "He was a

very good ping-pong player, but I did win, and he did leave the line in.”

The conflict between the Brothers and CBS played out with distinctly geographical consequences for the network.

“The affiliates, particularly in the South, who tended to be rather conservative, were pressuring us to stop them from doing what they were doing. But you cannot pressure Tommy,” Mike Dann recalled in an interview from New York, where he now is a senior adviser to Capital Cities/ABC. He remembers that Southern legislators were restive as well. “The controversy over Vietnam got certain Congressmen—Southern Congressmen in particular—very actively pressuring the FCC.”

But in their censorship struggles with CBS, the Brothers had some high-profile supporters as well. Among them: the Beatles. George Harrison appeared on one show, saying, “Whether you can say it or not, keep *trying* to say it.”

According to William Tankersley, CBS’s cuts were legitimate and justified. For one thing, he says, the *Comedy Hour* was entertainment, not a news or public affairs show.

“We had a basic policy that if a show engaged in humor and the intent, which is somewhat subjective, is to provide entertainment, that’s generally acceptable,” he maintains. “But if they’re using entertainment to deliver political messages, that’s 180 degrees opposed to policy. And the repetitious nature of their political material indicated very clearly that they had a message they were trying to get across. That’s where they would get over the line.”

1968 was one of the worst years in modern American history. Martin Luther King was assassinated in April, and Senator Robert F. Kennedy, who was running for President, in June. Riots broke out that summer at the Democratic Convention in Chicago. At times, it seemed the fabric of the country itself was going to unravel.

The presidential campaign of 1968 pitted Richard Nixon against Hubert Humphrey. “Nixon promises he’ll end the war,” *The Nation* noted wryly, “but what does he plan to do about the Smothers Brothers?” In the campaign, Pat Paulsen was the *Comedy Hour*’s dark horse. (Ken Kragen was later told that Paulsen’s TV joke-candidacy actually received as many as 200,000 write-in votes nationwide.)

1968 was also a year of behind-the-scenes politics at *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. With his artistic control and growing clout, Tommy was able to force out Saul Ilson and Ernest Chambers, the program’s original producers, with whom he had been at odds. Tommy’s perfectionism and artistic control also made life challenging for the show’s directors.

“He went through a lot of directors,” Chambers recalls. “I can’t remember the exact batting order, but he was just murder on directors. This was all Tommy, never Dickie. Dickie was just an easy-going guy.”

In late 1968 and early 1969, Tommy also removed executive producers Ken Kragen and Ken Fritz from the show. They had served as buffers between the sometimes hot-tempered Tommy and the CBS brass.

“We would come out of a meeting with Tom and Dick saying, ‘Tell the network to take this show and shove it,’” Kragen recalls. “We would go to the network guy, whether it was Perry Lafferty (CBS’s head of West-Coast operations) or Mike Dann, and say, ‘Hey, we’ve got a problem here.’ We wouldn’t say, ‘Take this show and shove it.’ Tom ultimately eliminated everyone between him and the network.”

In front of the cameras, the show had also changed. In early 1967, the clean-cut brothers were sporting red blazers. Now their hair was longer, they had mustaches, Tommy had grown sideburns, and they wore turtlenecks and Nehru jackets. At the start of the first season, they would open

each show with an American folk song like "Boil That Cabbage Down." Now they were just as likely to start with an original protest song, such as "We're Still Here":

*The war in Vietnam keeps on a-raging',
Blacks and whites still haven't worked it out,
Pollution, guns and poverty surround us,
No wonder everybody's droppin' out . . .*

While only a small percentage of the show had involved politics, that percentage got larger during the show's final season. They continued to develop new ideas. One new feature was "Seventh Inning Stretch," a kind of electronic town hall in which Tommy and Dick answered unscripted questions from the audience.

In one, a young woman asked Tommy, "Who has the last word—you or the censors?" The TV lights were hot, his turtleneck and Nehru were warm, and the subject was emotionally charged. During his answer, Tommy began to perspire freely.

"Television, being the most important of the mass media, is not allowed to express itself as other mass media," he replied. "We are all aware of what's going on in this country . . . and to not be able to discuss it on television is a disservice to this country."

When you watch a tape of that show today, you realize it both is and isn't great television: the moment lacks conventional entertainment values, but he's working without a net, and has an impassioned eloquence which perfectly captures the historical moment.

Ironically, his frequent political comedy created new problems. He had effectively

played the dumb brother; now he didn't seem so dumb.

"The problem was when you get involved with politics, suddenly you're not that dumb little boy who says, 'Mom liked you better.'" Mike Dann says. "He was an active leader on a highly controversial issue, one of the greatest issues that ever divided the country, next to the North against the South."

Ratings began to fall. In retrospect, Tommy says, "We might have been getting a little preachy." He adds that affiliates unhappy with the show's politics may not have promoted it, leading to further erosion of the ratings.

"I was hot-headed," admits Tommy, who now runs the Remick Ridge Vineyard in Northern California in addition to continuing to perform with brother Dick. "In hindsight, I probably would have handled it a little differently. But I'm older and wiser."

"When you're young and full of yourself and have a crowd of young writers who are pushing you—Rob Reiner particularly," he laughs. "Every time I'd back off, he'd say, 'Oh, you're copping out on these

capitalist pigs!'"

Even now, decades later, Tommy still remembers vividly how stressed he became during his battles with CBS—particularly a nightmare in early 1969 that left him shaken. In a dream with a gangland motif, Mike Dann and Perry Lafferty, CBS executives with whom he enjoyed good relations, force him into a car. They sit on either side of him in the back seat, with three anonymous men in gray suits in front. All smile mirthless smiles.



