

TELEVISION QUARTERLY



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Those who are associated with the planning of this Journal believe it is time for a penetrating, provocative and continuing examination of television as an art, a science, an industry, and a social force.

Accordingly, our purpose is to be both independent and critical. We hold that the function of this Journal is to generate currents of new ideas about television, and we will therefore try to assure publication of all material which stimulates thought and has editorial merit.

This Journal has only one aim — to take a serious look at television.

— THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Mission statement from Volume I, Number 1 issue of *Television Quarterly*, February, 1962

To the Editor:

While Michael M. Epstein is correct that *Eyes on the Prize* is one of America's greatest cultural treasures, he is mistaken when he writes of its "disappearance" ("Eyes off the Prize," *Television Quarterly*, Spring/Summer 2006). PBS will broadcast the first six hours of this 14-hour epic on three consecutive Mondays, October 2nd through the 16th from 9 to 11 p.m. as part of the *American Experience* series. PBS is proud to provide the first rebroadcast of this landmark series since 1993. Also, to clarify, although the program is not available on home video, it will be available to educational institutions this fall.

Sincerely,

John F. Wilson
Senior Vice President, PBS Programming

The Unthinkable Happened

A New York TV station news director reveals how 9/11 changed our lives forever. | **By Karen Scott**

The unthinkable happened. It happened on a bright sunny fall day—September 11th—a typical day for us. We were getting ready for our primary-election coverage that evening. The WB11 *Morning Show* started out like any other day, on this day our world was changed forever.

For almost a week straight we were on air live for 20 hrs. at a clip, providing coverage, information, help to our city viewers and the entire Tribune network nationwide.

We lost one engineer in the attack, Steve Jacobson. Steve worked at the World Trade Center transmission site. He had been a loyal and dedicated employee for WPIX for 27 years. He was a husband and a father of two children. As an indication of Steve's dedication to the job, during the 1993 bombing of the WTC, he stayed on the job until midnight, enduring heavy smoke conditions until the fire was put out, to

assure that the transmitter was operating properly when power was restored.

Our news-room team endured incredible moments when many thought they would not make it out of ground zero alive. News and Engineering, along with every department at WPIX, showed exceptional professionalism in these days of crisis.

As the news director my number one goal is usually to inform the viewers—to get breaking news out as soon as possible.

Because we had the first all-digital helicopter in New York City we were the only civilian chopper allowed to remain in the air on 9/11. But there were other massive communications problems.

But I realized very quickly this was a catastrophic event. My main concern was: who was dead; the safety of our crews; how many were dead and how many survived? The

magnitude of the event quickly unfolded before our eyes.

We ran back into the control room and we raced onto the airwaves after the first plane hit at approximately 8:48 a.m. The second plane hit at 9:03. The south tower collapsed at 10:05 and the north tower at



10:28. We knew Steve was at his controls in the transmission room. It was very hard to watch. In disbelief we showed the towers going down. We stayed on the air for 20 hours a day, non-stop, with no commercials for a week.

Digital Chopper: At the time of 9/11 we had the first all-digital helicopter in New York City. It enabled us to transmit aerials and pictures from a greater distance. As a result we were the only civilian chopper allowed to stay in the air on 9/11 and we transmitted the story for the entire world.

Broadcast tower: When the WTC collapsed, we were not broadcasting. Obviously, we would like a backup. We were being carried by other transmission sources (cable, etc.).

Radios: Nextels and mobile phones were out of service. 2-ways seemed to work but were very busy.

Landline phones were frequently busy. We couldn't call for information, communicate to others, do phoners, etc. Some service was available.

Access to the island was denied. Reporters/producers outside Manhattan could not enter, even with press cards. Those here could not leave for fear of not being able to return. When a disaster hits, our entire news staff knows to call in or just come to the station. Many who lived in Manhattan did so immediately. But some of our personnel, including my executive producer, John Houseman live on Long Island. Here, in his own words, is how he got to work.

"The issue of security came to the forefront in the minutes, hours, and days after the attack on New York. No one can question the decision to 'seal' the city by closing all bridges and tunnels into Manhattan. Thousands of terrified New Yorkers were fleeing the city on foot... too scared to get on the subways, most of

which were also shut down out of security concerns.

“For those of us trying to get into the city, patience and perseverance were the order of the day. As an example, it took me four hours to negotiate my way into Manhattan from Long Island. A large group of employees who live on Long Island

gathered at the offices of *Newsday* in Melville to plot a strategy for getting into Manhattan. The Long Island Railroad had been shut down. The only way was by car. The first big obstacle was the fact that the Long Island Expressway, the main highway off Long Island and into the city, was closed westbound into the city for more than 40 miles all the way to the Midtown Tunnel. The only vehicles allowed were emergency vehicles, fire trucks, and ambulances. Riding in a press vehicle, we had to work our way through five or six hastily formed checkpoints. Some were local police, some state police. We finally ended up joining a caravan of emergency vehicles and riding along.

“When we finally made it to the Midtown Tunnel, we learned that no press credential on earth was going to allow us to cross the East River into Manhattan with a car. We were directed to the 59th Street Bridge. The cops said we might have better luck there. Traveling the few miles from the tunnel to the bridge turned into a one-hour nightmare all its own. The streets were packed with traffic and thousands of people traveling on foot.

When the bridge was within eyesight, which is to

say about a mile away, we abandoned the car and set out on foot. The police said that was our only chance of getting into

Manhattan. Again we had to work our way through several barricades. I was traveling with the producer of our *News at Ten*, Robert Cucchiaro, and one of our reporters, Jill Conway. I don’t think any of us will

“The police officers we encountered were quickly convinced that only the truly insane would be trying to get into the city at that hour if they did not have essential work.”

ever forget that bizarre scene. Thousands of people walking towards us, fighter planes soaring across the sky directly over the bridge as they circled Manhattan, and a view to the south of a smoke-filled sky that made it seem as if the whole city was on fire. Needless to say we walked as quickly as possible. Our N.Y.P.D. press credentials were checked several times and we had to talk our way out of problems because Robert was relatively new to WPIX and did not have a valid press i.d. card. Luckily, the police officers we encountered were quickly convinced that only the truly insane would be trying to get into the city at that hour if they did not have essential work.”

Employees trying to come into Manhattan from New Jersey experienced similar problems. One reporter, Marvin Scott, only made it in by persuading a boat owner to take him across. That option was not generally available to the rest of our staff stuck on the other side of the Hudson River.

We have to be prepared if the worst happens.

The issue of “sealing” the city was also manifested during the November 12th



WPIX-TV's all-digital chopper.

for example, currently have phone update lines.

Second, we need to be able to move crews, trucks and the chopper. When American Airlines flight 587 went down in Queens we were lucky that we moved immediately or we would not have gotten our trucks to the

scene. A system should be developed so that credentialed media do not get caught in a lockdown or frozen zone.

Finally, we have to be prepared if the worst happens. If a case of smallpox is detected or if a dirty bomb is detonated, how many members of the media will stay in Manhattan? The answer is that nobody knows. But if we are at least ready with

crash of American 587 on Long Island. Within moments of hearing about the crash, we at WPIX dispatched all of our crews and live trucks out of Manhattan. Some of our competitors who did not react as quickly could not get their live trucks out of the city and could not put those reporters on the air because they had no remote trucks on site.

The two biggest problems faced on 9/11 were moving crews around once Manhattan went under lockdown and communicating with crews once the towers collapsed.

First, we need a system so that we can get accurate and up-to-date information as soon as its available from local, state, and federal officials. Perhaps a system can be developed that combines e-mail alerts, Internet access and phone updates. That way if one method fails there's still another source for information. In an emergency we should not have to wait until a press conference can be organized. The FAA in New York and the Florida State Police,

We had to stop to think that in the midst of terrorism, death and destruction, living under the highest state of alert, news and engineering personnel, with great risk to themselves worked around the clock for almost a month straight to get coverage to our viewers.

proper protective gear and potassium iodide, we may be able to maintain a staff to keep a broadcast on the air. Some sort of Panic Newsroom and Panic Live Truck needs to be developed. There are already cameras throughout the metro area. Also, the media and the government should collaborate and expand the installation of cameras throughout the entire metro area. If an evacuation of the area were required we could still get the story on

the air with video.

When the planes hit the World Trade Center we watched our broadcast signal go out. We lost W.T.C. transmitting capability at 9:12 a.m. Our cell phones did not work; pay phones had long lines; there was no-long distance service; and our Nextels went down because it was pure overload on the system. All of Verizon's equipment near the towers was blown up. Our assignment desk used the 450 radio but it was difficult getting in contact with our crews and reporters.

Our pagers worked...we have two-way pagers. Nextels came back before Verizon did and that's how we communicated. We were carried on certain cable companies because WPIX had fiber feeds that went directly to the cable outlet like Time Warner Cable.

In late afternoon our engineering department put a small transmitter and antenna on the *Daily News* building on 42nd Street, where our studios are located. This transmitter covered approximately one square mile of Manhattan. The following day we removed that same transmitter to a small balcony on the 81st floor of the Empire State Building at 34th Street, broadcasting to the north. Three days later we placed Channel 64 on the south side of the Empire State Building for coverage towards Brooklyn. But in the next week we were up on a 920-foot-high tower in Alpine, New Jersey, 18 miles from Manhattan. WPIX shared

this site with ABC. NBC, ABC, and Channel 13 (PBS). In all the madness we stayed on live for 20 hours at a clip—no commercials—only going over to CNN for four hours a day, from 1:00 to 5:00 a.m. For Tribnet stations throughout the country and CNN we fed our live digital chopper shots out via fiber.

I could go on about the courage of our engineer Steve Jacobson who died in the transmission room on top of the World Trade Center or our cameraman who was blown into a building when the WTC towers fell. The big white cloud with tornado strength killed many people. He held onto his camera. He survived to tell his story.

Or the reporter and crew who huddled in their live truck believing they would be dead as the towers came down with such force around them.

Or the cameraman who was caught in the force of the towers falling and ran with his camera light on so other people could try to run to safety. This cameraman found an abandoned city bus and turned on its lights and started honking its horn so other people could find their way to him and safety.

I could tell you of hundreds of people lined up around our building holding pictures of loved ones hoping to get on our news program in order to find their mother or father or husband or wife or brother or sister or friend alive.

That day forever changed our lives.

A former news producer for WNBC-TV New York, Karen Scott has been news director of WPIX-TV (WB/11 New York) since 1996. She is the winner of 12 New York Emmy® Awards, three Edward R. Murrow Awards, as well as honors from the Associated Press and the New York State Broadcasters Association.

The Open Mind: Open for 50 Years...and Counting!

Richard Heffner's uninterrupted half-century
of conversations with history makers.

By Frederick A. Jacobi

Fifty years ago last May a college history teacher named Richard D. Heffner launched a television discussion program, *The Open Mind*, on NBC's New York City flagship station. The topic was the American presidency and the guests included historians William Leuchtenburg and Allan Nevins and political scientists Richard Neustadt and Lawrence Chamberlain. *The Open Mind* is still on the air—now on public TV stations across the country—an extraordinary record for the generally shifting sands of television. Leuchtenburg, professor of history emeritus at the University of North Carolina, returned to the program in May 2006 and the topic was...The American presidency.

In the past half-century there have been over 1,500 *Open Mind* programs. In addition Heffner helped to establish and then ran New York City's first

educational television station; served for 20 years as chairman of the ratings board of the Motion Picture Association of America; produced three books; and since 1964 has been University Professor of Communications and Public Policy at Rutgers, the state university of New Jersey.

Asked who his favorite *Open Mind* guests were, he unhesitatingly identifies Martin Luther King, who appeared on the program in 1957. When this episode was rebroadcast recently, Virginia Heffernan wrote in *The New York Times* that "everything about the show is fascinating. First are the conventions of early television. The participants don't interrupt one another. They don't sloganeer. They don't thank the host, using his first name. They don't smile, joke or face the camera. Instead, *The Open Mind* puts on display a phenomenon now almost extinct on political shows: consensus."



Heffner (right) with New York Governor Averill Harriman (left) and Postmaster General James A. Farley (1954).

But Heffner also cherishes other memories. “I still *kvell* when I see Mario Cuomo,” he said recently. “Allan Bloom of the University of Chicago was so wonderfully articulate, even if I didn’t agree with him. I have the same feeling about Robert Bork. I did two programs with him after he was rejected for the Supreme Court; they were both intellectual feasts. I did a program with [former New York City mayor] Ed Koch after he had a heart attack; I asked him what his epitaph should be. He’d already been thinking about that. He replied: ‘He was fiercely proud of his Jewish faith. He fiercely defended the City of New York. And he fiercely loved the people of the City of New York. That’s my epitaph.’ I reminded him that when I asked the same question years before, when he was first elected mayor, he said that his epitaph should read ‘He was as good as Fiorello LaGuardia,’ because LaGuardia had set the standard.

“Every so often I have another favorite: Max Lerner and Malcolm X were brilliant,” Heffner added. He also cites the writer Marya Mannes, who talked about dysfunctional people in America; Norman Mailer, who had just come from a PEN meeting where he said outrageous things about women (“but he was civilized on *The Open Mind*, an excellent guest”); Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel and First Amendment Attorney Floyd Abrams, each of whom has been on the program more than a score of times; eminent medical scientists Jonas Salk and Lewis Thomas; Betty Friedan and her book, *The Fountain of Age* (“She tapped into the two mightiest veins of the 20th Century: feminism and ageism.”)

One recent guest was Supreme Court Associate Justice Stephen Breyer. Heffner asked him what high-school students should learn about the Constitution. “The Constitution is about creating institutions of government that are

democratic,” Breyer replied. “It is the way of translating the will of the people into statutes, into rules for their living together that are democratic. It’s a democracy that protects peoples’ basic liberties. We want to protect certain fundamental human rights and the Constitution does that.” In Heffner’s view, Breyer sees the Supreme Court’s job as being the greatest reflection of democracy.

Bill Moyers turns the tables on Dick Heffner.

On May 13, 2006—the program’s 50th anniversary—the tables were turned when Bill Moyers traded seats with Heffner and asked him “What do you think is the key to listening?”

“Being a teacher,” Heffner replies. “It’s wanting to teach, meaning wanting to teach the audience, whatever audience that is.” And speaking of teachers, he recalls that “a great teacher by the name of ‘Doc’ Guernsey gave me a sense of the glory of American history” at DeWitt Clinton, then one of New York City’s few elite, competitive high schools.

“The airwaves belong to the American people,” Moyers said, “yet they’re in the control of large mega-media corporations that have no interest whatever in this democratic discourse you’re talking about. Why do we stand for it? Why are we so complacent, so passive?”

“I think we’re too fat and sassy,” Heffner replied. “We’re too satisfied, too busy with material things.”

In a recent interview he elaborated on his answer to Moyers’ question. “Why do we stand for the attempt—which is succeeding—to change our tax structure to favor the very, very, very wealthy?” he asked. “Why do we accept such outrageous things as blacks as second-class citizens? That flummoxes me. Thurgood Marshall

was a wonderful guest on *The Open Mind* and he always spoke frankly. But why have we for the most part had so little racial rebelliousness? Only during a few hot summers, and when the kids were fearful of being drafted, was there any extended civil disobedience.”

Giving New York City its first noncommercial TV station.

Not long after Heffner launched *The Open Mind* on NBC’s New York City station, he became program director for the Metropolitan Educational Television Association, composed of leading educational and civic groups that built their own studio but begged, borrowed and bought air time for their educational programs from commercial stations. Later, leading New York citizens negotiated to buy Channel 13, then being operated by the commercial station WNTA-TV in Newark, New Jersey. At the time, New York was the largest American city without an educational station.

At the end of a two-year struggle—exacerbated in part by Governor Robert B. Meyner’s reluctance to have the outlet leave New Jersey—the transaction was completed at a cost of \$6,200,000. Dick Heffner was named vice-president and general manager of the Educational Broadcasting Corporation, new owner of Channel 13. After its inaugural broadcast, featuring Edward R. Murrow as master of ceremonies and FCC Commissioner Newton R. Minow as chief speaker, Jack Gould wrote in *The New York Times*: “Heffner has done superbly well in starting a new station at one fell swoop.” The arrangement lasted only a little more than a year, however, as policy differences with the station’s leadership led to his forced departure in 1963.

What about those movie ratings? And how did he get that job?

When Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, asked Heffner to chair the MPA's Classification and Ratings Administration (CARA), Heffner first turned him down, saying, "My mother didn't raise me to count nipples....I eventually took the job because I thought I could make a difference, that certain reforms could be effected. I took the job because I was a strong believer in voluntarism. I came away from my Hollywood years, however, no longer a strong believer in voluntarism. I am now pro-regulation, but decidedly *not* pro-censorship. There's a big difference."