Still having fun and making fun.
Tommy and Dick Smothers

Knave Productions

"Where are we going?" a frightened Tommy asks.

"Never mind."

"I promise I'll never do this again!" Tommy keeps saying. "I'll recant! I'll do anything!"

"It's too late, Tom." He is taken to a warehouse with 15 to 20 other men in gray suits and ordered to undress. He assumes they are going to kill him—and wakes up in a cold sweat.

Evil omens appeared in real life as well. William Paley and Frank Stanton stopped taking his phone calls. In Washington, Richard Nixon had been elected President and CBS was reportedly eager to placate him. Studio crew members who did not share the politics, lifestyle or hair length of the show's performers, began to heckle them.

Because of affiliate complaints, CBS decided in the spring of 1969 to do a weekly advance closed-circuit broadcast of the show to member stations. Affiliates could then decide if they wanted to carry a show completely, partially or not at all. The closed-circuit transmission took place on Friday afternoons.

On March 9, 1969, CBS refused to air that Sunday's program and replaced it with a two-month-old re-run, claiming the show's tape was submitted too late for closed-circuiting to the affiliates. At the time, Tommy Smothers claimed CBS had harassed him by requesting so many changes (including one just 20 minutes before the closed-circuit broadcast) that the show couldn't be finished on time.

Later that month, Smothers went to Washington, meeting FCC Commissioners Nicholas Johnson and Kenneth Cox, and several Democratic lawmakers (including Sen. John Pastore, powerful chairman of the Senate subcommittee on communications). He also spoke at a session of the National Association of Broadcasters.

Despite the controversy swirling around him, Tommy Smothers was enjoying himself. "It's exhilarating to live now," he told *The Nation*. "We're going through a revolution, not in the classic sense, but a revolution of ideas—artistic, moral and political . . . The people are hungry for truth."

But as far as CBS was concerned, the revolution would not be televised. Shortly after Tommy left Washington, CBS fired the Smothers Brothers and took the show off the air, saying they had failed to deliver the tape of the April 6 show in time for advance screening to the affiliates.

Accounts of the show's removal from the air typically speak of its cancellation. But the passions stirred by the show extend to the terminology of its demise.

"*Firing*, not cancellation," Tommy insists to this day. "We were fired! The show wasn't cancelled. It's very important. My brother says there are two kinds of death: you die of natural causes, or you're murdered. Our show was murdered. We were fired."

"I don't think there was really a specific date (for delivery of the tape)," Ken Fritz adds. "They had been pretty flexible with us, until one day they decided not to be flexible anymore."

Time Magazine commented, "CBS's stated reason for cancelling the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* was one of those rationales distinguished by the fact that just about nobody believed it." But with the show's ratings falling and the political climate in Washington heating up, CBS's decision stood.

The show's cancellation created a national furor. Most of the press rallied behind the Smothers Brothers. Jack Gould of *The New York Times* called the show "a contemporary variety (show) of modern style and taste to which there could not be the slightest objection."

And FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson told *Look Magazine*, "If we've come to

the point where *that* is so controversial it can't be seen on television, we're a hell of a lot sicker, in a hell of a lot more trouble than I ever thought." Students protested at CBS affiliates near the University of Illinois, Miami University of Ohio, Harvard, the University of Wisconsin and Notre Dame.

In the summer of 1969, the time slot of *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* was filled by *Hee-Haw*, which may have pleased Southern affiliates and Congressmen. The corny *Hee Haw* only spent that summer in the Smother's time slot. That fall, CBS's Sunday night 9 to 10 p.m. time was filled by *The Leslie Uggams Show*, produced by deposed *Comedy Hour* producers Saul Ilson and Ernest Chambers.

Meanwhile, Tommy Smothers traveled around the country with the tape of the controversial April 6 show, showing it to audiences of journalists, FCC commissioners, and Congressmen. "I'm not very educated, but I do know that this is a constitutional issue," he told his audiences "I've got a lot of faith in the Constitution."

The *Comedy Hour* would prove the high watermark of the Brothers' television career. But Tommy Smothers would harbor no bitterness toward the CBS network president who took the show off the air. In the mid-1970s, he ran into Robert Wood.

"He was jovial, a nice guy," Smothers laughs. "He said it was water under the bridge. I was kind of dead in the water anyway."

Another figure from the show who crossed swords with Tommy acknowledges the show's importance.

"It was the period," Ernest Chambers says. "Before *Saturday Night Live* it was the show young people watched. When people today ask me 'What have you done?,' I say *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. Everything after that has

been an anti-climax."

While the Brothers never again equalled the success of their *Comedy Hour* on television, they have had continued success as a concert act, playing as many as 100 dates a year across the country in venues ranging from the Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts in Southern California to the Sahara in Las Vegas. They have also appeared in several films. The E! cable channel has re-aired the original *Comedy Hour* episodes with wrap-around commentary from Tommy and Dick. And in 1988, the gang reunited for a special on CBS for *The Smothers Brothers 20th Reunion Show*.

On *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, Tommy Smothers did not always get to say what was on his mind. But, against tremendous pressure to the contrary, he kept trying to say it. At an important moment in television history, he acted in the best tradition of American dissenters in a medium which has not had many of them. ■

Jon Krampner writes frequently about television history. He is the author of *The Man in the Shadows: Fred Coe and the Golden Age of Television* recently published by Rutgers University Press.



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Making the Music Special

*Director/Producer Steve Binder Talks About Elvis,
Petula Clark and Harry Belafonte, Diana Ross, and the
Golden Age of the TV Special*

By Brian Rose

Once upon a time, there was a golden age for music and variety on television. The airwaves were filled with great performers, whose talent transcended demographics. The commercial networks showcased the artistry of these entertainers not just on talk programs, but on single-star variety series and, most importantly, on lavish specials, complete with carefully designed original concepts and high-production values.

Steve Binder was lucky enough to have played an important part in this now largely vanished era. At the age of 21 he was named director of Steve Allen's innov-

ative syndicated talk show for Westinghouse Broadcasting. Two years later, he continued his long interest in pop music by helping to launch *Hullabaloo* on NBC (while also actively working in the recording industry). After a brief stint at CBS with the *Danny Kaye Show*, he decided to move on to the more creative potential of music specials.

Acting as both producer and director, Binder's first special featured Leslie Uggams, fresh from her triumph on Broadway. His second special in 1967 followed along similar tracks as a showcase for Petula Clark and guest Harry Belafonte, but, thanks to Ms. Clark's unplanned



Elvis Presley and Steve Binder (right)

touch of Mr. Belafonte's forearm during an emotional duet, managed to ignite a nationwide racial controversy. His third special would prove just as momentous, as it singlehandedly revived Elvis Presley's career through its intense focus on the singer's explosive performing style.

During the 1970s, Steve Binder continued to work on musical specials and extravaganzas, featuring artists as diverse as Liza Minnelli, Mac Davis, Patti Labelle, and Barry Manilow (which won the Emmy Award for Best Special in 1977). In 1982, he did his first program for Showtime—Diana Ross's famous Central Park concert in the rain—which was televised live around the world. The program earned him a Cable Ace Award, but also helped symbolize the move of the traditional music special away from the commercial networks to pay cable. In the following decades, there would be little call for this once potent format on either ABC, CBS, or NBC. Instead, Binder turned his talents to

various awards programs (including the Emmy Awards telecasts from 1984-88), a movie-of-the-week, and a Super Bowl half-time show with Diana Ross.

Lately, he's worked on several Disney TV ice specials and is planning Luciano Pavarotti's first network TV special for ABC. In this interview, he looks back on the glory days of network music specials.

What led you away from series TV into doing specials?

I realized early in my career that movies are a director's medium, theater is a writer's medium, and television is a producer's medium. So I knew I had to become a hyphenate, though I knew little about producing, in order to have the power to direct the way I wanted to. That's why I began to say, I won't direct unless you let me produce. I got my chance with a trilogy of specials, the first one was with Leslie Uggams, the second was with Petula Clark and Harry Belafonte, and the third

was the Elvis Presley comeback special.

Let's talk about the second special, which made television history. Were you aware at the time in 1967 that your star pairing of Petula Clark and Harry Belafonte would turn into a racial controversy?

I was too young to really realize the impact. I had been raised to treat all people equally, and when I booked Harry on the show, he turned me down originally, saying he wasn't doing television anymore. Then he called me back and said, "Petula is that lady who's blond and blue eyed?" I said yes, and he said he'd reconsidered and this might be a good special for him to do. So I called up Young & Rubicam, who was the ad agency for the show's sponsor, Plymouth. I phoned the agency rep, and I told him I'd just booked Harry Belafonte, and he was delighted. Then twenty minutes later he called me back and said he's just talked to Detroit and a guy from Plymouth named Doyle Lott, who was running the show, didn't want him on because, he announced off the record, Belafonte was black.

I responded by saying that if he wasn't allowed on I was going to announce this "off-the-record" conversation to the press. He said he'd call me back. Twenty minutes later I got a call from Colgan Shlank who said "I'm the guy who just replaced so-and-so, and we've got to figure out a way to solve this problem intelligently."

They came back to me and said the contract for the show called for Petula Clark and guests and we had to find someone else to be with them. And I responded that if you can find someone else of Belafonte's caliber, I'd think about it. They began rattling off names like Milton Berle, Ray Bolger, and so forth and I wouldn't accept anybody. So the next thing that happened was that I was ordered off to Detroit to meet this Doyle Lott character and the president of Chrysler/Plymouth. I went into the meeting, surrounded by a

bunch of people from Young & Rubicam, who had told me earlier they would support me if Plymouth wanted to back out of the commitment. Doyle Lott launches into his presentation that Belafonte was washed up, that he'd had no hit records in years. The guy from Plymouth turns to me and says, "What are your feelings?" I told him that Belafonte was an icon, I'd grown up with him, and he's one of the greatest performers in the world. The reason he wasn't exposed is he didn't want to be over exposed. He asked if Petula was happy with him, and I said yes, so he turned to Doyle and said, "I'm going to override you and we're going to go ahead and do this special."

So right from the start you knew that this special was different. What was it like for you in the control room when, in an emotional moment, Petula Clark touched Belafonte's arm?

By this point everybody was at peace. The sponsors weren't allowed in the control room—they were off in a separate room with a monitor. It certainly wasn't like today where everybody, whether it's the studio executives, producers or the stars, tries to interfere and call the shots. Petula was performing an anti-war song called "Paths of Glory," which NBC objected to because of its theme, but which they finally allowed once I pointed out that Petula had written it herself. Harry was singing it with her, along with an ironic song written by Mason Williams which had been woven through the whole segment. We'd done three takes, but something just didn't sit right—it had been staged with Petula singing upstage of Harry and there didn't seem to be enough emotion. So I stopped, left the control booth and went down to the stage.

I suggested that Petula walk directly down to Harry rather than stay upstage behind him. We rolled tape, and they began to duet next to each other, and all of

a sudden I see a tear in Petula's eye, and then Harry's—at the height of the chorus, she reaches out and touches Harry's forearm.