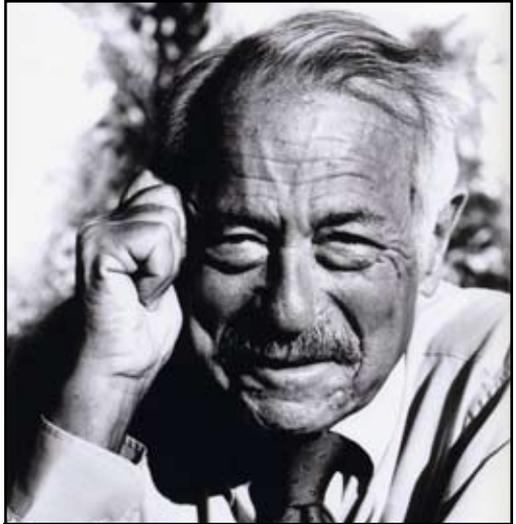
Heffner spent 20 years commuting nearly every week to the West Coast and when he left he said, "There are a lot of people in Hollywood who must be happy that I'm going. When you have people with money and power, selfishly backing films with scenes of imitable violence, how are parents around the country going to fight for truth? I believe there is a public interest and I don't think you can leave everything to the selfishness of the powerful and their spin doctors." He also believes that there has always been a greater sense of public service in broadcasting than in the Hollywood he discovered in the mid-1970s.

And all those books...

Heffner is the author of *A Documentary History of the United States*, first published in 1952 and now in its expanded and updated seventh edition, and the editor of an abridged paperback edition of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America. As They Saw It* is a book derived from his broadcast conversations over the past half-century.



Eleanor Roosevelt presented Richard Heffner with a check for the Robert E. Sherwood Award to *The Open Mind* in 1957.



Richard Heffner now.

Contents of the *Documentary History* range from Tom Paine's "Common Sense," the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States to pronouncements by former Vice-President Spiro Agnew and former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Asked about some of the later additions, Heffner said: "You can dislike the individuals involved but you have to recognize what truths there are in what they say and write. Agnew expressed anger at the media for their instant, negative analyses of major Administration talks. It's the curse of our time: there is no more public conversation. There is only public controversy."

When Bill Moyers asked if there is one

document that most eloquently expresses the American mind Heffner replied “I don’t think there’s any question but that it is the Declaration of Independence. But I have to tie it to the Constitution. Those two seminal documents cause us to go back and be proud. I don’t say that if you take those words literally then you will fully understand the American mind and the American spirit. But they are magnificent distillations of what the American mind was at that time.”

Backstage at *The Open Mind*

For the past 25 years Daphne Doelger has served as associate producer of *The Open Mind*. She invites each week’s guest—“someone who has piqued Mr. Heffner’s interest,” she says, “someone with a national reputation or expertise in their field.”

The program is underwritten by the Bluestein Family Foundation, the Rosalind P. Walter Foundation, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the Rudin Family Foundation, the Malkin Fund, the Carnegie Corporation and, from the corporate community, Mutual of America, which provides office space and facilities, “a wonderful boon,” Heffner says.

Another underwriter is Teachers College, Columbia University, which is assembling an online digital archive of *Open Mind* programs from the past 50 years (www.theopenmind.tv). “As a form of ‘living history,’ *The Open Mind* Online Digital Archive brings hundreds of important conversations right into the classroom,” says former T.C. President Arthur Levine. Heffner notes that this project requires \$460,000 for completion, and in addition to his other duties he is hard at work raising this sum.

Heffner and his wife, Elaine, a

psychotherapist in private practice, have two sons: Daniel, a movie maker in Hollywood, and Andrew, an assistant district attorney, chief of the official corruption bureau in the office of New York City DA Robert Morgenthau. There are four grandchildren. The Heffners’ weekend retreat is a house on a lake which they can reach in 55 minutes (“without getting arrested”) from their New York City apartment.

As University Professor of Communications and Public Policy at Rutgers, Heffner is not a member of any specific faculty but rather says his academic interests hark back to the days when we had a real FCC, with the Fairness Doctrine and Equal Time in full force. Each fall he teaches a freshman honors seminar on Communications and Human Values and a lecture course on Mass Communications and the American Image. “We are increasingly what we see and hear,” he adds. “America’s mass media of communications make us what we are.”

The new season of *The Open Mind* has just been inaugurated by another table-turning show: Bill Baker, president of New York public-TV stations Channel 13 and 21, hosted an hour-long special with Dick Heffner as his guest.

“We’re privileged to have *The Open Mind* on Channel 13,” Baker said. “You might think that this 50-year-old program is an anachronism. But that’s what makes it great. It’s a treasure. There’s just nothing like this kind of television show. There’s not that privilege in this compressed, massive media world to reflect and be peaceful and calm.”

Frederick A. Jacobi is editor of *Television Quarterly*. He has been in and around television since the days of Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, *Howdy Doody* and *Victory at Sea*.

Plowing the Field of Dreams

A new-media specialist shows how the online video explosion forces a reconsideration of just what constitutes television. | **By John V. Pavlik**

Inspiration can be elusive and sometimes comes from the most unexpected places. With the death last May of Elma Gardner “Pem” Farnsworth, it is worth recalling the spark that once led her late husband, Philo T. Farnsworth, to his invention of television. As a 13-year-old boy, Farnsworth plowed the fields on his family’s Rigby, Idaho farm in the early 1920’s. Traveling back and forth across the fields behind a horse-drawn machine, he thought about how he plowed one row at a time and transferred this experience to solve a problem with a newly emerging machine designed to transmit pictures through the air.

Other inventors had been designing mechanical television devices with whirling discs and mirrors but struggled to produce the desired result. Farnsworth’s inspiration came when he realized he could employ electrons to transmit and scan an image far more rapidly onto a picture tube in the same fashion as he had plowed the fields, one row at a time. This inspiration laid the foundation for the development of electronic television, and Pem Farnsworth worked by her husband’s side for decades helping him advance his invention.

In some ways, television is in the midst of a new stage of inspiration and innovation. The advent of both digital technology and the Internet have led to a radical explosion in the development and distribution of television, or video, in an online environment.

This transformation of television involves at least ten dimensions. These are 1) the medium of online delivery; 2) the devices for accessing, displaying or watching video; 3) the audience or users of video; 4) the producers of video; 5) video content itself, 6) the distributors of video; 7) the financiers of video; 8) the regulators of video; 9) the digital technologies of production (and encryption) which in many ways are fueling the explosive growth in video production and protection; and 10) the inventors and innovators of the next generation of television. In this first half of a two-part article, I will deal with the first four of the above-listed dimensions and will elaborate on the others in the next issue of *Television Quarterly*.

This story begins with the ubiquitous deployment of broadband Internet access. Although many homes had dial-up access to the Internet in the 1990s, this slow

speed delivery meant a very limited form of video was possible. The first decade of the 21st century has seen wide-spread delivery of high-speed, or broadband, Internet access. The

Federal Communications Commission “generally defines broadband service as data transmission speeds exceeding 200 kilobits per second (Kbps), or 200,000 bits per second, in at least one direction: downstream (from the Internet to your computer) or upstream (from your computer to the Internet).” Broadband access is now at more than 70 percent of U.S. Internet users, or more than 40 millions persons. There are at least six different means of broadband delivery, including digital subscriber line (DSL), cable modem, fiber or fiber optics, wireless, satellite and broadband over powerline (BPL). DSL and cable modem are the leading providers of broadband to U.S. homes, but wireless is increasingly important in the delivery of broadband to portable devices, and therefore for video to such mobile devices as cell phones. Broadband is increasingly popular because it can deliver a variety of enhanced services, including voice over Internet protocol (VoIP), high-speed music downloading and video on demand.

A growing concern about the distribution of online video is what it may do to the actual arteries of Internet traffic, the major Internet service providers, including the telephone and cable companies. An increasing chorus of these companies is warning that TV-quality and high-definition programming could choke the Internet. The bandwidth

required to deliver such high-quality video is considerable, and although small, low-resolution video clips do not pose a problem, the increasing volume of high-quality video has carriers such

as Verizon and AT&T contemplating charging content providers to guarantee delivery of large video files. Such a toll lane poses other problems, of course, including potentially locking out smaller video providers. To compete, cable TV giant Comcast is building an on-demand video service using Internet technologies.

Devices for Accessing, Displaying or Watching Video

Viewing video distributed online requires a computer, a handheld such as a cell phone or some other digital device with access to the Internet, typically broadband, or high-speed access, either wireless or land-line. Increasingly, video providers are producing original video designed specifically for either online viewership or viewership on a small-screen mobile device, mandating special design considerations. Among these considerations are the use of only relatively large text on the screen for easy readership and usually reduced amounts of text, still images which require less bandwidth, and different types of shot selection, framing and editing of pictures. For example, long shots with small objects are almost useless when displayed on a small screen because the viewer is unable to discern what they are. Closeups are particularly important, and limited camera movements are required because excessive or rapid panning,

An increasing chorus is warning that TV quality and high-definition programming could choke the Internet.

zooming or other camera movements may result in pixilation when delivered online, especially via wireless delivery media.

The online video explosion is about more than just television. In fact, it forces a reconsideration of just what constitutes television. Listening to satellite radio on May 3, 2006, the author heard a decades-old but still funny comedy routine by Bill Cosby about the stupidity of watching golf on television. What made it especially amusing to the author (an avid golfer who likes watching golf on television) was Cosby's reference to the plethora of television channels available at the time: a whopping seven. Today, with satellite and cable television systems, most U.S. homes have access to hundreds of channels of scheduled, premium and on-demand video programming delivered to their "television set." But, the same homes, typically equipped with broadband Internet access, oftentimes through the same digital network delivering their "television," have access to potentially millions of "channels," if that is the right word for it, of video programming, whether scheduled, on-demand, free or for purchase, delivered to their computer or another digital device such as a personal digital appliance or cell phone. In terms of video volume, the online video or television is in the millions of hours, and growing dramatically each day. The biggest challenge for many users or audience members is finding the video they want or might enjoy watching.

Watching video on any digital device requires a software player. Usually, these players are available for free, although

sometimes there are fee-based advanced players with more features or capable of playing video at higher quality of resolution, frame-rate or size or additional premium content. Sometimes video software players come pre-installed on digital devices or computers, but occasionally downloading, installing and upgrading is needed or recommended. Upgrades sometimes add features for the viewer, but sometimes they include hidden features that allow distributors to better track viewing or restrict viewing based on copyright restrictions.

In September, 2005, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) provided some 5,000 of its viewers with a computer program called the interactive media player (iMP), which allows them to download most of the BBC's television programs for up to seven days. Among the programs available for online viewing are the long-running soap opera *EastEnders*, nightly newscasts and major sporting events. Cell phones typically require additional technology (hardware and software) to view video programs downloaded from the Internet. One such device is the Sling box, which attaches to a high-speed Internet access device such as a home computer and then uses wireless technology to deliver the video content to a cell phone.

The audience is no longer passive or a couch potato...A more appropriate term for many consumers of video is a user, or even a producer.

Consumer-electronics giant Sharp reports that it will soon introduce an LCD-screen TV for the Japanese market enabling viewers to watch high-definition television, use a remote control to access

the Internet, and store TV shows on an internal hard drive.

In the days of terrestrial broadcast television, and even the early days of cable TV, the viewers of television were typically called the audience. This term is increasingly becoming antiquated. In today's digital, online age, video is not just something people watch. The audience is no longer passive or a couch potato, at least not much of the time. A more appropriate term for many consumers of video is a user, or even a producer. The video user is becoming far more active or interactive. Video is downloaded, accessed on demand, stored or saved for later viewing, fast-forwarded through, searched, sorted, edited, redistributed, uploaded, clicked on or otherwise manipulated in video games, and subject to a host of rapidly evolving interactive features.

Only occasionally is it just watched. Users are often highly mobile, and watch short video segments, sometimes serialized and viewed on demand, often for a fee. Users equipped with video capable cell phones or other mobile digital devices shoot their own video and transmit it to friends or family. Although slow to develop in the U.S., in many other parts of the world where advanced digital cellular networks are already in place, users are engaging in high-quality video phone calls from one mobile device to another. The author tested one such system while visiting Stockholm, Sweden in November, 2005, and found the video more than satisfactory in terms of resolution, frame-rate and audio quality.

While writing this article, I noticed my 13-year-old daughter, Tristan, sitting in front of a computer. I asked her what she was doing, and she replied, "Watching the news." Taking a closer look, I saw

that she was watching a video produced by *The New York Times* and available on the nytimes.com home page. "What's the story about?" I inquired. "It's about a candidate for mayor of Newark," she replied. The video was seamlessly playing, in nearly full-screen mode, with high-quality audio, and what a professional might call broadcast-quality production values.

A quick perusal of the nytimes.com site reveals a variety of well-done video reports on a variety of topics, ranging from breaking news to technology reports. If the author's experience with his daughter is any indication, the video-news habits of the elusive next generation "audience" is undergoing a dramatic transformation. comScore/Media Metrix estimates that more than half (56 percent) of the U.S. online audience has viewed streaming videos in the past year. Consumers viewed 3.7 billion video streams in March 2006 and about 100 minutes of video content per viewer per month, compared to an average of 85 minutes in October. Video viewing on phones is expected to rise in the coming years, as the number of video enabled cell phones rises from 3 million in the U.S. in 2006 to an estimated 15 million by 2009.

The Producers of Online Video

Online video comes from an explosion of sources. Television was traditionally produced by a select group of companies and distributed by a finite number of broadcasters who tightly controlled what went on air. Cable has public access, but this is a drop in the bucket of total television programming.

Since the introduction and development of digital technologies, video production and distribution has grown exponentially. At the same time,

the diversity of sources of video has grown dramatically wide and varied, from high-end professional producers to literally mom and pop producers, son and daughter, and just about everyone else.

Much of this video is of very limited quality or interest. Some online video is produced by young, independent videographers looking for an alternative vehicle to reach an audience. Original fan productions such as those created by devotees of the popular television series *Star Trek* are among the best produced and most widely viewed programming on the web. Austin, Texas-based StarShipExeter.com is among the best examples. Sometimes the video it is produced by average citizens who may have home video they want to share with friends and family, or they may simply have exhibitionist tendencies, and much of this video is not worth watching.

In some cases, non-traditional providers can bring diversity to the television mix. One example is Barrio 305, an independently produced online video magazine about Latino culture. Much of the coverage has focused on the rise of urban Latino youth in South Beach, Miami, FL. Produced in English and Spanish, the production values are not quite at the level of much commercial television, but it is still a useful alternative voice.

In other cases, online video is of somewhat less value, at least as independent journalism. A case in point is an online video produced by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (<http://feeds.feedburner.com/AICPAMultimedia>). Essentially a video news release, the video podcast titled "Pillars of Success" profiles the story of four African American CPAs.

If there is a one problem facing

consumers of online video, it is sorting through all this video trash for the occasional nugget of interest or quality. There is no comprehensive programming guide for online television and video. Real Network's Real Guide offers a useful guide to online audio and video programming, but is not complete. What is needed is a comprehensive and continuously updated web portal and search engine for online TV and video that encompasses all online video formats from MPEG 1 to 4, AVI, Quicktime, Real Player, Windows Media Player and the various other video formats online. The current situation essentially requires users to know all the locations of online TV and video and regularly visit them for updates.

A considerable amount of video comes from established, familiar or traditional sources, such as news and entertainment companies, television networks and stations, public television, sports teams and leagues, arts organizations and the government (for more on the topic of government-produced video, see the author's article about video news releases in the Spring/Summer 2006 issue of *Television Quarterly*).

One significant change in video news production from just a few years ago is that many news providers who had specialized in print, like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, as well as news agencies such as the Reuters and the Associated Press, now produce extensive video for online and other distribution. The AP makes its news video available through member newspaper web sites, such as that of the *New York Daily News*.

An example of quality journalism being produced exclusively for an online audience comes in the form of a video report titled "A Shifting Bolivia," produced for *The New York Times* on the web by

Times' reporter Juan Forero. Forero reported from Bolivia on Evo Morales, who in January 2005 assumed the office of President of Bolivia. Morales is an Aymara Indian and former coca grower who is decriminalizing the growing of coca and making other fundamental changes to his country's struggling economy, but with significant social and political implications. The 13-minute multi-part web-exclusive video report features an interesting combination of video and stills, in English but with Spanish actualities either subtitled or dubbed in English.

Washingtonpost.com also produces quality original online video journalism, such as its October 4, 2005 report, *Fueling Azerbaijan's Future* (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/video/2005/10/04/VI2005100400654.html>). The ten-minute documentary style report provided a detailed examination of the former Soviet-republic's economic development through its oil resources.

An interesting case is the Belo Corporation, owners of some two dozen news media properties around the country, including the *Dallas Morning News*, well known for its quality local and regional journalism, as well as television stations and interactive media. Belo has now developed a converged news operation where video is often produced and distributed alongside traditional newspaper reporting (<http://www.dallasnews.com>).

Last May I conducted telephone interviews with two Belo executives, including David Duitch, Vice President of Belo, Capital Bureau, who has responsibility for managing both the print and broadcast operations of the bureau. He has been behind the Washington Bureau's drive to produce videos for *The*

Dallas Morning News website. Among the best examples of online video journalism at Belo comes from the *Dallas Morning News* Washington Bureau, where veteran newspaper reporter Jim Landers has distinguished himself in the new media age by shooting and editing his own video to accompany his newspaper reporting. Landers specializes in international reporting on how developments around the globe impact communities in North Texas. He has mastered a new form of storytelling, and has produced quality video reports on a variety of stories, including economic problems in the West Bank and oil concerns in Saudi Arabia.