Right afterwards, an NBC executive popped his head in the control room and said the sponsor was furious and had just walked out of the building. Then, I get another call from some higher ups at NBC, who'd been watching on the closed-circuit monitors, and they told me that whatever happens, they'd support me, which was great to hear. Instinctively, for whatever reason, I realized I had to get rid of those previous three takes, so I ran downstairs to the editing facility and demanded we erase the masters. The engineer was shaking and made me sign a release, but now all we had left was the take we'd just done.

It became the shot heard and seen around the world. *Newsweek* and *Time* came down to take pictures of it on the monitor, and it became an instant phenomenon. By the time it went on the air, the public had been warned by racists to watch for “the fornication on the air of a black man and a white woman.”

I didn't really grasp the impact right away, and when I got home I received an amusing call from the president of Chrysler/Plymouth, who I'd met earlier, telling me about all the humanitarian causes Chrysler had contributed to. There were all sorts of ramifications. Harry was going to go on the *Tonight Show* and urge blacks to not buy Chrysler products. Petula had fled to Paris because she didn't want to be a part of the controversy. I also got a call from the president of Young & Rubicam who said, “Before we start talking, Steve, we must never let logic enter this conversation.” To this day, it is my favorite quote, and is so applicable to my own career.

It really wasn't Chrysler's fault. It was this guy Doyle Lott.

From this controversial special, you next

went to a project that would be just as famous and much more important—the 1968 comeback special of Elvis Presley. What were its origins?

I've always had this approach that no matter what, I can always go back and work in my dad's gas station, so I've never really been intimidated. After the Petula special, I was told by a lot of people that I would never be able to get a job in Hollywood again, which is probably why I got the call about Elvis. NBC needed to find somebody that Elvis could relate to, and there was nobody around. Bob Finkel, who was the executive producer at NBC called me and said we have this deal with Elvis for a special, but we don't ever think we'll get it made. Elvis called him “Mr. Finkel” and everybody else Mr. So-and-So, and he didn't seem to relate to anybody there. They asked if I would come and see if I could get things rolling.

At this point Elvis's career was virtually over?

Yes, he hadn't had a hit record in years and had stopped making movies. The P.R. machine was still going on, but there was really nothing happening. Bones Howe was my partner at this time, and was an established hit record producer, who I'd worked with on the audio for the Petula Clark special. Bones had worked with Elvis before, and convinced me to do the project, saying that if I'd meet him we'd really hit it off. So I arranged a meeting at my office with Bones and my writers, Alan Bly and Chris Beard. Elvis and Colonel Parker and the entourage came in and right from the start it was, “Hi, Elvis,” “Hi, Steve,” and we got along great.

We didn't talk much about the program but more about life and the music business. We didn't really have a show to pitch him, but I did tell him that this program would be the third of a trilogy that our creative team (going back to *Hullabaloo*) would put together and that the show

would be tailor made to his music and his talents. He said it sounded great, and went off to Hawaii to get a tan and rest for a few weeks, and we went to work feverishly to come up with the concept. He came back, loved it all, and didn't want to change a thing. It was done like a one-camera film show, except for the mobile camera energy of the live performance segments. But the rest of the show was a book show, with the premise being Elvis's musical journey, which returned him at the end back to his roots.

We decided we would do all the rehearsing in our offices, rather than at NBC, so everyday at four o'clock two Lincolns would pull into our garage—we were the only show business company in that building, so nobody knew what was going on. The entourage would play out in the lobby while we worked inside. When we finally did the show at NBC, Elvis decided to live out there, and we converted his big dressing room into living quarters. After rehearsals, he would go there with a group of musicians and unwind. I would watch them everyday having fun and thought to myself, we've got to tape this.

So I went to Colonel Parker who said absolutely not, this boy is not going to be seen with his hair messed or sweaty. I kept pressuring him until he finally relented, but only if I promised him that he would be able to see it first and if he didn't like it, we wouldn't use it. He let us recreate the jam sessions on stage, which was not what I originally wanted, but it was at least a good compromise. It was the Colonel who suggested the audience be right there physically with Elvis, and I said, great!

So the Colonel was not getting more involved and excited about your concept?

Not really. He was still off on the side. We had a lot of confrontations during the show, because what he had originally sold NBC was an Elvis Christmas special with no dialogue and twenty Christmas songs. I

had to convince him that this would have absolutely no television impact. The Colonel was constantly on my case; when he liked me he would call me "Bindel," as soft of an internal joke, but when I was being reprimanded it was "Binder." On many occasions, I would be called into a meeting with the Colonel and Elvis, and Elvis would literally stand there with his head down. Once I was brought in and the Colonel said, "it has come to my attention that there are no Christmas songs in this show, Binder, and Elvis wants Christmas songs, don't you Elvis?" And Elvis would say, "yes, sir." Then the Colonel said, "is that understood?" and I said, "if that's what Elvis wants, that's what we'll do." And we would walk out of the room and Elvis would elbow me in the ribs and say, "forget it, we're going to do it the way we're going to do it." We had two or three of those meetings.

Did the Colonel finally realize when the show aired that you had made the right decision?

He knew before. There were too many instances where he, I think, could have pulled the plug. Elvis loved the show; I knew that before it aired. He made me play it for him three or four times in a row after I showed him the edited version.

And NBC loved it?

NBC was incredibly concerned. They wanted guest stars on the show from the start. Nobody on primetime had ever done a one-man show, but I was adamant that Elvis didn't need anybody but Elvis.

The network was also very concerned with the bordello scene, which really made me quite upset. I kept fighting them about it to the point that in order to appease me they brought someone from General Electric to make the final decision. So this guy, in suit and tie, arrives in the editing room. While they're cuing up the Elvis tape to look at the scene, he's watching Dean

Martin on the next monitor performing a sketch from his show with Phil Harris and a 6-foot blonde bombshell in a bikini basically doing an off-color joke without the punch line. The GE guy is laughing his head off, and I saw him and thought, this is going to be easy because our bordello scene isn't anything as risqué as that. Then he turns, watches our scene, and immediately orders it to be taken out of the show. So it was removed, but it came back in when they replayed the show and there were new people at NBC who were unaware there had even been a controversy over this thing.

NBC also didn't like the way Elvis looked in the improvisation scenes with his hair out of place and sweating.

You were one of the first TV directors to realize the importance of audio, and that sound on television needed to be approached the same way it was in the recording studio.

I knew the marriage was there, and that if I was going to be doing music on TV, the two worlds had to be merged. I had worked as an independent record producer with Bones Howe in the 1960s at Johnny Rivers record company, working with the 5th Dimension, and in 1973 I started my own record company, TA Records, a division of Talent Associates, which launched Seals and Croft. But I always realized at the time that TV audio engineers were nowhere near the level of engineers found in the recording world. At first, I would bring in sound engineers to work as consultants—that's how I brought in Bones Howe for the Petula Clark special—and little by little, they started to slide into the seats of the audio guys on television, once it was recognized they

were not the enemy and that they were there to make it better.

I found this same formula in lighting. I took rock and roll lighting directors and had them consult with TV lighting directors in order to make the look more contemporary, and it's really worked once people start recognizing they're on the same team.

During the 1970s, you continued with a number of influential specials, including the 10th Anniversary of Rolling Stone Magazine, four Emmy Awards telecasts, and the first of what would be many specials with Diana Ross. Then in 1982 you worked with her again on the award-winning cablecast of her concert from Central Park. What logistical problems did that present?



"Petula," 1968 NBC-TV Special with Harry Belafonte and Petula Clark

Actually, Diana and I go back all the way to The T.A.M.I. Show in 1965. She's a fabulous person to work with. Paramount and Showtime were the executive producers, and Diana was the producer and she'd asked me to direct. I said Yes, and came to New York

to meet her. She'd bought a beautiful building for her offices on Sixth Avenue and when I arrived there were about 200 people there, including the NYPD, the Parks Commissioner, and the concert promoter. She'd bought a new business suit for the occasion and looked fantastic and was greeted by wild applause as she entered. She thanked us and told us how great it was to be here and how exciting this event was going to be, and then said, "if you have any questions, ask Steve Binder."

I'd been worried about how to make a two-hour concert program on one stage visually interesting, but luckily Tony

Walton came up with a brilliant backdrop, which used a sailing mast so that flags could be raised and lowered to subtly change the backdrop. I'd spent some time watching most of the previous Central Park concerts, such as Barbra Streisand's and Simon and Garfunkel's, and I felt that other than the opening and closing credits, you never knew you were in New York. I wanted to make sure you could see the skyline of New York throughout the entire show in the wide shots. I also wanted to capture the intimacy of a small club, so I literally put cameras on dollies and small cranes physically on the stage with her.

I brought Diana out to see the environment the night before, because I always felt it's important to make artists feel comfortable with their performing "turf." She walked out there on the stage, and saw the two big camera cranes staring at her in the face, and told me, "We've got to do something about them." I didn't think much about it, until ten minutes later she told me, "I'm serious, we've got to get rid of them." I told her they were "money" cameras, and if I could think of any way to get rid of them, I would, but they're important as a way for the worldwide audience to see her.

Ten minutes later, Barry Diller, who was then the president of Paramount, came over to me and said, "Steve, I know you're really bright and I know you can figure out a way to get rid of those cameras. It's really upsetting her." I assured him that there was nothing I wanted to do more in life at this moment than to please him and Diana, but there was no way I could get rid of those cameras.

I went back to my hotel room, and Diana comes to see me, and I could tell she was incredibly distraught. And she said, "Steve, the audience at Central Park won't be able to see me." I tried to assure her with a million people in the park, she'd never even realize they were even there and how important those cameras were for

her sake, but she ordered me to get rid of them anyway. I told her that if that was true, I was leaving.

Next morning, I have to go shoot the show, and she's there, cheery, excited, kisses and hugs, as if nothing has ever happened. We go on to shoot the show, and I realized what it was—every artist, especially faced with the prospect of facing a million people, is tremendously frightened. And she needed something to focus her anxieties on. The whole show turned out to be incredible fun.

And let's not forget that this was the concert where torrential rains began falling five minutes after she began singing.

And we had to throw out my carefully prepared 300 page shooting script. Still, I knew where all the cameras were, and I knew her well enough to anticipate what she would be doing. We ended up winning a Cable Ace award for my direction of the show. Lucky for us, the rainstorm added excitement to the event and made it also an international news story!

When I came into television, the typical musical artist was told when they came on the floor that there was a mark on the floor where the back light, and the fill light and the key light is and that's where you begin. And when you get to the chorus, you can walk over there, where there's another lighting setup. My goal was to free them up from all of that. When Elvis went into the boxing ring, I said do what you want to do. I'm going to have you on camera no matter where you go. It was the same thing with the Central Park concert. Here's your stage—do whatever you want to do on it.

So your job as a director is to provide artists with a free stage for their own creativity?

Absolutely. My job is to make anybody look as great as they can look without getting in their way when they're performing live. But I can enhance their performance if they trust me, because we're not

working against each other, we're working together for the best results. It's a true collaboration.