I also interviewed Belo's John Granatino, Vice President of News and Operations for Belo Interactive. Granatino noted that increasing numbers of the Belo audience are broadband enabled. "Roughly 80% of our online audience has broadband Internet access," he explains. The audience, he adds, expects broadband content, especially video. "Fortunately, we have it at our TV stations. We also create original video reporting. It's a 'must do,' not a 'should we do.'"

The audience has grown considerably for Belo's online video journalism. "We're seeing a doubling, tripling of video streams over past year. We're now doing two million video streams a month across 20 sites around the country." The video segments tend to be short, but in some cases, video blog reports can actually be longer than a video report on television. "Our reporters often give behind-the-scenes looks and this might take a bit longer," Granatino notes. Video advertising is especially growing for national web sites, but also for regional ones.

Among a growing number of news

organizations with video reporting capabilities is the *St. Petersburg (FL) Times*, once exclusively a newspaper organization. Today, “We think of ourselves more as a journalism company than a newspaper company,” explains Kevin McGeever, city editor for tampabay.com, the portal site where sptimes.com resides, and whom the author interviewed by telephone on May 23, 2006. “A year ago we weren’t even thinking about video,” he notes. Now the company produces it regularly. “Some stories lend themselves better to video, or are well told in moving images rather than in words or words alone,” McGeever adds. “We’re working to change the culture of the newsroom and video is not something journalists at newspapers always think of.” Stories where they have produced original video include the recent immigration marches as well as hurricane preparation. Particularly interesting is a special report on the petting of the manatee (http://www.sptimes.com/2006/03/20/Tampabay/Manatee_petting__Just.shtml), an endangered species living in the waters of the Tampa region and increasingly approached and harassed by snorklers in the area, in violation of federal law. The site obtained unique footage showing snorklers approaching the manatee and coming in illegal and harmful physical contact with the large marine mammal. At the *Times*, the legacy newsroom is embracing a culture change. Tampabay.com, the *Times* leadership says, is the “first edition” now and “we will publish at the height of interest...” Yet, McGeever adds, “it’s nice if the video

has an evergreen quality and audience interest can last more than a few days.”

A notable development regarding even these recognized quality sources of video is the sheer volume of video being made available online, either live or on demand. Most of these sources have found the cost of quality video production to have fallen dramatically or can leverage their resources by making the video available online after it has had its premiere on conventional television. Once it has aired, video is often made available for on-demand viewing online, including for a fee (ranging from modest amounts of about a dollar to substantially greater amounts) but sometimes for free.

In some cases, major web portals such as Yahoo! are producing significant amounts of original video for the web, including journalism. One exemplar is Kevin Sites in the Hot Zone (at <http://hotzone.yahoo.com/>). A veteran war correspondent, Sites has covered global war and disaster for several national networks and now is producing original video news reporting on various conflict zones around the world for Yahoo!. His report, “Africa in the Hot Zone” involved in-depth on-location reporting from Mogadishu, Somalia and elsewhere.

In the next issue of *Television Quarterly*, I will deal with such additional dimensions of the online future of television as video content, its distributors, financers and regulators, as well as the new technologies that are fueling the explosive growth in production.

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Television's Convergence Conundrum

Finding the right digital strategy
By **Everette E. Dennis**

For media and entertainment companies as parents of network and local television, finding a workable strategy in an increasingly digital environment has long been a conceptual—and operational—challenge. They worry that television's role in the media landscape will diminish as webcasters who play on conventional computer screens and hand-held devices inch their way into the media marketplace. Concurrently, search engines like Google and Yahoo!, the apparent new masters of the communications universe, are taking a more important role as aggregators and distributors of information and entertainment content.

For television, coping with convergence has been the cause of hand wringing for more than a decade. At first, TV executives considered it an annoyance that mostly benefited cable rather than over-the-air broadcasting. Later, broadcast executives saw it as a promising but unfulfilled revenue stream, mostly as a hedge against market uncertainty. A clear exception was NBC's bold joint

venture with Microsoft that created MSNBC as a cable and Internet presence integrated with CNBC, thus showcasing four distinct platforms. More quietly, for most television operations digital development has been incremental—mostly involving the Internet, but increasingly Video on Demand and other broadband innovations.

The term “convergence” itself has had ups and downs, first being wildly advertised as a Nirvana for the industry, and later decried as trendy and insubstantial, undervaluing the reliable, venerable medium of television itself. Typically, though, media executives have seen convergence in narrow terms, sometimes simply as cooperative ventures between TV and newspapers, as in the case of the Tribune Company, the nation's 12th largest media company by revenue. As recently as last June, *The New York Times* reported that Tribune had been “fitfully blending papers and TV,” but found pitfalls in a shifting landscape. A so-called synergy model, which originally allowed shared content and talent as

well as advertising and cross-marketing connections among television stations and newspapers in Chicago, was less successful when applied to this onetime midwest company's east- and west-coast properties and thus the cause for corporate hand wringing, according to media reports. As Richard Siklos and Katharine Q. Seelye wrote, "Not only would the properties in each city cross-pollinate their editorial content, but advertisers could make sweeping national buys across the media and across the country." Other firms have similarly reported ups and down in various ventures involving convergence strategies.

Regulations that previously blocked cooperative ventures suddenly were not only permissible but strongly encouraged. This enabled economic and market convergence and ultimately content and human capital convergence.

Rarely, though, have media executives considered the full range of convergence options or the broad meaning of the term itself. While often used as shorthand for a "coming together" of content and distribution, electronic media and ink-on-paper publishing, convergence has a much more expansive formulation on which a digital strategy map can be drawn. As I wrote three years ago in *The International Journal of Media Management*, convergence is more than the sum of its parts. It is, first and foremost, a technological phenomenon that permitted an integration of all forms of communication through an electronically-based and computer-driven system. Thus, conventional media

were connected with the Internet, and old competitors in broadcasting, cable and even motion pictures were working together. This, of course, went hand in hand with regulatory convergence and the deregulation of the media environment generally. Regulations that previously blocked cooperative ventures suddenly were not only permissible but strongly encouraged. This enabled economic and market convergence and ultimately content and human capital convergence.

All this was evident to careful observers during the Dot-com boom and bust. Leading up to that dramatic meltdown, which affected the economy

generally and media most particularly, media companies, some with television properties, had radically different strategies for navigating what they believed to be the changes driven by the several convergences—technological, economic and regulatory. General

Electric's NBC pioneered a multi-platform universe with a high tech partner and most notably the nation's largest media company, Time Warner—for a time AOL Time Warner—was the most exuberant champion of convergence in the entire media marketplace. Other bullish companies included Disney, Bertelsmann and Vivendi, all hailed by admiring business leaders as innovative and forward-looking. At the same time, old lions like Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., owner of Fox Television, and Viacom, which acquired CBS to join its various cable properties, lagged behind. After the Dot-com crash, those who had been reluctant recruits in the march to convergence appeared prudent and wise,

while those who had led the pack looked hasty and even reckless. This quite naturally led to a cautious period from 2001 forward to at least 2004 in many corporate boardrooms and executive offices and the search for a workable digital strategy slowed considerably.

This seemed the perfect time to take the temperature of digital strategies, present and evolving, in the nation's top 25 media companies by revenue, which I did with two colleagues, Stephen Warley and James Sheridan, then research assistants at Fordham's Graduate School of Business. In research published in last spring in *The Journal of Media Business Studies*, we reported on interviews with CEOs and other executives from firms including TimeWarner, Viacom, Disney, Comcast, NBC, Cox, News Corp. and others. We asked how they shaped their digital strategies, how often they were reassessed, where the digital function fit in the company's hierarchy, how they actually conceptualized convergence in its application to marketing, consumer relationships, content and distribution. We also asked about perceived threats—and divined some new strategic questions.

Along the way we assessed leadership styles—and apparent performance. And, as educators and professionals we wanted to know how all this relates to hiring patterns for new and mid-level employees.

Just over half of the companies—14 had definite, written digital strategies, while only two confessed they did not. Those reported strategies fell into four categories—(1) direct or de facto coordination of all in-house Internet and other digital operations

at the senior management level; (2) decentralized Internet/digital operations with control at the divisional or local level; (3) cooperative ventures between two or more companies and (4) those who chose to make external investments to test out digital strategies without responsibility for full operations. The first strategy was mostly used by Cable MSOs; the second by local broadcasters and newspaper publishers; the third by entertainment conglomerates and the fourth by mixture of the other three and typically by smaller firms that were more risk averse.

Where did the digital strategy migrate in the corporate hierarchy? Here there were three dominant leadership patterns: (1) the CEO or senior executive of an exclusively digital media company of which Comcast was a prime example; (2) executives overseeing a separate or interactive division in a traditional media company, such as Belo, Hearst and ABC and (3) executives who “inherited” the digital strategy by virtue of their position and the culture of the company. At the time our study was conducted in 2004 and 2005, the latter model was in place at Primedia, Cox and Gannett.

Professionals from the content side of the business, including writers and journalists, were dismissed as having “marginal value” by some respondents who chafed about their preoccupation with detail and inability to think strategically.

When asked about convergence per se, 17 of our executive interviewees embraced it while others said the term was either rarely used or virtually meaningless. Still, those who see convergence as a useful

term, spoke of (1) operational convergence wherein internal infrastructures confirm to digital standards; (2) cross-platform marketing in which companies leverage their platforms and repurpose old content; and (3) delivering on-demand content in addressable form for viewers and users.

In assessing how digital technologies affect the operations of the media firm, we asked how and to what extent the digital preoccupation affects hiring patterns for future managers and leaders. Here we learned ideal new employees would have (1) knowledge of the technological landscape, (2) creativity, especially in understanding content and distribution links and (3) analytics—a fundamental understanding of business plans, marketing, advertising and audiences. Business school and liberal arts graduates with industry experience were preferred by most we interviewed. Professionals from the content side of the business, including writers and journalists, were dismissed as having “marginal value” by some respondents who chafed about their preoccupation with detail and inability to think strategically.

When we asked about perceived threats, the executives turned introspective, most often decrying their own complacency and lack of imagination. While no generic platform was deemed a great threat or potential competition, they did express both fear and admiration of and for search engines. The executives worried about technology overload in a wireless environment as potentially crowding out some media products, including television fare. Control of intellectual property was also frequently mentioned

as critical to survival in a digital world. They complained that neither laws nor enforcement had kept pace and some said they were concerned about the future of paid content vs. that offered free.

“None of us really know what we are doing. We make thoughtful, calculated guesses based on the best evidence, but as for what will ultimately work both in the short and long run, the jury is out.”

Clearly, there is a dynamic discussion among media executives about the interplay of traditional and new media as well as what platforms and organizational structures will be most suitable in navigating a nearly seamless digital landscape. As we assessed the companies in our study, three distinct strategic styles emerged. We saw companies that were or had been clear *leaders*, boldly seeking out their market share with innovation and creativity. Others, we’d call *learners*—more cautions about change, but drawing on lessons from successes and failures of others. And finally, there were *laggards*, cautious to the point of inaction in some instances, fearful of abandoning core competences and products for a clearly undefined world. As one executive summed it up, “truly none of us really know what we are doing. Yes, we make thoughtful, calculated guesses based on the best evidence, but as for what will ultimately work both in the short and long run, the jury is out.” Others worried that other technological changes affecting television and other media had longer gestation periods at a time when the market was kinder to innovation and less demanding of quarterly profits for shareholders.

Since the time we interviewed some

27 executives in 23 of the 25 companies and got information on the others from public and outside sources, it is clear that many changes are affecting the television industry as it integrates more fully with other media enterprises, largely in a digital context. Ultimately television, like cable, has begun to redefine itself and its role in the media family. It is an industry, a technological platform, a content creator and distributor of information, entertainment and advertising. Some say it is an institution or even a social force. It is coping with convergence by

harnessing many of the attributes of the digital revolution to its own ends. And all this is changing. Firms we categorized as learners and laggards at the time of our study are now on the move, some demonstrating muscular leadership while some of the former leaders have dropped back in the face of loss of market value and other economic difficulties as they reassess their approach. If television is to remain a dynamic industry, not only holding its own, but creatively marking its way, it will clearly have to master the challenges that digitization brings.

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Drama on Public Access TV

How a local-community project burgeoned into a regional and national venture.

By Shirley Ann Bruno and Norman Hall

“The New Playwrights project offers the viewer the unique opportunity to witness the budding talents of a young Neil Simon or a Tennessee Williams, the creative geniuses of tomorrow’s theater, in their infancy.”

This is a typical viewer response to an extraordinary project conducted by a public-access TV corporation in a suburban community adjoining metropolitan New York City. Established in the mid-80s as an organization serving 15 incorporated Long Island villages, the Public Access TV Corporation had as its mission “to promote and produce programming of an educational, scientific, literary, cultural or civic nature for cablecast.” In 1995 PATV launched the New Playwrights project, which has been a huge success with a growing ripple effect.

The driving forces behind the New Playwrights project are Shirley Ann Bruno, executive director of the Public Access TV Corporation, who has taught television production and communications courses in high school and college; and Norman Hall, an acclaimed 50-year veteran theater and daytime television director who has directed all the New Playwrights productions for the past 10 years. The winner of an Emmy® Award for One Life to Live, Mr. Hall is president of the board of directors of the Public Access TV Corporation.

In their own words, Ms. Bruno and Mr. Hall describe the saga of this venture. It is quite a story! —Ed.

Norman Hall: When I was asked to serve on the Board of Directors of Public Access Television in the Great Neck/North Shore area, I enthusiastically agreed. I met with the Executive Director, Shirley Bruno, who knew that I had been a television director and she suggested that I think about creating programs, with a limited budget, for broadcast on our Public Access Channel. The studio was conveniently located across the

street from the PATV office. It was a box-like room about 15 by 20 feet with two tracks 15 feet off the deck, each allowing for both a gray and black velour drape. There were about eight to ten lighting and scenery pipes. With three cameras and some modular units in the room it was a tight fit. The control room was narrow, accommodating four seats and one standing position for the audio/tape technician in the same open control



Nikki Lauren (left) and Charles F. Wagner IV during the production
 "Seems Like Old Times" by Lucile Lichtblau.

room. The audio problems would be difficult, but that was the situation.

I suggested a number of program ideas. *New Playwrights* became our first project. We decided to advertise throughout the country for two- or three-character short plays running ten to twelve minutes that could be staged in one set. We planned a competition, which would choose two plays for production each year and have a host interview the competition winners when the play was videotaped and edited. The prize for the winners would be a production of the play, a copy of the tape and a year's subscription to our membership list. We invited Shirley Romaine to join our *New Playwrights* committee to act as our host and interviewer. Ms. Romaine is an actress who has appeared extensively on and off Broadway. The program was

to be a half hour long. Shirley Romaine, George Gimpel, a former Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Long Island Stage, Shirley Bruno and I would act as the panel of judges to choose the contest winners. We advertised the competition in our local papers and in mailings and flyers in our community. We set a deadline and the first year we received 13 entries.

Shirley Ann Bruno: In our initial discussion with our judging panel, we set up the parameters for selection of our competition winners. We discussed the project envisioning the dramatization of the play for television and what the author intended when creating a one-act play for the stage. In essence we were bringing "theater to the local TV audience." We felt that with the use of multiple television cameras and editing

techniques, we could bring an additional level to each of these productions.

NH: Since this was the first season the plays were produced as staged readings with full-blown productions planned for the future, I planned to use actors with whom I had worked before. Also, since I was on the teaching staff at the Weist/Barron School of Television and Film in New York City I had access to free rehearsal space. Marcelo Mendez, our PATV technical coordinator, would be my technical director when we did a three-camera shoot and act as the camera operator if the approach was to be single camera film style. Marcelo would also be the editor for the productions. In the other technical areas we would use volunteers and interns. The North Shore Community Arts Council provided a small grant to help with very basic productions needs.

Our first play was “Sense and Censorability,” by John Haney, a Queens college professor and Board member of Queens Public Access

Television. The subject was the censorship of an art show in the Manhasset Library. We set up music stands as lecterns for the cast and a position for a reader, to describe the set and stage directions. The reader was seated in a high director’s chair in the downstage right area.

We used three cameras, planned a “line cut” and approached the production as “live on tape.” If we needed to correct anything we planned to shoot inserts and pick-ups after the taping. The play ran about twelve minutes. Scenically, behind the cast at the music stands, there was a gray velour drape. Entrances and exits were made from the upstage left area.

The second and third plays, “Second Chance” by Mark Feldman, about a man wanting to change a part of his life; and “I Need a Job So Shoot Me,” by Spencer Moser, about the difficulties in finding a job, were modified staged readings in front of the gray velour drape. For these plays we eliminated the music stands and set up furniture for the actors to work in. The plays were again short and by the time we completed rehearsal in NYC and got out to the studio all the actors knew their lines but used the scripts in hand only as a prop. We continued to use a reader and again we planned to do the plays as “live on tape” productions with three cameras. The audio set-ups combined a hand-held boom mike and cartoid mikes placed on furniture wherever convenient. We shot each of the three shows in one day. As before, we taped the introductions and interviews on a different day.