I'm supposed to be there as the objective eyes, as a sort of father figure. If artists trust you, you can do great things with them. If they don't understand why or what they're doing, my job is to help them figure it out and guide them away from what they're not supposed to do. If they don't trust you, if they make you feel insecure, you have nothing to give them.

I'm not a dictator. If anybody says to me, "I'm uncomfortable," I immediately say, "then don't do it," and I'll figure out another way to do the same thing.

As if a concert in the rain weren't enough, in 1996 you staged a Diana Ross Super Bowl half-time show with your star leaving the stage by helicopter.

Actually, that was easy because we were operating totally on adrenaline. NBC wouldn't set up a separate control room environment for us, so we had to use the sports truck. It became like a fire drill where everyone working the Super Bowl had to get up at the half-time break and rush out while we rushed in.

The sports booth was not like the drama or variety booths I had known; there were probably 100 monitors. When I arrived in Phoenix and looked at the environment I said there was no possible way, even though I was trained as a live television director, that I would know which monitor to look for since they were all over the place and so many. So I asked the technical director to put every monitor I wasn't using to black, and then I did mock ups on 8x10 sheets of paper of the control room layout, and for the next week my assistant director and my technical director and I practiced the shots in our hotel room. By the time we actually shot it, it was automatic because we'd rehearsed it so many times.

The helicopter exit was quite an event—

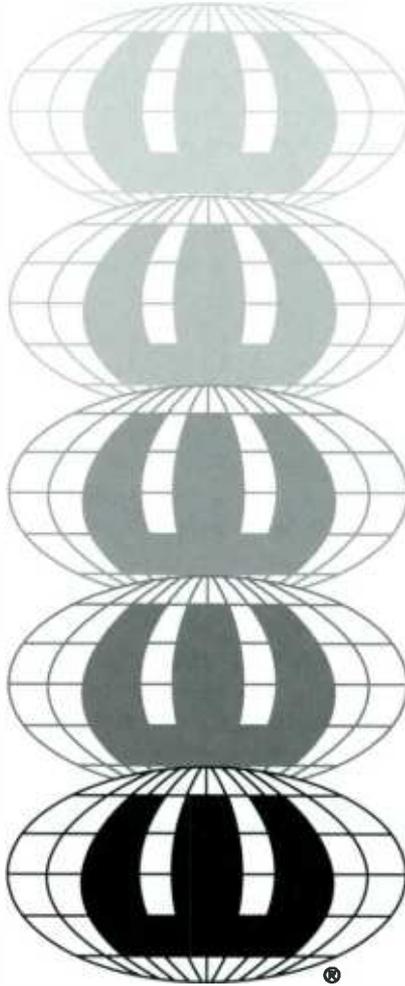
we had to practice it about five times with Diana, and twenty-five times without her. Everybody was there to monitor us, including the NFL and the FAA. Even after we did it, I said we never should have done it, just thinking of what a disaster it would have been if anything had gone wrong. We had to tell the stadium audience in advance that it was going to happen, because we didn't want them to think it was a sudden terrorist attack like the movie *Black Sunday*.

What do you see as the current state of music and variety specials?

Generally speaking, when I talk to my contemporaries and my peers, I find that nobody is ordering anything new which would give people a chance to show their talent. I think an entire generation is out there chomping at the bit to get some opportunities, but somebody is going to have to open the door again. Unfortunately, directors getting started today don't get the opportunity to learn from the kind of experiences I had coming up the ranks. Now, with cameras, it's mostly point and shoot. Everybody has a place to point to, and there's very little use of dollies or cranes. The zoom lens should be blown up, and we should go back to multiple lenses and turrets, if only to know what you can do with each type of lens. I try to avoid zoom moves, and if we can dolly, we dolly. If we can track, we track, or crane.

Still, everything is cyclical, and there's got to be an innovative way to present variety. Music on TV works, I don't care what any programmer says. We live with music 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all of our lives. It's the way it's being packaged that's not working. ■

Brian Rose is a Professor of Communication and Media Studies at Fordham University, and the author of several books on film and television. He is currently working on a book called *Directing for the Small Screen*, to be published by Scarecrow Press.



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Television transforms Russia

Changing Channels: Television and the Struggle for Power in Russia

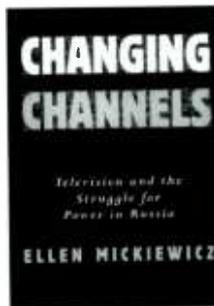
By Ellen Mickiewicz
Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York

By Bernard Redmont

Imagine you're a modern Rip Van Winkle. You've fallen asleep over dull, state-controlled Soviet TV in the Brezhnev seventies—when you covered Moscow and CBS News.* Then you awaken in the Gorbachev era, revisit the TV center at Ostankino, and discover sweeping changes under the *glasnost* policy. You rejoice guardedly at the breath of fresh air coming from innovative programming like *Vzglyad* (Outlook), *120 Minutes*, *Twelfth Floor*, and Leningrad's *600 Seconds***

Now take a look today at Russian television, transformed even further. You're dazzled by the mind-boggling revolution on the airwaves and cable, the barrage of information available, competition from private stations, and the continuing struggle to create genuine political pluralism, independence and a more democratic nation.

With the disappearance of the Soviet regime, many media entities have freed themselves of Government control. Some 97 percent of all Russian households are finally tuned in. It's a new ball game. Not quite American-style sport, to be sure, but



cameras do roam free. They shoot a Presidential candidate pressing the flesh, awkwardly kissing babies, and cavorting with a rock band, while opposition leaders tear him down with communist/fascist style arguments.