Our viewers said that they didn’t need to travel to the city to see theater because Public Access Television was bringing theater to them at home.

SB: By 1999, we began to advertise our *New Playwrights* competition in the Dramatist Guild Resource Directory and received 63 submissions from over 45 writers. Our authors were enthusiastic about the way their theatrical pieces were produced for television. Our viewers reacted positively, too, saying that they didn’t need to travel to the city to see theater, because PATV was bringing theater to them at home. Furthermore, they hadn’t seen anything like this on broadcast TV.

NH: In 2000 “The Band Takes a Short Break,” by Albert Meglin, was our first

full-scale production. The story was about a young couple involved in an adulterous affair that the young man was trying to break off. Since we could not afford a set designer, or personnel to handle hard walls that would need building, I planned to design the productions myself using set pieces, furniture and occasional pieces that could easily be built, all to be placed in front of the cyc that encircled the studio. We created a corner of a restaurant for the two-character play and again approached the production as “live on tape” with a three-camera set up with pick ups and inserts where needed. Since the script called for the actors to dance, we set up a circular area of black velour as a dance floor and on a separate day shot the dancing sequences.

The audio for the dancing sequences was a hand held boom mike and for the table scenes the actors wore lavalier mikes in addition to a hidden mike on the table. We edited in the dancing sequences with music and sound effects at a later date. Although we videotaped the production in color, we edited it in black and white. This effect was startling and enhanced the mood of the play.

“Another Story,” by Lucile Lichtblau, focused on a young couple walking down a street on their way to temple arguing about the wife’s appearance. We “walked” the play at a small strip mall on a day that all the stores were closed. Using one hand held camera and one hand held boom mike, covered with a wind protector, we ran and shot the play as we walked down the path of store windows. No matter how many different ways we tried it, it didn’t work.

I asked the playwright if we could re-locate the setting. We discussed possibilities and decided that we could move the play indoors to the couple’s

bedroom by “backing up time” as if they were getting ready to go out. Minimal dialogue changes were made but we did save the final two minutes of the play for a location outside the couple’s house and the street on the way to temple.

The setting became the couple’s bedroom as they were getting ready to go out. Still short on funds for the project, we used the same French door unit that was used in the previous play, with added drapes, as a corner of the bedroom. We placed a vanity table downstage with small stuffed chairs on either side of the set and made it look like a bedroom.

The dialogue described characters and settings in various locations so we decided to shoot these characters as they were talked about. We shot these “silent scenes” in the studio. In addition we shot one exterior location in front of the director’s house and another interior at the home of one of the actors in the Great Neck area. These scenes were videotaped silently and played back over the dialogue as scripted. There was also a reference to a street urchin begging for coins in Rome, so we shot a young boy in front of a blue background and edited in a picture postcard of the Coliseum in Rome as the background. The two-character play became a seven-character play.

“Exit the Maven from Mott Haven,” by Milton Polsky, spotlighted an old man moving to a retirement home, after a lifetime in an apartment across the street from the Yankee Stadium. Reluctant to go, the old man reminisces longingly with his nephew, who is helping with the move, about the Yankee games they watched. The set was a table, a chair, and a standing lamp against a totally enclosed black velour drape except for a window that we built to hang on invisible wire a distance from the main action. We

planned a one camera shoot. We acquired Yankee ballgame footage and used a blue screen technique to edit in footage behind the old man of games with DiMaggio, Mantle, Berra, Ford, Martin and others. We occasionally went to the footage full screen. Marcelo Mendez, our technical coordinator, shot this production film-style in two days using a Steadicam and body mics. In editing, we added crowd sounds and the music of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame".

"New Playwrights is an example of public access television at its best. Professionals from the community are given a chance to experiment in ways the commercial theater never affords them and do it with class."

"Break a Leg," by Lucile Lichtblau, was a backstage dressing room story of two Shakespearean actors about to go on as Romeo and Juliet, a delightful romp back to the 17th century. We went to the Theatre Development Fund costume collection in NYC to choose appropriate costumes for our three actors. A member of the Great Neck Fire Department volunteered to build two large clothes racks which we dressed with extra costumes, hats and props. From pipes above we hung thick coils of scenery rope. I must confess the idea for the "backstage look" came from the Laurence Olivier movie "Henry V."

At nearby Hofstra University there is a replica of the Shakespearean Globe Theater that would be our "location shot". We obtained permission to videotape the miniature model for use over opening and closing credits. With crowd sounds, applause, and 17th century music it worked wonderfully.

SB: Our productions began to get positive feedback from other access organizations and the New York University Tisch School of the Arts. Professor George Stoney showcases our programs as he lectures to community groups nationwide. "*New Playwrights* is an example of public access television at its best," he says. "Professionals from the community are given a chance to experiment in ways the commercial theater never affords them and do it with class.

I am repeatedly amazed when I see the work of PATV's *New Playwrights*. They maintain thoroughly professional standards while working in limited space and with limited technical support. Here is proof positive that non-commercial, community-

run television need not be second rate."

On a county level, we were the recipients of a NYSCA grant from Nassau Grants for the Arts. The community liaison, Polly Whitehorn, also a community resident, was very interested in having a copy of this current production sent to our local high school's English class that was studying Shakespeare. She had seen the production at the *New Playwrights* Showcase and felt that the detail in the period elements was an excellent example of Shakespearean productions. The class used this *New Playwrights* production to discuss aspects of Shakespearean theater including the fact that men played all the parts.

NH: In 2002 Cablevision opened a new facility. We happily moved into this new complex of studios, offices, a green room, storage space and a conference room. The new studio for Public Access was more

than twice the size of the one we had been working in. This larger space opened new artistic possibilities for the *New Playwrights* productions. In addition, we were fortunate in having good contacts at NBC TV and we were able to acquire lighting units, set pieces and other equipment that were made available to us.



"Two Old Men Talking in a McDonalds in Plainview" by Albert Meglin, featuring Marvin Einhorn (l.) and Michael Rosenthal.

The first show we produced at the new studio was "Two Old Men Talking in a McDonalds in Plainview," by Albert Meglin. It concerned two elderly gentlemen who had lost their wives, one of them trying to convince the other to join a bereavement group.

With the cooperation of a local McDonalds franchisee, we obtained furniture, food and beverages. We set up a number of tables and added background customers to the production. This production was shot as a three-camera line shoot with pickups and inserts at the end of taping. We also went on location, to the franchisee's restaurant in Nassau County, Long Island, N.Y. for the opening and closing shots.

"Waiter, There's a Writer in My Soup," by Martin Russell was, according to the author, a "quirky" play. A man and a woman are seated at single tables in the foreground of a coffee bar and a waiter, who is an integral part of the script, serves them. We filled the background with other tables and a number of background customers. The set was the

usual black velour cyc that encircled the tables and chairs with a long bar in the background that served as a coffee bar for the waiter. The name of the establishment was played against the black velour with a cut out in a Leko lighting unit. There were also circles of light on all the table areas upstage. Part of the "quirky" script called for the man at the table, adjacent to the woman, to ask the question, "and who are you?" Her responses were written as if different characters responded to the question. We decided to answer the man's questions with the original dialogue but with a change of costume for the woman each time she answered.

We shot the entire play as a three-camera line shoot one day and did the woman's answers, in costume in limbo setting, the next day. In editing we replaced her from the line shoot with the limbo shots. The woman's character changed each time, as did her costume.

The author lives in California so we arranged with the public access station, Access San Francisco, to videotape him in their studio answering questions that our



Rehearsal of "Let's Dance" by Brenda Shoshanna with actors Lynn Laurence and Greg Horton.

received additional grants from Astoria Federal Savings and New York State Council on the Arts to aid in the cost for production, outreach and distribution.

NH: "Cool Reception," by Mitch Coleman, spotlighted a middle-aged couple sitting at a table during a wedding reception observing and commenting

on the bride and groom at the other end of the room. They are reminded of their own marriage and its ups and downs.

SB: During this production we added patrons at a restaurant and called upon some of our volunteers to be part of the production. They were eager to help, feeling that this was a local way of supporting the arts. When our volunteers were not involved in the actual taping they would help us out with the catering for our cast and crew. Since the production days were long, we needed all the help we could get to facilitate the completion of shooting.

This was the first time PATV partnered with another access center for *New Playwrights*. At this time PATV was receiving over 65 scripts from all over the USA and even one from England. The knowledge that other access centers would assist us by taping the author interview segment enabled us to consider scripts from all parts of the country. PATV

Since the author lives in Michigan, we arranged with the public-access station in Grand Rapids (GRCTV) to tape the author who was sent questions, using the same format as we did for the San Francisco interview.

"Let's Dance," by Brenda Shoshanna, was about a couple meeting in a singles bar. It turns out that they knew one another from the old days, when they were kids in Brighton Beach. Painfully they find a way to re-connect.

SB: When Norman told me that he needed 20 extras for the dance club and they had to dance, I was stymied. We held an open call for auditions and we had a few "dancers" come down. The problem was with the weekend commitment and our marathon shooting schedule – 10 hour days. When you are working with professional actors who are volunteering their time, you better get it done in one day.

I decided to contact local colleges and was surprised when the US Merchant Marine Academy, at Kings Point, NY, responded that they had a ballroom dance club and they would be happy to participate. Not only could they dance; they were happy to get a chance to show their stuff. Recreating a dance club including a bar and plenty of patrons and dancers proved our most challenging production.

New Playwrights is now in syndication, with the entire series on public access channels in the five boroughs of NYC, as well as in Larchmont and Mamaroneck in Westchester County, all of Nassau County, Western Suffolk and Easthampton on Long Island. Finally, in order to answer many of the production questions from public access organizations, we will

produce a documentary on the making of our current play, "Seems Like Old Times", by Lucile Lichtblau.

We are gratified by the success of this enterprise. Perhaps the biggest surprise is that we have already received more than 150 scripts, a record number, for consideration for next year's productions.

"*New Playwrights* is the only program of its kind," said one viewer. "It is a fresh, commercial-free series of original theatrical productions outside the mainstream of corporate productions. As such, it provides exposure for original and talented but unknown playwrights, as well as excellent entertainment for those of us lucky enough to be plugged in!"

For further information about the *New Playwrights* project, both Shirley Ann Bruno and Norman Hall can be reached at pachannel@aol.com or 516-629-3710 ext. 12. Also on the Public Access TV website (www.patv.org) there is a link to *New Playwrights*.

Working on the Dark Side

The candid backstage confessions of former New York State Governor Hugh Carey's press officer.

By William F. Snyder

My career in broadcasting began in 1957 when a chance audition over the phone landed me a weekend news job on WNDR-AM in Syracuse, New York, one of that market's first "pace" radio stations—lots of jingles and noise and, of course, Top-40 tunes. An impressionable teenager, I "ripped and read" the headlines, introduced by a powerful news open (Man, it was cool!) and goaded by my weekend DJ mentor to read it fast and hard. At the time, I had no understanding of journalism or reporting—I was on the RADIO! And I chose Bill Fortune (my real middle name), as my on-the-air moniker, to which I still answer when someone recalls my broadcast adventures.

News was always on the periphery of my disc jockeying through the 60's, when I spun 45's at WHOL-AM in Allentown, PA and later at WHEN-AM back in Syracuse. At one point, I caught the early-morning news assignment at WHEN, rewriting local stories from the newspaper and trying to come up with stories of my own over the phone—usually without success. With no formal

training and spotty coaching from the news director, my sense of journalism was, well, improvisational. There's a newscast on the hour and half-hour and you need to fill three minutes. And read the commercial.

Later, for airing my choice of music rather than from the station's playlist, I was dismissed. I was lucky enough to be in a market where the public (then educational) TV station was starting up and looking for a program manager—cheap. Out of work (boy, did I come cheap!) and with some broadcast experience, I was hired. WCNY-TV went on the air Christmas week of 1965, but after a year, it became clear I wasn't a television programming whiz. With management's encouragement, I decided to look elsewhere for my next career opportunity.

I applied for a reporter's job at the Syracuse *Herald Journal*. I submitted a writing sample, was hired and promptly assigned to the obit desk. In those days, obituaries were actually written and edited by the newspaper. It was serious journalism. Shortly thereafter, a couple of reporters bolted from the city desk



The author in Audio Information Service studio, 1980.

and I was thrown onto the street as a general-assignment reporter. The city editor, Joe Ganley, was my journalism professor: Two sources. Three is better. Attribute everything. Check, double check. Fairness. Balance. Accuracy. And get it done on deadline, this is a daily newspaper, dammit!

Now I felt equipped to be a journalist.

Seeking to legitimize my decade of practical experience in broadcast and print, I entered college at the State University of New York in Albany. I stayed in the business on weekends at WRGB-TV in Schenectady, producing and editing the local news and, later, reporting and anchoring. After graduation, I took on the 11 pm anchor assignment at a time when broadcast journalism was legitimate, even revered. And credible. Yes, this was a long time ago.

As producer, editor and anchor of an

11 pm newscast seen by about a million people each night, there was a palpable weight of responsibility attached to covering, editing and reporting each and every story. But, in the mid-70's when my "numbers skewed old," the management decided to move me from the anchor chair to the street. I asked for the Capitol beat.

New York politics was and is a good story. The elaborate Victorian architecture of the Capitol building, the grand chambers of the State Legislature and the hushed halls of the Executive Chamber could impress the most nonchalant reporter, and the people who worked there, even post-Watergate, seemed to have some measure of dignity and altruism. At least, that's how it seemed from the outside, but always with a dose of skepticism. Covering the Capitol was still honorable work. There were occasional

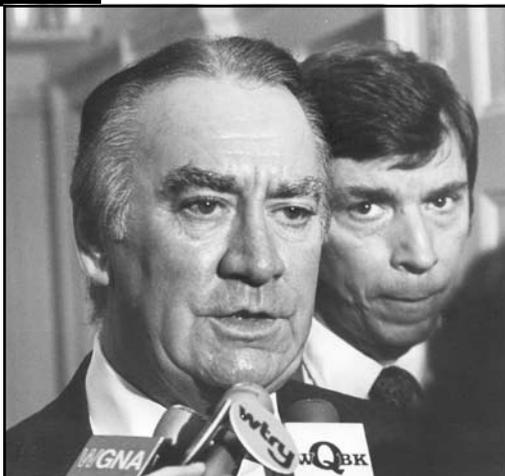
plum assignments, like the one that put me on Air Force One for an exclusive interview with then-Vice President and former New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller.

Brooklyn Congressman Hugh L. Carey came to the New York Statehouse in 1975, a recent widower arriving with his gaggle of children (a dozen!), who moved with abandon into the Executive Mansion. He was a colorful guy. "Run for governor," Carey once advised a would-be candidate, "It comes with a house." But the day he walked in the door, the New York City fiscal crisis fell on him. In his first "State of the State" Address he warned, "The days of wine and roses are over."

The whirlwind of saving New York City from bankruptcy was a great story to cover from an upstate perspective. City Democrat Carey faced determined opposition from the upstate Republican majority in the New York State Senate, led by an imperious politician from Binghamton. After the federal government refused to help and President Gerald Ford's famous quote, "Ford to City: Drop Dead!" appeared on the front page of the *New York Daily News*, Carey convinced the upstate Senate and downstate investment bankers and union leaders to do the right thing and got the U.S. Congress to guarantee new bonds to cover the City's debt.

The quest for ratings by appealing to the broadest audience resulted in the dumbing down of state-government news to the point where I felt it was no longer responsible journalism.

Beyond upstate-downstate prejudices, my stories about the New York City fiscal



Snyder with Gov. Hugh L. Carey as he speaks to reporters, 1982.

crisis were subject to the growing pressures to make TV news more accessible and entertaining. Believe me, as important as its work is, the Legislature will probably never be fodder for reality TV. The occasional story suggestions from the sales side of the house were disconcerting and sometimes unethical, I thought. The quest for ratings by appealing to the broadest audience resulted in the dumbing down of state-government news to the point where I felt it was no longer responsible journalism.

After nine years with the Capital District's most respected and venerable TV station, it was time to move on. WHERE I moved surprised everyone.

Hugh Carey was fun to cover. His quips and intelligence were refreshing, his political intuition was brilliant and his style of governing was inspired. He was the right man at the right time for New York. I respected him and I entertained thoughts

of working with him. On my beat at the Capitol, I had come to know some of his

staffers and his deputy press secretary, Howard Clark (a former Associated Press Albany bureau chief), quietly asked if I'd be interested in joining Carey's press operation. Press Secretary Jim Vlasto interviewed me and decided it would be a good idea to have a broadcast guy in the press office for the 1978 re-election campaign. So, after a disconcertingly penetrating interview with Carey in the fall of '77, the Governor approved my hiring and I went over to the "dark side."

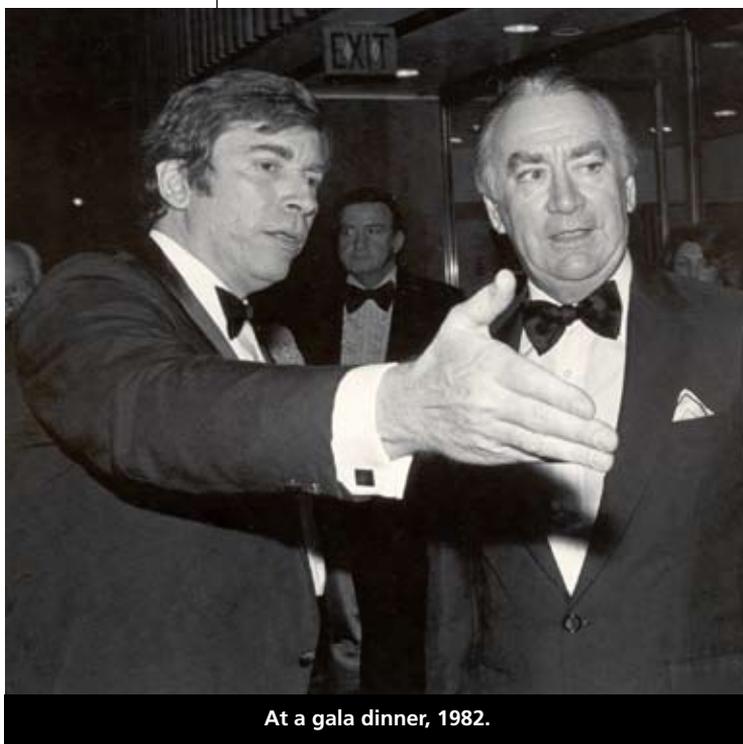
"Why would you want to be a 'flack,'" my news director complained, "a mouthpiece for a damn politician?" Many of my colleagues were puzzled by my defection. Some stopped talking to me. I was a little surprised by the assumption that I could no longer be trusted to tell the truth. I was reassured on my first day on the job. I walked into a morning press conference where Governor Carey was being harangued by a vocal member of the Albany Legislative Correspondents Association (LCA) about free trips by members of his family on the State airplane. The issue had never come up before. Carey said he'd look into it. He soon reimbursed the State for hauling his kids around on State aircraft.

After some time

writing messages and proclamations (like sitting at the obit desk, only not as lively), I discovered there had never been a broadcast professional in the governor's press office—a "tonsil artist," as Howard Clark put it. Everything was print-oriented. The

daily clips were the bible. I proposed a radio feed setup, "The Executive Chamber Audio Information Service." I followed the Governor around and recorded his utterances and put them on the audio system to support the Administration's message. Radio newsrooms around the State got a placard with an "800" number to call for "actualities" of Governor Carey. Not surprisingly, business was brisk since few radio stations outside of Albany could afford Capitol coverage. E.J. Dionne of

"Why would you want to be a 'flack,'" my news director complained, "a mouthpiece for a damn politician?"



At a gala dinner, 1982.

The New York Times and others tried to write negative pieces, but could only find one radio news director to sniff, “We get our own stuff.”

Carey’s press office was said to have had a revolving door, as a parade of short-lived press secretaries and directors of communications moved in and out of the office next to the Governor’s with alarming regularity. Carey, demanding and quick to criticize, was tough to work for. During one of the press office personnel shifts, I found myself in the role of principal “official” press officer on the road with Hugh Carey in the 1978 gubernatorial campaign. There was a campaign press guy who handed out the campaign press releases, and me, handing out the gubernatorial grist. Reporters would sneer and grumble about the advantages of incumbency. I asked if they would have every incumbent resign their office in order to run again.

During the campaign, criticism of the Audio Information Service grew louder. Charges of “managing the news” emerged, on top of questions about the appropriateness—even the legality—of using State resources to get Hugh Carey on the radio. At one point, I asked an especially obnoxious reporter (a role I never played, of course) if he would have us hire the Associated Press to write our press releases or if it was okay for us to buy and use typewriters for our press releases. What was the difference in using a tape recorder and the telephone to get the Governor’s message out? As I remember, there wasn’t a good answer.

In January of the election year, the Governor’s Office, upon my suggestion, assumed responsibility for the television production of his “State of the State”

address, relieving public TV of that chore, which they relinquished (surprisingly, I thought) without protest. I had pointed out to the Governor and his senior advisors that the “State of the State” was our show and we should decide on how it was produced and presented. Later, we also assumed control of the Governor’s executive budget presentation. To this day, official television coverage of both events is still produced by the Governor’s Office.

The Irish flair for poetry and hyperbole was never in short supply when Hugh Carey was around.

In March of 1981, our effort to bypass the LCA and its reporters to go directly to a radio audience was sorely tested. Governor Carey, bristling at what he thought were politically motivated and exaggerated claims of toxic contamination at the State Office Building in Binghamton, proclaimed he’d “drink a glass of PCB’s and run a mile afterwards!” The Irish flair for poetry and hyperbole was never in short supply when Hugh Carey was around. The press corps whooped and ran to their cubicles to write their stories with obvious relish. I told Carey’s senior staff we had to put it on the audio service if we were to have any credibility. At least the quote would be surrounded by some context, for what it was worth. They all disagreed and regarded me as a little crazy, but I put it on. No, it didn’t change the story and its intimation that the chief executive of the State was, well, not afraid to speak his mind. But the audio service continued to peddle our material to maybe even more radio stations statewide.

Around the same time, I began to plan occasional video news feeds of

gubernatorial goings-on in addition to video of press conferences, which had been distributed by the State University's New York Network (NYN) to public TV stations around the State and then passed around to the commercial stations in each market. It was a practice that went back to NYN's founding in 1967, which allowed then-Governor Nelson Rockefeller to be seen on local TV news programs statewide.

We managed to accomplish a couple of other-than-press conference feeds but fell on hard times when a prayer breakfast at the Executive Mansion was announced to the press, but no one came. (Cocktail receptions, on the other hand, usually drew a full house.) It left our "official" camera as the only one there, so we went ahead and edited a package and sent out a feed. We were pummeled by reporters and columnists for blatant news management and nefarious publicity peddling despite the fact it was coverage of an announced event overlooked by the entire Capitol press corps. Carey's staff decided we should lay low on the TV stuff.

Near the end of his second term in 1982, Governor Carey announced he would not run, so I concluded my first public-service experience—without regret—and a sense that I had been in the presence of greatness. I have enduring respect for Hugh L. Carey.

Carey was succeeded by Mario M. Cuomo. I produced the television coverage of Cuomo's Inauguration and his first "State of the State" address and was sent out to the agency pastures, but recalled for the "State of the State" each year. Cuomo was a good speaker but seemed less interested in electronic



Snyder with Gov. Mario M. Cuomo at a "State of the State" rehearsal, 1985.

communication. The audio service persisted, but despite the presence of later-to-be-NBC's Tim Russert as Cuomo's first press secretary, expanded TV coverage by the Governor's Office did not materialize.

Finally, in 1985, I came to my present assignment as the director of the State University's New York Network (NYN). Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., the SUNY Chancellor, wanted to leverage the Network for University purposes and challenged me to reinvent the aging interconnect of New York's public TV stations. We created "SUNYSAT," a Ku band satellite network to replace the terrestrial PBS interconnect, which also provided a gateway to all 64 SUNY campuses.

As it turned out, NYN and SUNYSAT also provided a gateway to every TV news organization. We found ourselves in service to the major networks to provide "talk backs" with newsmakers who happened to be in the Albany area. It was, coincidentally, a convenient way to

get Governor Cuomo on ABC's *Nightline* and other network news programs.

When George Pataki came to the Statehouse in 1995, his Director of Communications, the formidable Zenia Mucha (now ABC/Disney's corporate spokesperson), erected what the LCA dubbed "Fort Pataki," in the form of a closed-door policy for the press. Previously, reporters could roam the halls of the Executive Chamber and drop into offices where a story might be mined. No more. The salty-tongued gubernatorial spokeswoman often responded to tough questions with only an epithet and the LCA was in an uproar. They wrote story after story about Mucha's abusive press-relations strategy—a story that quickly became repetitive and eventually inconsequential. And Zenia had 'em where she wanted 'em.

The recent attempts by the Bush administration to peddle video news releases (VNRs) as independent coverage and having broadcast commentators on the government payroll have sullied the legitimate profession.

The Pataki press office was the first to extensively use video to deliver the Administration's unfiltered message. A staff videographer was assigned and showed up at almost every gubernatorial event to record and then distribute picture and sound of the Governor to any willing TV station. To our knowledge, a scientific survey was never undertaken, but anecdotal reports from various New York TV markets indicated Pataki WAS getting more screen time. And the radio service was still there, but on line!

The New York State government communications saga over the past three decades provides a useful model in a discussion of contemporary government "flackery," and how initially earnest efforts to communicate as a government have been distorted. The recent attempts by the Bush Administration to peddle video news releases (VNRs) as independent coverage and having broadcast commentators on the government payroll have sullied the legitimate profession. John Pavlik's article "Disguised as News?" in the Spring 2006 issue of *Television Quarterly*, documents the pervasive influence of VNR's in TV news and sounds the alarm for news directors and reporters everywhere.

Every news director and desk editor and reporter I've known have instinctively regarded government communications as illegitimate and untrustworthy,

although there are many professional government communicators—of every political stripe—who have some measure of altruism and do their jobs with integrity.

"Don't ever lie to me," an AP reporter once said to me, "and I might believe what you say

is true." I never lied. I may have spun (although we didn't call it that then), but I never lied. "Spin doctors" try to guide reporters' impressions of their client's position or statement from a negative to a more positive view. Liars, on the other hand, simply peddle untruths. When government communications—in any medium—are a lie, an important bridge to the public is damaged or destroyed. Voters should know what their elected officials are saying and doing. But, reporters and editors, no matter how independent,

bring their personal experience to every story, which colors the message of the first person. As Tom Lewis, my speechwriter colleague in the Carey Press Office once observed, “Reporters’ hands aren’t clean either.”

“Print what he means, not what he says,” a flack for a less-than-articulate politician once admonished. In that case, the journalist’s job would be to not only discover what was meant. Inevitably, interpretation creeps in. That is when public trust in the profession is all the more important.

As the internet provides more and more information from more and more independent sources and as the younger demographic begins to prefer political satire (*The Daily Show*) to the nightly news programs, the challenge for the government communicator becomes even more interesting. The professional government communicators we call “flacks” (not a term of endearment among the press) can post their own unadulterated material on the web—in the “blogosphere”—and hope that it’s taken for gospel truth. On the other hand, they must counter misinformation or outright

lies about their client or program. Like any other effort to cut through the clutter, the government communicator can feel forced to sensationalize the message just to get it heard.

“Crooked politicians,” my father-in-law used to mutter, “never tell the truth.” If the government communicator has to start with an untruth, the popular belief that all politicians are crooks seems proven and justified.

It remains, however, that it is a government’s responsibility to communicate, using all media and professional practitioners to deliver its message.

We can hope, however, that government of, by and for the people might once again emerge out of a dark era that was revealed in Watergate and has persisted to the present. Things will change only if reporters are themselves diligent and honest and are supported by their editors. Things will change further if honest reporting keeps government communicators honest and exposes dishonesty when it is discovered.

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William Fortune Snyder is the Executive Director of the New York Network/SUNYSAT in Albany and served as a press officer to Governor Hugh L. Carey from 1977-82, concluding his appointment as Director of Communications. He is a Trustee of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (NATAS) and a Regional Vice President in the New York Chapter of NATAS.

What's So Funny?

A veteran television comedy writer reveals how he learned his trade. | **By Earl Pomerantz**

I never studied comedy formally, but I studied it informally all my life. From the earliest age, I noticed funny things. Like the waiter in a restaurant our family frequented. Because he brought out the orders on a tray balanced on his right shoulder, his head was permanently tilted to the left. Even without the tray, his head remained frozen at a forty-five degree angle. He'd be taking our order, and his head would be "over there." It's like he was thinking, "The tray'll be back; why bother straightening my head?" More likely, it was a work-related condition, like carpal tunnel, only in his neck. Whatever the reason, it was funny, and I caught it. These observational skills seemed to set me apart. It's like there was this comedy dog whistle and I was one of lucky ones who could hear it.

Sometimes my comedy sense got me in trouble. An example from high school: It's 1962; I'm in tenth grade history class. Our teacher was a dark-haired fellow who came close to having an actor's good looks but not close enough, so he wound up a teacher. Mr. Not-Quite-An-Actor was a very serious fellow. And we're talking about my hometown of Toronto, in Canada, where everybody's serious, so "very serious" means extremely serious.

Our class is discussing the population problem and how in some countries, like

China, there are too many people and in other countries, like Canada, there are too few. A student suggests, as a solution, transporting ten million Chinese people to Canada. To that, Mr. Not-Quite-An-Actor replies, "If we brought ten million Chinese people to Canada, it would change the complexion of the entire country."

He says that seriously. For him, "change the complexion" refers to the "essential nature" of the country. I hear it the other way, and laugh real loud. An explosive, honking "Ha!" No other person in the class laughs. Next thing I know, I'm on my way to the principal's office.

Real life was a goldmine for observed comedy. But the greatest influence on me, by far, was television. Mine was the first television generation; "the box" was the Baby Boomers' iPod. There were other influences, of course. Early radio offered lessons in timing – the silence-filled pauses in radio comedies were often the shows' funniest moments. In movies, Danny Kaye's "The Court Jester" left me awestruck by its ability to draw laughter from a wide range of comic techniques – verbal comedy, physical comedy, hilarious plot twists and tongue-twisty songs. Herb Gardner's Broadway comedy of social rebellion, "A Thousand Clowns," memorably proved you could

be smart and funny at the same time. Although I was not a great reader, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, with its pitch-perfect reproduction of wartime insanity, and the dark surreality in the stories of Bruce Jay Friedman demonstrated the hilarious possibilities of comedy on the edge. But, with a grateful acknowledgement to other influences, hands down, television was the greatest teacher of all.

(Parenthetically—hence, the brackets—I remember having a “Wizard of Oz”-like experience when I went from watching this Saturday night comedy about a single woman who's gonna make it after all to becoming a member of the writing staff of that very same show. When that occurred it felt like, after years of television watching, I had suddenly gotten up, stepped through the screen, and was now happily situated on the other side.)

The favored comedies of my youth molded my taste, style and judgment for the rest of my creative life.

As a kid, I watched everything; admittedly “everything” was a lot less than it is today. There were three American channels, plus a Canadian channel, which generally featured the news, French-Canadian sitcoms and documentaries on the migratory habits of the Canada goose, so I didn't watch much of that. Though I was an indiscriminating viewer — primarily because I loved television but also because it was usually too cold to go outside — I still had my favorites. Those were the comedies. It would be no overstatement to assert that the favored comedies of my youth molded my taste, style and judgment for the rest of my creative life.

As if more evidence of my televising

geekdom were required, I retain in my possession a collection of TV Guide preview issues going back to 1957, all of them in sequence, except I'm missing four. That's still a lot of issues. I will draw on their listings to contrast examples of the comedies I admired with others I watched but enjoyed less. My preference has always been for comedy in which believable characters responded to identifiable situations rather than shows featuring contrived storylines and a barrage of jokes. Joke writing is not my forte. I can write them when I'm in a room full of joke writers and the testosterone's flowing, but it's not my natural way to write.

I have, on occasion, been criticized and penalized financially for not writing jokes. Unfair, yet understandable. Jokes are the meat and potatoes of comedy;

it's what most people, including professionals, consider comedy to be. Some writers have shown, however, that you can get laughs from

non-joke-style comedy. The style may be more dangerous, because it takes a little more work from the audience than jokes, which simply rain down on you, but the rewards can be huge. It's also, at least to me, more gratifying, because the audience, with their participation, is in there with you.

In the fifties, my favorite comedy was *Sergeant Bilko*. The show had different titles but that's how I remember it. *Bilko* was centered on a motor-pool platoon headed by Lifer (portrayed by Phil Silvers) who spent his time ignoring army work in favor of coming up with a never-ending series of “get rich quick” schemes, none of which ultimately succeeded. The stories were deeply rooted in the characters of

the show, and even when the scriptwriters “went big,” meaning beyond the realm of everyday experience, as in the episode where, through an administrative snafu, they inducted a monkey into the army, the issue was handled with such step-by-step credibility you could believe – and this is what made it so funny – that this incredible situation could actually occur. Around the same time *Bilko* was on the air, another offering was *The Milton Berle Show*, where a man dressed in outrageous costumes and was weekly whacked in the face with a giant power puff. Both shows were enormously popular, but only *Bilko* hit the spot.