Negative advertising campaigns outdo the USA at its worst; televised debates in Parliament earn higher ratings than a season premiere of *Seinfeld* or *E.R.*

Live into your living room—blood, charred corpses and all—comes the 1994-95 war in Chechnya, Russia's Vietnam. Elena Masyuk, an intrepid, 29-year-old reporter for the largest private TV station, makes history, and TV exposes official lies to viewers back home. All this is part of a new and different struggle for power in Russia.

In October 1993, when Boris Yeltsin was popular, he remarked, "Television saved Russia." Years later, he used TV to the hilt to

*(See Soviet TV: Ballet and Brezhnev, TVQ Vol. XVIII No. 1 Spring 1981)

** (See Soviet Television's New Look, TVQ Vol. XXIV No. 1, 1989).

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win the 1996 election. Today, when crusading journalists have unveiled intrigue and corruption, Yeltsin's image has tarnished. Government has eased its grip, but big business is flexing its muscle, and the new media czars are vying for power. Big banks, entrepreneurs and energy companies own the country's biggest TV stations, newspapers and magazines.

Business has become the new power—big money seeking big power. New media barons invoke the United States as their model, using the flag of independence against government control. They also copy the American's corporate aptitude for conglomeration—media monopolies. Many critics suggest the media czars are looking to protect their own business interests and political influence.

Look at two typical media magnates—Russia's Murdochs:

1. Vladimir Gusinsky: Owns 51 percent of the NTV private television network, founded in 1993. Claims a potential audience of 87 million, more than half of Russia's population of 150 million; also has a four-channel satellite broadcast system, NTV Plus. He made a fortune as head of the Most Bank, then formed Media-Most, a communications empire. Runs Ekho Moskvyy radio, the newspaper *Segodnya*, the newsmagazine *Itogi* (which has a link with *Newsweek*), and *Sem Dnei*, a publishing house. At 46, he has a net worth of \$400 million, and he never moves without a security entourage, sometimes as many as 15 armed guards.

2. Boris Berezovsky: Owns a substantial share of Russia's largest TV network, ORT, which is 51 percent owned by the government. Founded in 1994, it reaches all of Russia's population and broadcasts to other former Soviet republics. He holds an

interest in TV-6, the first independent stations, established in 1993, also with broad coverage. In addition, Berezovsky runs a newspaper, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, and a magazine, *Ogonyok*. He owns interests in banks, an oil company, real estate, Aeroflot, and car dealerships. He helped bankroll Yeltsin's re-election campaign in 1996, and was rewarded with the post of Deputy Secretary of the National Security Council, but was dismissed in a power play, November, 1997. At 51, with a net worth of \$3 billion, Berezovsky is on the *Forbes* listing of the world's 200 richest. He has survived assassination attempts and unproved murder accusations.

Other business-media hookups: Gazprom, a big natural gas monopoly, has a 30 percent stake in NTV and interests in two newspapers, *Trud* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the biggest oil company Lukoil, and a share in *Izvestia*. Banks invest in publications like *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and *Vek*.

Government and business have become more intertwined. RTR, a television channel owned by the government, depends on commercials to bolster its dwindling subsidies. In an echo of the words of a General Motors CEO decades ago, media tycoon Gusinsky says, "Whatever is good for business in Russia is good for Russia."

This is the picture as *Changing Channels* comes off the presses. It is the first book to explore in depth the role of television in Russia's quest for democracy. Ellen Mickiewicz, who teaches at Duke University, once again has proved herself to be not only an excellent historian but a superb narrator.

Nobody is better equipped to produce this analysis. Her previous books have included *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (1988) and *Media and the Russ-*

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ian Public (1981). Mickiewicz has personally interviewed many of the key actors in this drama and was on hand during many of the events she describes. The minor defects that often mar much of scholarly writing and presentation do not detract from the fascinating story she tells. I could have hoped for a bit of journalistic synthesis and a simple chart showing what major TV channels are now available to average Russians. But let's not quibble about an otherwise splendid resource.

Her book is particularly important because at the chaotic end of the Soviet Union, as she notes, television was just about the only institution left standing. She recalls that it was Mikhail Gorbachev who first ordered TV to implement an information revolution. While crediting Gorbachev for opening up communication and initiating reforms, she concedes that he and his supporters did not foresee or approve all of the outcomes.

Under *glasnost* and *perestroika*, some hard liners still adhered to the old system of control and punishment for deviation, but "others took risks they knew would agitate the rulers, excite viewers, and push the limits of reform far beyond what was then permissible."

The reformers in TV were all people who grew up in the Soviet Communist system. Eduard Sagalayev, whose ground-breaking work I had spotted on the programs *Twelfth Floor* and *Vzglyad*, had been a top official of the Communist Youth League. He went on to become head of news programming on Channel One, and head of state TV's Channel Two. Sagalayev in 1993 inaugurated TV-6, the first independent broadcast TV station in Russia. It began as a joint venture with Turner Broadcasting System, but parted with Turner when Berezovsky came into the picture.

At the end of 1989, Sagalayev promoted a bold new program called *Seven Days*, with

frank and open commentary that soon displeased the Politburo. In 1990, Sagalayev inaugurated a pioneering news program called TSN (Television News Service), a snappy, modern counterpart to the stultifying official *Vremya*.

It was almost like CNN *Headline News*, and in fact it used much CNN footage. It was fast-paced and chatty, and for the first time the anchor was seen in tight, American-style close-ups, and used a TelePrompter, unlike the stodgy *Vremya* official spokesmen at Ostankino headquarters.