The sixties brought *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, a true-to-life comedy showing us the domestic and working world of the head writer on a network variety show. The series pilot revolved around the mother’s concern that her son was ill, her evidence being that the boy refused to eat his cupcake. The story resonated; it felt identifiably real, though being comedy people, the writers hedged their bets by injecting the funny word “cupcake”, which has two “k” sounds in it and everyone knows “k” words are funny. It wasn’t he “refused to eat his hot dog.” In the show’s work arena, though a lot of corny jokes were flying around – totally appropriate to the comedy-writing venue – the stories always felt as if they’d been taken from a writer’s actual experience. In one story, the head writer is retained to develop a nightclub act for the talent-deprived nephew of a dangerous gangster. The episode was hilarious, but more importantly, you got the powerful feeling

that at some point in history, a similar situation had actually taken place. While *The Dick Van Dyke Show* was on the air, the competition included a talking horse, a Martian, a show about identical cousins, and the prime-time adventures of a dangerously near-sighted cartoon character named Mr. McGoo.

For me, *The Ed Sullivan Show* was “school.” In our house, there were two choices. You could watch Ed Sullivan or you could go to bed. It was the most important entertainment program on television.

The seventies offered the aforementioned single woman who’s gonna make it after all, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, the program I stepped through the television screen to write for. By this time, most comedies were rooted in some level of reality, but the “Mary” show’s roots ran deeper, while others relied on “break-out” characters and calculating catch phrases like “Dynamite!” The problems of the single working woman and her neurotic pal Rhoda, played by Valerie Harper, felt achingly real and again, to me, funnier because of it. When considering some fattening item, Rhoda wonders whether to eat it or “apply it directed to my thighs,” a substantial segment of the audience knew exactly what she meant. You never heard a joke like that before.

Throughout the decades of my unofficial comedy apprenticeship, my passion, as mentioned, remained for honest comedy and I was indelibly influenced by the shows that displayed it. But if any program inspired me to consider a career in comedy, it was a show

that for 23 years delivered to my attention three or four comedians a week, *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

For me, *The Ed Sullivan Show* was “school.” Ironically, the show also meant school, because it was broadcast Sunday nights and, though you were caught up in the entertainment, you could feel Monday approaching like a runaway train. There was no avoiding the inevitable. It was *Ed Sullivan*, bedtime, school.

For my family, Sundays at eight, there was nothing else on the air. I heard about *The Steve Allen Show*, I heard about *Maverick*—the competition at the time—but I never saw them. In our house, there were two choices. You could watch Ed Sullivan or you could go to bed. Such were the days of the one-television household.

In its day, *The Ed Sullivan Show* was by far the most important entertainment program on television. Getting on meant not only access to a vast national audience, but the ultimate seal of approval. “Doing” *Sullivan* meant you were made. You also had it made. Advertisements for local appearances trumpeted, “Direct from *The Ed Sullivan Show*,” even when you hadn’t appeared on it for years.

Ed Sullivan was a variety show in the truest sense of the word. It presented every type of act imaginable. Singers, from Elvis to opera, dancers, from tap to ballet, scenes from current Broadway shows, magicians, jugglers, acrobats, bicyclists, plate spinners, animal acts, the greatest performers from around the world. And, of course, my favorites, the people I’d sit patiently waiting for, the comedians.

Ed Sullivan, who introduced the acts, was not funny at all. In fact, he was kind of scary. Sullivan was a syndicated entertainment columnist and had no

performing ability whatsoever. He did have an inordinately stiff body, whose parts, including his stone-chiseled face, seemed incapable of making a natural, non-jerky movement. But Sullivan was the man who approved the acts. At this, he was an expert.

As with all the acts, the selected comedians were the best around. So every Sunday night, the audience was treated to performances by the funniest comedians from every conceivable genre. They were magnificent. Especially to a student of comedy.

Where to start. The older comedians. The incongruous Englishman, “Mr. Pastry,” whose purportedly solemn “Passing-Out Ceremony” involved this dignified fellow, in white tie and tails, leaping manically around on chairs. There was the homespun Sam Levenson who told stories about “Mama.” When he dropped a cooked chicken on the floor in front of “the company,” she instructed him to return the dropped chicken to the kitchen and come back with the “other” chicken. There were the specifically ethnic comedians, like the shiny-bald Myron Cohen, who told the story of Mrs. Shapiro and Mrs. Schwartz: when Mrs. Schwartz braggingly proclaims, “I’ve been to Europe three times,” to which Mrs. Shapiro coolly replies, “That’s nothing, I was born there.” There was the Danish comedian Victor Borge who admits, “When I first came to this country, there was this point after I’d been here a short time when I’d forgotten all my Danish but hadn’t learned any English.” And there was the yodel-voiced Pat Buttram who reported about a couple, “He was so bow-legged and she was so knock-kneed that when they walked down the street they spelled “Ox.”

Later, a new crop of comedians arrived.

Educated people. People who knew about Schopenhauer. People who had been in psychoanalysis. People who'd engaged in sex, or at least badly wanted to. The new comedy centered on relationships, questioning our institutions, the slights and irritations of everyday life. I can't relate their material as easily, because their performances were more extended scenes than individual jokes. A couple, played by Ann Meara, Irish, and Jerry Stiller, Jewish, meet and discover they grew up on the same street, but due to their differing ethnic affiliations, they have no common experiences whatsoever. Shelly Berman, playing an increasingly harried caller wishing to report a man about to jump from a building across the street from his office, is repeatedly placed on "Hold." Bob Newhart portrayed a skeptical recipient of a phone call from Sir Walter Raleigh explaining how to use his exciting new discovery: tobacco. (Holding an imaginary phone to his ear) "You shred it up...and put it in a piece of paper...roll it up...don't tell me, Walt,

don't tell me, you stick it in your ear, right?"

I can't possibly do justice to the hundreds of wonderful comedians who taught and entertained me those Sunday nights: the Jackie Masons; the Jackie Vernons; the Jackie Kahanes—and those are just the Jackies. My initial viewing of Abbott and Costello's "Who's On First" nearly caused my mother to call the paramedics because my uncontrollable laughter had made it scarily difficult for me to breathe. I was dying, but I didn't care. It was the funniest thing I'd ever seen.

Could I have been thinking, "Wouldn't it be great if I could make people laugh like that?" Or maybe just one person. A colleague of mine once said he went into comedy because he wanted to make his mother laugh, and to me, this is hardly an alien concept. My mother had a pretty tough life. Lightening her load, that would have been great.

I knew she liked comedy. I saw her watching *Ed Sullivan*.

A frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, Earl Pomerantz was executive producer of *The Cosby Show*. His comedy-writing credits include *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Cheers*. He has won two Emmy Awards, a Writers' Guild award, a Humanitas Prize and a Cable Ace award.

It Will Play in Peoria

How Jack Venza, public television's cultural-program chief, achieved success by never underestimating his audience. | By Greg Vitiello

When Jac Venza retired from his position as WNET's head of cultural programs in February 2005, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting awarded him the Ralph Lowell Medal as the "Impresario Creator" of public television's *Great Performances* series. The CPB Board's citation declared: "We celebrate his achievement in making the performing arts accessible to more Americans, and his belief in the taste and judgment of the American people. As he memorably said, 'If a program manager feels it won't play in Peoria, it's probably because he underestimates his audience.'"

Jac Venza never underestimated his audience. Growing up in Chicago as the son of Sicilian immigrants, he learned at an early age that the arts weren't the preserve of a gilded minority. "My family had never heard an opera or been to one," Venza recalls. "But when I developed my love of the arts, I quickly realized that you don't have to be raised in a family that listens to opera or plays Mozart's string quartets. That makes it all the more satisfying when you make works

accessible to people who don't have any other exposure to culture. And this is precisely what television can do."

In a career spanning almost 55 years, Venza was "Impresario Creator" (CPB's term, not mine) not only of *Great Performances* but of such respected public television series as *NET Playhouse*, *American Masters*, *Live from Lincoln Center*, *Dance in America*, *Theater in America*, and *Broadway: The American Musical*.

He started his television career as a set designer at CBS in the early 1950s. Over the next decade, he worked on a wide range of productions from dramas to variety shows and from game shows to the evening news. Though the period kicked off with such fine dramatic series as *Playhouse 90* and *Studio One*, the arts were becoming increasingly marginalized on television by the late 1950s and early 1960s.

"One of the early writers about television said it was rather like a duchess who had these fine jewels that she took out once or twice a year to show them off, then put them back in the vault," Venza remarks. "That meant that after you

did the *Nutcracker* and one symphonic program or a show on Andrew Wyeth, that was it; you felt good, you'd done it. But in fact, it was a time when the arts in America were thriving and defining their strength."

The one program that captured the nation's rich artistic climate was *Omnibus*, which ran for a decade on network television with backing from the Ford Foundation. "*Omnibus* proved that people would watch an intelligent program about the arts if you could get someone like Leonard Bernstein to talk about symphonic music or Agnes DeMille to put her wonderful energy and sense of excitement into her comments about dance," Venza recalls.

"But even though *Omnibus* was created by CBS, it was really for a fringe audience," he adds, "and the Ford Foundation finally decided that maybe they needed to create an alternate system in which you could deal with excellence." That "alternate system" was National Educational Television (NET), which Venza joined as a producer in 1964 after working for WGBH, Boston, on a series titled "A Time to Dance." Two years later, he became NET's first head of drama with responsibility for *NET Playhouse*.

NET's senior creative staff (which included vice president of programming Bill Kobin, director of cultural affairs Curtis Davis, and director of public affairs Don Dixon) faced the difficult challenge of producing five hours a week of quality programming on relatively modest budgets. The job was made more difficult because "educational television" (as public broadcasting was known at that time) comprised an odd *mélange* of stations, many of which typically served minuscule audiences. Venza tackled his portion of the job with acumen, knowing

that it was critical for *NET Playhouse* to gain cultural credibility within the artistic community.

"In my pioneering days as a set designer, I had learned how to produce prime-time quality programs," Venza says. "I knew that whatever we did had to be artistically impeccable so that the arts community and the audience would support it.

"What television lost with the demise of anthology series like *Playhouse 90* was the voice of the American playwright," Venza continues. "We decided to create a drama series distinctly different for public television by creating a dialogue with leading playwrights and directors. We asked such playwrights as Arthur Miller and Edward Albee about how they'd like to see their work produced. When we did these productions, we brought together the director who'd conceived it for the theater with a television-experienced director like Kirk Browning to collaborate on how it should be shot and paced and what things might be altered for this close-up medium." Miller collaborated on two works for *NET Playhouse*: his adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" and his one-act play, "A Memory of Two Mondays" (in which I made my debut in an uncredited cameo).

Another way in which *NET Playhouse* distinguished itself was by joining up with the non-profit community of theaters, many of which were supported by foundations or had grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. During its first seasons, *NET Playhouse* worked with such companies as the American Conservatory Theatre of San Francisco in the premiere of Ed Sherin's "Glory! Hallelujah!"; the Boston Theatre Company in "A Celebration for William Jennings Bryan"; and the Yale Repertory

Company, a professional company working in unison with a student troupe, in Paul Silas' "Story Theatre." *NET Playhouse* also achieved a coup when it produced the American Place Theatre's production of Ronald Ribman's "The Journey of the Fifth Horse," with the previously unknown actor Dustin Hoffman.

"If cameras were going to be in the right place for soap operas, they could damn well be in the right place for Tennessee Williams."

To ensure the best technical productions, the NET team filmed most of the dramas in studios rather than theaters. "We didn't take cameras into the theaters because we couldn't control where they'd be located," Venza explains. "If cameras were going to be in the right place for soap operas, they could damn well be in the right place for Tennessee Williams or Shakespeare."

Venza continues, "Another drama initiative never seen on the network was long-term series based on important novels and historical personalities. Our first experiment at NET was the BBC productions of John Galsworthy's 'The Forsyte Saga.' It was impeccably produced. And because the BBC hour actually ran for just 52 minutes, we introduced a host to tell viewers more about the work. For that production, we hired John Gielgud."

In subsequent years when WGBH, Boston presented *Masterpiece Theatre*, Alistaire Cooke (and later Russell Baker) appeared as host.

Over the years, each drama season under Venza's guidance included a wide range of commissioned literary adaptations, from Paul Gallico's

"Verna: USO Girl" with Sissy Spacek to adaptations of three stories by John Cheever to Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited," which launched the career of Jeremy Irons.

NET Playhouse continued until 1972 when NET merged with New York public television WNDT to become WNET/Channel 13. Venza became WNET's head of cultural-affairs programs. At that time, he recalls, "We decided to unify the arts through a series called *NET Playhouse* that would allow us to pursue

new projects. Under this umbrella, we produced *Theater in America*, *Dance in America*, and *Music in America*, which also included *Live from Lincoln Center*."

With continuing support from Exxon Corp., the weekly presence of *Great Performances* enabled Venza to create a dance unit under Merril Brockway's leadership and a music department headed by David Griffiths. Venza continued to head the drama initiatives until he was able to persuade Lindsay Law, whose television career had begun at *NET Playhouse*, to return and head the expanded drama production unit.

"It was no secret that I always favored dance and was particularly proud of our ability to influence George Balanchine's interest in television," says Venza. "Over a span of 12 programs, *Dance in America* set up a collaborative style of carefully planned studio productions that allowed Balanchine to choose the ballets and dancers he thought were best suited for the camera. At one point, he came to us and said he wanted us to do 'L'enfant et les sortilèges,' a Ravel opera based on a story by Colette. Balanchine said, 'I did it with Diaghelev and it's a very funny work, in

which people become trees and furniture. And I realized that with television we can do it better.' The visual designs included puppetry and special effects by Kermit Love in some of the nightmarish scenes when trees, figures from the wallpaper and furniture all come to life. Balanchine actually said that our version surpassed the one he'd done in Paris for Diaghlev.

"My only frustration was that Jackie Onassis' plans for a children's art book based on our ballet didn't work out," Venza continues. "I remember fondly the creative meetings with Jackie, who loved the Balanchine company."

A similar collaborative success involved the choreographer Paul Taylor. "At first he hated the idea that during the studio taping, his dancers would be out of his control," Venza says. "But one day in the control room, when we were working on one of his very dark pieces and the dancers were falling in a great heap of bodies, he suddenly realized that the work on camera could be very different. Eventually the programs we did with Taylor became much more like films."

This was a time when American dance was bursting with creativity. Venza recalls fondly a program for *Dance in America* "of very American works that had been created by Twyla Tharp for Mikhail Baryshnikov. They even included a ballet in which Misha [Baryshnikov] danced Sinatra songs." This series explored American dance from "The Trailblazers of Modern Dance" to the Native American Dance Theater and from four Alvin Ailey programs to a survey of contemporary tap dancing with Gregory Hines.

The pattern of collaboration included younger artists who had grown up with the television medium. "The new artists began to be responsive to us because they had seen the quality of our work and it



Jac Venza (right) with George Balanchine in the late 1970s



with Baryshnikov in 1984



and with Lee Remick as "Jennie" in 1975.

took much less convincing than with the pioneer artists of the 1970s,” says Venza.

He cites the example of the late playwright Wendy Wasserstein. “We were trying to get a greater sense of what young people in the arts were doing, and we were attracted to her first play, ‘Uncommon Women ... and

Others,’ which was about the ability of young women to have a new role in America,” Venza says. “Just a few days remained of the Phoenix Theater’s production of ‘Uncommon Women’ at Marymount College and Wendy was impressed that we wanted to do the play, retaining the young actors who had collaborated on it. We planned to use the existing cast until Wendy learned that Glenn Close wouldn’t be available because she was going into a Broadway musical with Rex Harrison. But, she said, ‘It’s okay because my school friend Meryl Streep is available to come and do it.’”

Wasserstein also played a creative role in one of Venza’s favorite shows: the 20th anniversary of *Great Performances*. “It was a time when the National Endowment for the Arts was under attack, and so I asked a group of leading theater artists if they would do short pieces—a kind of variety show—about why a particular art form was important,” Venza explains. “Wendy wrote a wonderful short play about three generations of actresses—a woman, her daughter, and her granddaughter—played by Nancy Marchand, Blythe Danner and Cynthia Nixon. Terrence McNally, a great lover of opera, wrote a short play set backstage at an opera company as a terrified young standby soprano, played by Bernadette Peters, prepared for her

first performance as Tosca. And Annie Leibovitz did her first film – a film about dance movement with Baryshnikov and Twyla Tharp.”

“With the new lenses and light-sensitive equipment we were able to tape in theaters with relatively little disturbance to the paying audiences and a greater collaboration among the technicians.”

At the same time that WNET was featuring important playwrights’ voices and major works of literature, the Venza team was presenting works that brought American history and its seminal personalities to life. “One of our most ambitious production challenges was the series on John Adams – *The Adams Chronicles* – which we produced for the nation’s bicentennial.”

Live broadcasts took a back seat to filmed performances until 1976 when WNET embarked on a collaboration with New York’s Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. The ensuing series, *Live from Lincoln Center* (which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year), was created by John Goberman, and it owed its success to technological breakthroughs. “With the new lenses and light-sensitive equipment, we were able to tape in theaters with relatively little disturbance to the paying audiences and a greater collaboration among the technicians of opera and ballet,” says Venza. “Doing ‘La Boheme’ in a studio, which is the only way it had been done in the early network productions, was intimate but it wasn’t as attractive to the opera-loving audience as being able to attend a Met or Covent Garden or La Scala opera performance free with the best seat in the house. We began this experiment. It meant questioning

how, without compromising the integrity of these works, we could create a new way that the background information was presented for our new opera audience without losing our knowledgeable opera goers.

“To accommodate the audience that was new to opera, I proposed doing a plot summary at the beginning of each scene. Then I came up with the idea of subtitles so that the audience could follow the dialogue. Some people said opera lovers would hate it. But it turned out to be one of our greatest successes. It was the opera lovers who loved it most of all. They realized that without changing the language – and, say, doing an opera in English – they could hear the music as they loved it and, for the first time, know exactly what was being sung.”

When Giacchino Rossini’s “The Barber of Seville” was produced during the initial season of *Live from Lincoln Center*, it was the first opera with subtitles ever shown on American television. [For more on *Live from Lincoln Center*, see “Backstage Secrets at Lincoln Center” in this publication’s Fall 2005 issue.]

While the performing arts continue to be a focal area for WNET, the station has also excelled at interweaving documentary commentary along with various creative forms. “We did a program with Miles Davis in which we interviewed him and juxtaposed his words with the best of his early filmed performances,” says Venza. “This way you could have an intimate and revealing exposure to an artist while seeing the sweep of that artist’s career. We did similar programs in this form about Agnes DeMille, Bob Fosse, Maria Callas and Julie Andrews.”

In 1986, WNET began a new documentary series of artists’ biographies titled *American Masters* under Susan

Lacy’s leadership. “We realized that these programs could be the definitive documentaries about artists,” says Venza. “As documents, they were as carefully researched as the best published biography of a creative person. And if the artist had died recently, our biographies enabled people who had worked with him or her to add their personal perspectives.” Over the past 20 years, more than 100 artists have been featured on *American Masters*, including such totemic figures as Charlie Chaplin, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Martha Graham, Lena Horne, Georgia O’Keeffe and Eugene O’Neill.

“We were moving more and more from just showing a performance in favor of an in-depth portrayal of artists and art forms,” Venza continues. “That also meant dealing with how art is a reflection of culture or history.”

WNET took this in-depth approach in a nine-program series called *Dancing* created by Rhoda Grauer that showed the different ways that dance reflects society. “In our program on dance and religion, we involved anthropologists and sociologists to explore how dance was considered immoral in puritanical societies like America, while in various societies across Africa and India, religion was expressed through dance,” says Venza. “For the courts of St. Petersburg and Java, dance was an expression of power or prestige.”

Venza continues, “Over the years, I was proud of having created a team of leading producers who were as passionate about the arts as I am – Judy Kindberg in dance, Margaret Smilow in documentaries, and David Horn in music.

“That was joyous for someone like myself because by staying on, each year there was a new project, a new challenge. There was something fresh to do.” As his coda, Venza chose a series on the history of

American musical theater. This ambitious collaboration with the series creator Michael Kantor took 10 years to fund, research, write and obtain the complicated rights to a century of Broadway musicals. The station already had a long-standing relationship with the estates of Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein and George and Ira Gershwin based on the production of earlier tributes in which top Broadway stars performed songs of these composers. “The ability to get representatives of those estates in the same place and trust us with the rights was one of the big contributions that we were able to bring to that project.”

After several programs in which

Julie Andrews performed Broadway music, including her final show, “Victor Victoria,” she had hosted a number of these *Great Performances* tributes to the music of Broadway. “So Julie was the perfect Broadway spokesperson to host this extraordinary chronicle of how Broadway created one of America’s great art forms – the musical,” says Venza.

“Because those programs touched on so many music specials that we had created over the last 30 years, I really enjoyed that project – going out with a big song.”

Surely it could be heard all the way to Peoria – or to the Chicago neighborhood where Venza grew up.

A frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, Greg Vitiello is a New York-based writer and editor whose books include *Eisenstaedt: Germany, Spoleto Viva, Twenty Seasons of Masterpiece Theatre* and *Joyce Images*. From 1966 to 1972 he wrote for National Educational Television and the Children’s Television Workshop.

How *Roots* and *Black. White.* Broke Racial TV Ground

Nearly 30 years apart, two ground-breaking series provided meaningful examinations of race relations in America, both historically and in contemporary society.

By Richard G. Carter

To these wizened eyes, the true test of a special television show touted as “thoughtful” or “worthwhile” its relevance to the present day. This includes entertainment vehicles, miniseries, documentaries or reality shows. And since race relations remains America’s most important domestic issue, I pay attention when this subject is dealt with seriously.

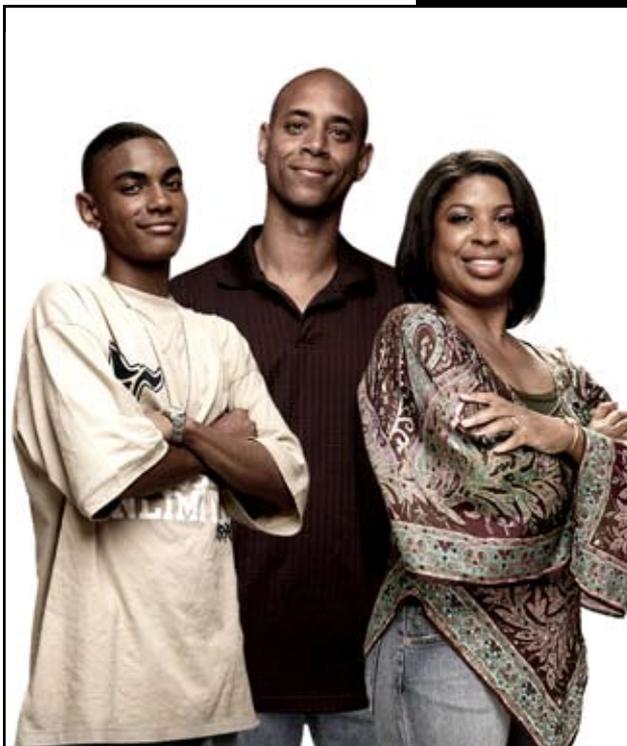
Arguably, the two most meaningful examinations of race in America, with distinctly different approaches, occurred nearly 30 years apart. One was *Roots*—an Emmy-winning, ground-breaking, 12-hour, eight-night miniseries that ran on ABC in January, 1977. The other was *Black. White.*—a stunning, documentary-reality miniseries on FX cable which aired for six weeks in one-hour segments in March and April 2006.

A third candidate is the award-winning

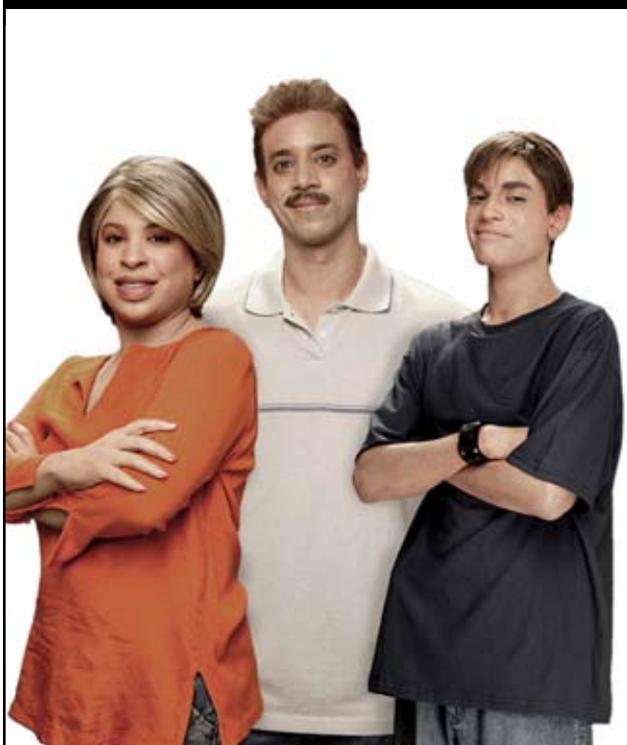
PBS documentary series *Eyes on the Prize* (1987). The late Henry Hampton’s nonfiction project dealt powerfully with the modern civil rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s, its players and its aftermath.

All three of these powerful programs should be “must-see” for every man, woman and child in America. But when push comes to shove, I defer to *Roots* and *Black. White.* as TV’s most thoughtful portrayals of race—and racial tensions—in America.

While *Roots* essentially presented race from a black perspective, it took pains to explore the changing feelings of whites. The show often dealt with harsh physical suffering endured by blacks in the antebellum South, but also explored the tortured existence of those seeking to better themselves via learning and violent revolt against slave masters.



(from left) Nick Sparks, Brian Sparks, Renee Sparks



Blacks in whiteface
(from left) Renee Sparks, Brian Sparks, Nick Sparks

The quest for dignity by enslaved blacks in *Roots* was heart-wrenching, and Lou Gossett's memorable "Fiddler" was a role for the ages. And the empathy of some of those oppressed with the likes of the white Brad Davis, as the unforgettable, dirt-poor "Ol' George Johnson," also brought tears to millions of viewers' eyes.

On the other hand, the contemporary *Black. White.* delved deeply into some of the ongoing negative racial attitudes of both races—including a troubling lack of interest in racial matters by a teenage black male and the exact opposite by a female white teenager. Moreover, their more comparative parents were locked and loaded for a racial firefight.

Now for some background.

One of the most telling things about history in this age of enhanced media coverage—including cataclysmic events of the last quarter century—is remembering where you were and what you were doing at the time. And television news bulletins led the way in alerting millions of us to all manner of gut-wrenching mayhem.

Topping my list are the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963; the televised murder two days later of his accused killer, Lee Harvey Oswald, by Jack Ruby; and the horrific murders of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (April 4, 1968), and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (June 5, 1968).

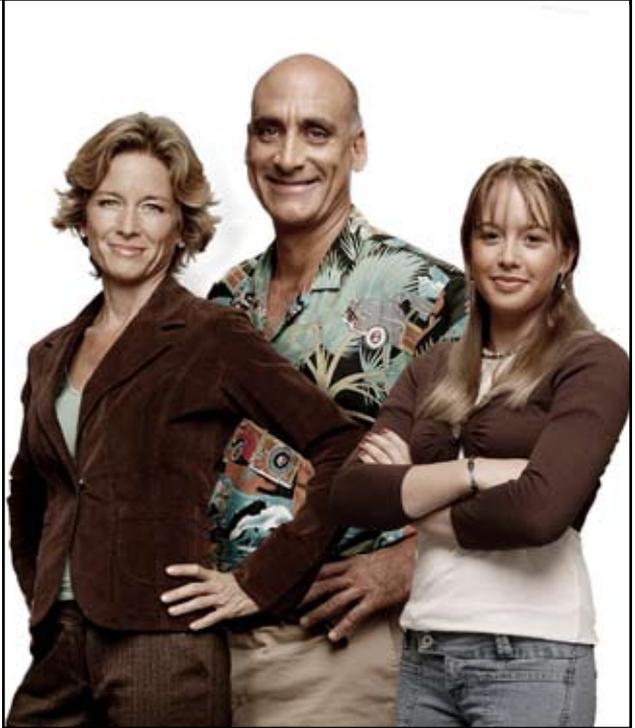
I can recite chapter and verse

of my activities on each of these awful dates in the turbulent 1960s. That's how vividly I recall them and how critical they were to me and millions of others around the country, and the world. Indeed, I don't want to forget them.

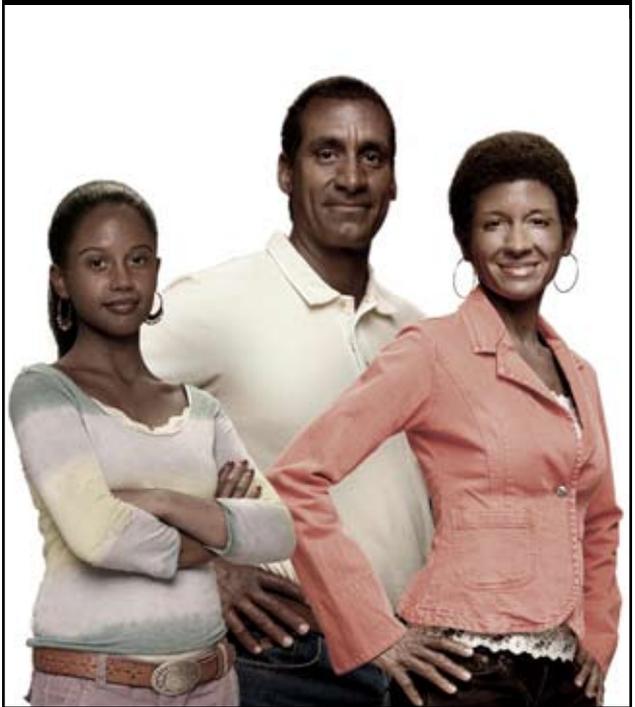
Yet, among the most cherished TV memories of my lifetime, about which much of today's youth is unaware, is *Roots*, the race-based, epoch-making megaminiseries. This outstanding artistic achievement from early 1977—perhaps ABC's all-time best—was lovingly recalled in a one-hour, NBC tribute in January 2002.

Marketed as a work of historical fact, *Roots* is based on the late Alex Haley's landmark, Pulitzer Prize-winning book tracing the origins of his family in Africa. Ironically, ABC-TV chose not to air the nostalgic look-back in honor of its 25th anniversary. Why the originating network took a pass on running its own special is anybody's guess. Perhaps it was due to allegations that the content of Haley's book was, according to critics disputing his genealogical research, "a historical hoax."

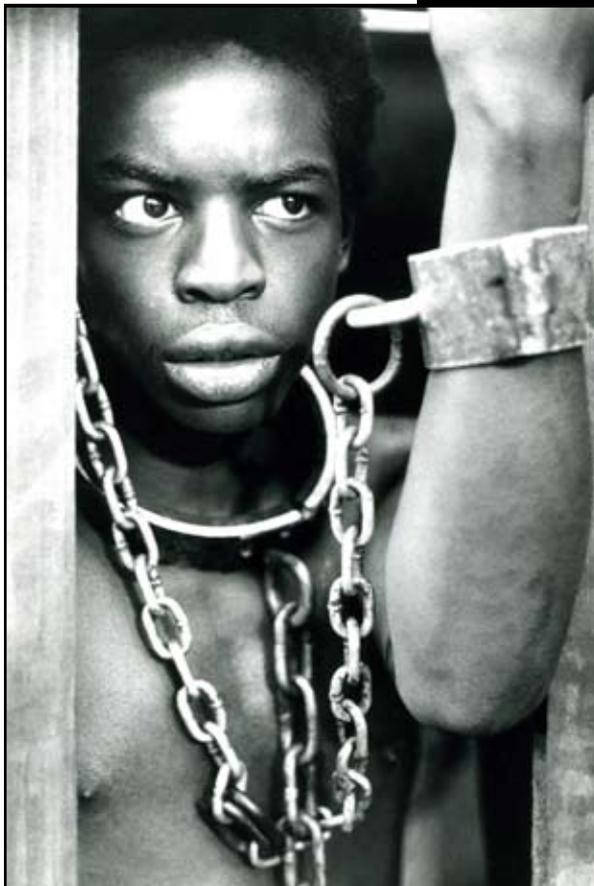
I was living and working in Cleveland when the star-studded *Roots* came on the air that frigid January. And right from the start, the sight and sound of so many gifted black actors warmed my heart. In all, the 62 principal cast members were a veritable directory of big movie and TV stars of the 1960s and '70s.



(from left) Carmen Wurgel, Bruno Marcotulli,
Rose Bloomfield



Whites in blackface
(from left) Rose Bloomfield, Bruno Marcotulli,
Carmen Wurgel



LeVar Burton as Kunta Kinte in *Roots*.

With apologies to those I don't have space to mention, black names also included LeVar Burton as protagonist Kunta Kinte, along with John Amos, Maya Angelou, Olivia Cole, Scatman Crothers, Ji-Tu Cumbaka, Moses Gunn, Lawrence Hilton Jacobs, Lynne Moody, Lillian Randolph, Thalmus Rasulala, Richard Roundtree, Madge Sinclair, O.J. Simpson, Raymond St. Jacques, Cicely Tyson, Leslie Uggams and Ben Vereen.

Roots was a special experience—for white people as well as black.

Notable white actors included Ed Asner, Lloyd Bridges, MacDonald Carey, Chuck Connors, Lynda Day,

Sandy Duncan, Loren Green, George Hamilton, Burl Ives, Doug McClure, Vic Morrow, Robert Reed and Ralph Waite.

There is little doubt *Roots* was a special experience—for white people as well as black. During its run the show was a daily topic of conversation at workplace coffee machines, water coolers and cafeterias, as well as business lunches everywhere. Regardless of the knowledge of history by adult whites, many were horrified at the hardships inflicted upon blacks during slavery. And my black friends also found scenes of the brutality hard to take. The program proved to be a catharsis and a wake-up call for much of America.

But remembering *Roots* also means remembering tender moments. The touching scenes of black family loyalty, pride and love are stamped on my brain. And recalling the youthful Burton's insistence that his name is, indeed, Kunta Kinte

is something I will never forget. Here's hoping this towering miniseries someday will be rerun in its entirety.