I remember we correspondents had to journey out to the suburb of Ostankino near the big TV tower to transmit our stories—and sometimes risked having the censors pull the plug. Armed guards always stood at the entrance to check passes and telephoned upstairs for an escort.

Inside the building, the studio doors were guarded by uniformed police with submachine guns. No mistake about it—Ostankino and television were super-important, as witnessed by the famous 1993 Battle of Ostankino, which Mickiewicz relates in her book. Rebels stormed the buildings during Yeltsin's confrontation with parliament, and when it was over, at least 143 people were dead and 735 wounded.

No wonder Alexander Yakovlev, a close collaborator of Gorbachev and eventually a top TV executive, said in 1994, "To 'take' the Kremlin, you must 'take' television!"

Eventually, TV developed even more of its own autonomy, especially on the private stations. Nine crucial elections in eight years brought voters to the polls, always with a turnout exceeding that of American presidential elections. In 1996 in Russia, as in the U.S., the largest proportion of campaign expenditures went into television.

Mickiewicz does not attempt a history of Russian TV as such. She covers only the years 1985 to 1996 and concentrates on

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the Moscow-centered networks reaching a large national audience. But as she notes, "local, privately owned television stations were growing vigorously, popping up in significant numbers and serving local constituencies."

Some 700 private stations were operating in Russia by the summer of 1995. Some stations aired pirated Western films, mainly from the U.S. She reports that *Jurassic Park* was playing on Russian cable while it was still opening in movie theaters across the United States.

At one point, CNN began broadcasting its international 24-hour news in English. Moscow viewers could see the 2X2 Channel, which included English-language news programs from CBS and Russian-dubbed news from the BBC.

Since *Changing Channels* was written, Russian TV has plunged headlong into domestically produced sitcoms to supplement a diet of imported American, Mexican, and Brazilian soap operas. One, called *Funny Business, Family Business*, could be described as "*All in the Russian Family*," and another *Cafe Strawberry*, is a sort of *Cheers* on the Moskva.

You won't find it clearly summarized in the book, but essentially, three major networks now cover most of the country. Viewers in Moscow also receive two local stations and the St. Petersburg channel. The privately owned NTV (The initials in Russian stand for Independent Television) also has a satellite network, NTV Plus, with four channels for Russian movies, foreign films, sports and music. A new city station, Meteor, is a joint venture with foreign companies, as is Cosmos TV, which shows European and American programs like Italian soccer and NBC's *Tonight Show*.

In 1996, three TV networks reaching most Russians with news programs were Russian Television (Channel Two), which is state-

owned; NTV, (privately owned); and ORT (Channel One), in which the state is majority stockholder. All three were pro-Yeltsin in the election, but NTV was more trusted and objective, and it infuriated Yeltsin with its vivid coverage of Chechnya. All candidates were given equal amounts of free time on the state-supported channels, and also had the right to buy time for paid spots.

Mickiewicz sees channel choice and market-based television pluralism as "a notable achievement in the new Russia." But she sagaciously observes that, as in the United States, channel choice does not necessarily bring a broad range of quality alternatives, and "the market is a poor guarantor of the kind of diversity of speech and expression of minority opinions that democracy needs."

She raises a fundamental question: "Competing for one's own domestic public is not only a matter of rich production values and internationally recognized stars; it is much more about crafting programs that connect to the public with integrity, veracity and artistry."

Russian TV, she declares, still is hampered by prohibitions that "restrain television from introducing responsible discourse and developing a way of illuminating issues in a fashion that does not seek to annihilate the opponent or arouse bigotry."

After absorbing this excellent book, with all its reservations about potholes on the road to democracy, I can share its conclusion that "perhaps in no other country in the world is there a greater opportunity and greater role for television than in rapidly changing, transitional Russia." ■

Bernard Redmont covered Moscow as bureau chief for CBS News from 1976 to 1979, and on shorter assignments before and after this period for Westinghouse Broadcasting/Group W and other media. He is Dean Emeritus of Boston University College of Communication and author of *Risks Worth Taking: The Odyssey of a Foreign Correspondent*.

In Memoriam:

Fred W. Friendly...

Fred W. Friendly . . . came along at the right time. Television was just beginning to be a factor in the life of the people in this country in 1950, and television needed news. Fred Friendly either knew how to do broadcast news or figured out how. He laid out the ground rules for broadcast journalism and established the standards to which its best Practitioners still aspire.

Over the 40 years of his career, Fred's restless brain searched out the most pressing and complex questions puzzling thoughtful citizens and confronted them directly in the programs he produced.

—Andy Rooney, in *The Los Angeles Times*

Fred W. Friendly...

When I think about today—my own work not excepted—part of the problem is so often we check our journalistic conscience with the hat-check person and the coat rack because we're so focused on ratings. We've become totally consumed by ratings . . . Fred Friendly loved ratings. And he and Ed Murrow at their absolute prime with the greatest documentaries of all time, in my opinion, the documentary on McCarthy and *Harvest of Shame*, they cared about ratings . . . but they were not consumed by them.

—Dan Rather, on *The Charlie Rose Show*

Fred W. Friendly...

Many baby boomers can remember sitting in elementary school and watching the film of CBS Reports *Harvest of Shame* about the plight of migrant workers in America. It made a strong impression, even on third-graders who usually were more interested in recess than redressing social ills. The piece was a seminal work from the premier documentary unit of its day. It was also vintage Fred Friendly, who headed that unit. "It's not enough that we report a story," he once said. "We have to dig deeply and provide an analysis of what we report." He did that in a career that helped to define TV news, public affairs and documentary programming.

—*Broadcasting & Cable* editorial, March 9, 1998

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