Now to the more recent *Black. White.* which I checked out after reading about its unique premise. And I wasn't disappointed. During its six-week run on FX cable last March and April, this documentary-type reality miniseries turned out to be riveting, must-see TV. In case you missed it, here's the deal:

Through use of innovative make-up and prosthetics, a black family of three becomes outwardly white and a white family of three becomes black. The idea is for each to experience life in a new way to better understand the

other half. From the start, it was clear the blacks were far more racially aware than the whites—just as in America today.

Before proceeding, I must say the switch from white-to-black was more convincing than the black-to-white. As a black man myself, I felt the black family looked more Latino than white—especially the mother. Had I encountered 41-year-old Brian Sparks, his wife, Renee, 38, and 16-year-old son, Nick, as white in their makeup, I doubt if I'd bought it.

The head-in-the-sand attitude of teenage Nick—including not caring when he was called “nigger”—was mind-boggling.

Their transformation reminded me of Melvin Van Peebles' stunning, quasi-comedy “Watermelon Man” (1970), with the late Godfrey Cambridge as a bigoted white man. His skin color makeup was a real stretch. But when he turned black overnight—to the horror of his white wife, played by Estelle Parsons—reality set in. But that's because Cambridge again was playing himself and looked like himself.

Despite this shortcoming and incessant commercial interruptions, *Black. White.* provided vital insights into race relations. Co-produced by rapper-actor Ice Cube and experienced documentarian R.J. Cutler, it ranks with *Roots* and *Rich Man, Poor Man* as, the best and most addictive miniseries I've ever seen.

However, the aspect of the show I found most interesting and troubling was the generation gap in the black family. The head-in-the-sand attitude of teenage Nick in racial matters—including not caring when he was called “nigger”—was mind-boggling. I appreciated his parents'

belated efforts to clue him in to life in racist America.

As a serious, reality-type TV program, *Black. White.* was wildly successful. Filmed in summer 2005 in the Los Angeles area, viewers were exposed to racially tinged incidents through the eyes, ears and personal experiences of very different people in very different families. It was a noble undertaking and altogether believable.

Yet, for at least three of the six participants, the goals of the project seemed to go in one ear and out the other. Two of the white—47-year-old Bruno Marcotulli, and his long-time partner, Carmen Wurgel, 48—never

really got it. However, Carmen's blonde daughter, Rose, 18, seemed to grasp the true significance of what was happening and actually learned. But it all seemed too deep for her teenage black counterpart, Nick.

It didn't take long for sparks to fly as the racially naive Carmen set the tone early. Laughing, she said to Renee, “Yo, bitch!” in an ill-advised effort to invoke black vernacular. The outspoken Renee was incredulous and harped on this faux pas for the remainder of the series, strongly castigating Carmen for her disrespect and demonstrated lack of understanding.

Brian, the enlightened black father, joined Renee in her outrage and also took down Bruno for defending Carmen and trying to minimize the explosive comment. Finally, in the last episode, Renee relented a bit and forgave Carmen for her blunder—which was not the only time the white woman put her foot in her mouth out of utter ignorance and naïveté.

But the overbearing Bruno was worse—as close-minded as they come—clinging to the idea that anti-black bigotry is mainly in the mind. This man would not admit that conspicuous acts of racism occur, even after going out in public in black makeup. He was oblivious and didn't want to know, and his final letter to the group was a caustic cop-out.

Now back to Nick, the irresponsible, bad-attitude black teenager whose loony outlook on life made me wonder where he's been and what he's been doing. One of his revealing scenes was in a restaurant when he approached a table-full of his white friends and one laughingly blurted out, "Hey, my nigger." Nick smiled in apparent approval.

In addition, Nick hinted that he "might" be a gangster and made light of being kicked out of high school because he didn't like being told what to do. And despite being jobless, he paid \$150 for a wrist watch because, as he lamely explained, "I saw it and I liked it."

After his mother, Renee, loudly scolded him with "What's wrong with

you, Negro," for paying so much for something he didn't need, his father, Brian, accompanied him to the jewelry store in a mall to return the watch. Then they went to a black barbershop where, at Brian's behest, the barber tried to explain some racial facts of life to Nick.

In the final episode, Brian exposed Nick to some multi-media images of the black civil rights struggle over the years, and an ex-gang-banger named Kenny took him for a drive through a gang-infested neighborhood. While quietly lecturing him on the downside of a life of crime, Nick's facade crumbled a bit and he seemed to start to see the light.

Black. White. was a compelling portrayal of an aspect of life in which countless whites have no interest. But everyone, white and black, who watched with an open mind, was skillfully exposed to a slice of America's rampant racial dilemma. And Kenny's impassioned explanation of the power inherent in the project to the many creative people involved—with special emphasis on Nick—provided a forceful, lasting image.

Richard G. Carter, a New York freelance writer, was a columnist and editorial writer with the *New York Daily News*. He has appeared on *Larry King Live* and *The Phil Donahue Show* and co-hosted *Showdown* on CNBC with the late Morton Downey Jr. He was Vice President-Public Affairs with Group W Cable and in 1986 received the Marquette University By-Line Award for distinguished achievement in journalism.

Inside Big Bird and Outside Oscar the Grouch

A conversation with Caroll Spinney,
Muppeteer extraordinary. By Steve Rogers

For nearly four decades Caroll Spinney has been splitting time between Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch on *Sesame Street*. He has been with the program as muppeteer extraordinary since episode one, in 1969. *Sesame Street* has now produced 4,108 programs and is seen in 120 countries around the world. This interview was conducted on the occasion of Spinney's Lifetime Achievement Emmy Award by the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences last Spring.

In 2009 *Sesame Street* and I will both turn 40. I was part of the first generation to grow up watching the show. That television experiment for young children has grown up and old along with us. Still, Big Bird doesn't look or seem a day over six and Oscar is timelessly tasteless. My three-and-a-half-year-old daughter Willow believes in them with as much unwavering enthusiasm as I did when I was her age.

Steve Rogers: What question are you asked most?

Caroll Spinney: Mostly I'm *told* what people like best about *Sesame Street*. They tell me how my work effects them,



Caroll Spinney (right) and friend.

what *Sesame Street* taught them. You know, when my daughter Jesse was three years old, she was sitting at the table and she looked up to me and said, “you know what? this table is a rectangle,” which I didn’t think was something that three-year-olds would just say, and I feel like *Sesame Street* was responsible for that.

SR: You started puppeteering at a very young age. Was that an extension out of an introverted childhood or the sheer wonder of make-believe or both?

CS: I was shy, yes. I guess if the word “nerd” existed back then, that’s what I would’ve been considered – even though I don’t like that word. So, yeah I had seen puppet shows. There wasn’t television back then. I saw one puppet show about the three kittens who lose their mittens, and you know it wasn’t that great. They were just kind of playing with these little hand puppets, but I thought how neat is that? So I got a hold of a puppet at a rummage sale and I had already had a green snake puppet that my mother had made for me. I put on shows and made

enough money to go to movies and have a penny left over for candy. And when I was nine my mother, unbeknownst to me, made me a whole Punch & Judy puppet show stage. She didn’t know it, but she gave me one heck of a career that day when she lay those puppets under the tree.

SR: Is it true that Jim Henson discovered and invited you to New York and *Sesame Street*?

CS: Well, I hadn’t tried out for *Sesame Street* or Jim. I was working in television in Boston at the time, but I wasn’t particularly inspired. I went to a national puppet festival because I wanted to be inspired by people who were trying really hard as puppeteers. The show I was putting on there was very elaborate actually, using animation with rear projection, but everything went wrong and yet Jim came up to me after the show and in his true fashion said, “you know, I really like what you were trying to do there.” That was typical Jim Henson. We really lost something when he died. He was a real, true genius. He could think in so many different directions. He could be managing 12 projects all at the same time and yes, you’d see him being quietly frustrated, but he was always a really nice and gentle guy on top of all of that.

SR: What changes have come to *Sesame Street* over the last four decades?

CS: Well, the budget thing became an issue for *Sesame Street* because we used to be supported by toy sales, but when so many new kid’s



The author’s daughter Willow with Rosita.

shows came on the TV, like *Teletubbies* and *Barney*, toy sales began to spread out, so we couldn't count on that to produce 110 shows a year, so it was reduced to 97 and then 50 and then they were going to scale back to 25 and someone said, "that won't work because there are 26 letters in the alphabet and each episode has to be brought to you by a letter. What are you going to do, leave one out?" So the producers said, "all right, we'll find a way to produce 26."

The other change I'd say is in the pacing of the show. The format is different today than when we first began. It's more segmented. It starts out with the story, which runs for five to ten minutes and then goes into the Letter of the Day and the Count and then back to the story and the end of the program is dedicated to Elmo's World, so yes, the show's formatting has changed as well and those changes were based on research the producers conducted with children.

SR: So *Sesame Street* continues to adapt for children?

CS: Oh yes, I'd say so. You know, in the 1940s people were citing studies about children and learning but they were actually using data based on white rats and not real kids. Well, they actually research the programming with real children at *Sesame Street*, and they take it very seriously. There was a character in the beginning that Frank Oz created called Professor Hastings and he would attempt to explain things to the children and in the process he'd fall asleep, well

it was hilarious, but it turned out that children were actually falling asleep along with him. So that didn't work, but we learn that way.

Marty Robinson, who plays Snuffy on

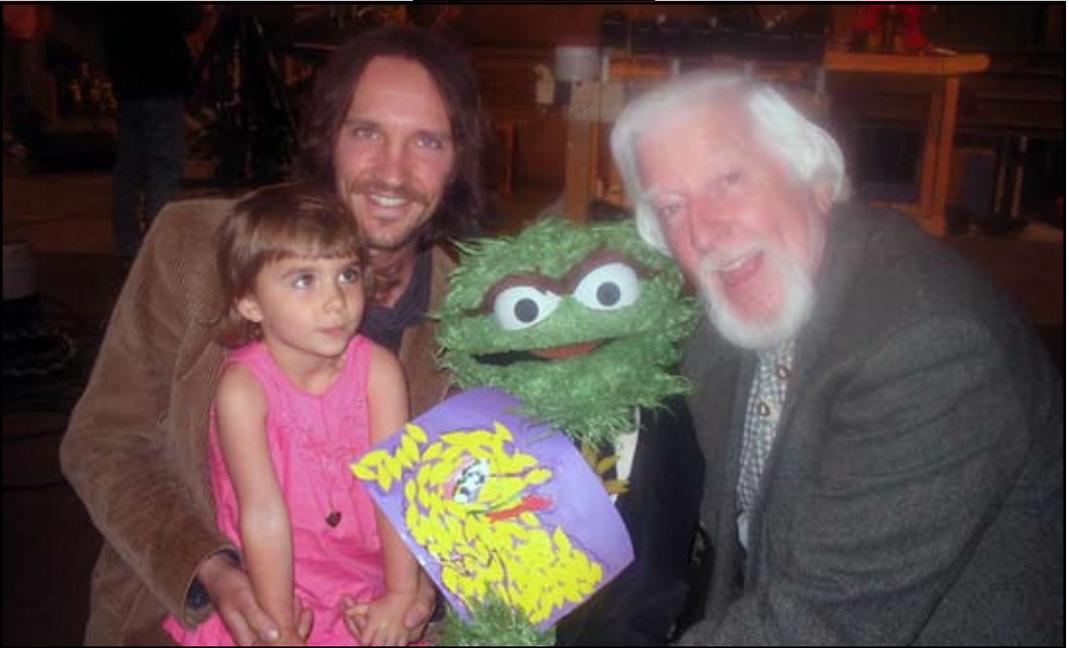
the show, was nine years old when his family suffered a divorce. So he came up with a story to help children understand it. Snuffy's parents are separating and, you know, Snuffy is

crying and everything, and he thinks he's the reason they're breaking up because that's what kids think, but when they tested the story on a group of children they were crying, even when it was all resolved and Snuffy was saying, "it's all right, Bird, I'll still be with my mom, and see my dad on the weekends, and everything's going to be ok," but the children were all still crying. The producers didn't buy it and they never ran it. The interest at *Sesame Street* is always in doing the right thing.

SR: Do you believe children have changed much or at all during your nesting on *Sesame Street*?

CS: Yes, sure they have, because the world changes constantly. You can just look at all the change in a 10- to 20-year period. Think of the change in the child's environment from say 1865 in America with the end of the war and the end of slavery to say 1900. It was only 35 years, but there was incredible change that effected children. Now look at the change from 1969 to present, 37 years later. So much has changed but particularly in the media. There's so much on television. So much of it is wonderful sure, but so

Children have changed because the world changes constantly...I hate to see children becoming too worldly-wise. Innocence is a precious thing.



(l. to r.) Willow Rogers, her father Steve, Oscar the Grouch and Caroll Spinney.

much of it is just awful. I like the show *Friends*, but I'm an adult, I'm 72 years old, so I understand it, but they show that program during the afternoons now, and so much of it is just all about getting their characters into bed. Would you want your child to hear all of that? I just hate to see children becoming too worldly-wise, using terms they don't even understand. Innocence, you know, is a precious thing.

SR: It's easy to overlook your other alter ego, Oscar the Grouch, but how much of the "dark genius" of the trash monster is the flipside of Caroll Spinney and why is he an important character to children?

CS: Well, Oscar's values are the opposite socially. I have to use my reverse computer with that one. Honestly, I'm often surprised at what he's going to say, but my mother and father were very funny and that's why it comes easy for

me, or for the puppet. I will say Oscar is a nice change after a day of being Big Bird. I used to suppose it was the same thing for Henry Winkler when he played Fonzie and he could just come out and "heeeey" and everyone applauded and loved him. To just be someone different than yourself, than what you normally are, when even really tough guys like and respect you. I had one big guy say to me once that he wasn't so much a fan of Big Bird, but he really liked the "nasty guy in the trash can" and he asked me to insult him. The only trouble I ever have with Oscar is when once in awhile I feel he's really being rude and getting away with it. That's when I stop and question what we are doing and if Oscar is doing the right thing, but I think it teaches kids that it takes all kinds in the world.

SR: Big Bird is, at least, in part responsible for making children feel as though it's okay to not know or understand their world in full. How important do

you think that is to the empowerment of kids?

CS: I think it's very important, yes. The original concept of the character when Jim brought me to the show was that Big Bird would be extremely goofy, but as we went on it just didn't feel right that this big goofy guy would hang out with kids, so we made him one. I raised my voice up a few octaves and we realized that what once sounded like a familiar television dinosaur on TV today, then actually sounded like a child. It worked. Yes he was eight feet, two inches tall but we gave him a child's view of the world and a childlike nature and kids responded to that.

A lot of the animation based on comic books is filled with battles and fighting... They don't present solutions. Violence is not the way to deal with things.

SR: What subject, confronted by the show and your characters, has been the most significant and rewarding?

CS: I think the death of Mr. Hooper was probably the most significant moment. You know, it was the most classic and incredibly moving. Everyone was crying, and you know I don't know if it is available as a comfort to someone, to children who are dealing with a death in their family, but it should be. We also did an episode when Big Bird has to go to the hospital and get some shots and he cried and Maria was a surrogate mother to him and I think it was very helpful to children and I understand that some hospitals still use it to help children cope. We also did a hurricane episode, which was aired after 9/11 and I think that was helpful and they

reran it after Katrina. It's important to connect to the lives children are having to live. It's so good to be able to do something that can be a comfort to them.

SR: What's wrong with children's programming today?

CS: I don't like a lot of the animation that is based on comic books. It's filled with battles and fighting and laser rays coming out of character's fists. They don't present solutions. Certainly violence is not the way to deal with things. Kids go right from *Sesame Street* to *Power Rangers* and characters saying things like (with a deep tone) "I will control the world!" I don't care for that at all. I also don't care for

a lot of what goes on on the Cartoon Network. I don't know who they are programming for, children or adults. I have a

feeling it's more for adults who want to watch cartoons, but kids are watching because it is cartoons. Over-all there's too much wiseguy stuff going on on those shows.

SR: What's right with it?

CS: Apart from *Sesame Street*, I like the show *Jakers* very much. I think it's a wonderful program because it teaches lessons. I appreciate any program like our show that is constantly looking to see what worked. Our audience is getting younger and younger. Look at Elmo, he's a three-and-a-half-year-old—a talented one at that, why, he can even play the violin, but originally *Sesame Street* was geared for children as old as eight. The problem was that we were losing them



Spinney accepting his Lifetime Achievement Award at the 33rd Annual Daytime Emmy Awards Creative Arts Ceremony.

before they got that old, so the show has adapted to a younger audience. I also like that *Sesame Street* stays fresh. Some shows are just so redundant and should probably be replaced with newer and brighter ones. But as far as what is right on TV, you know as a father that you're ultimately responsible for what your daughter sees. Your child is going to discover the world. What world she discovers is up to you.

SR: Much has been said about your longevity. How do you physically and creatively keep up the strong work year in and year out?

CS: I can keep up with it because I've gotten to know my characters inside and out, literally, and the writers work very hard. They're very good at what they do. They're tuned in and work sometimes for months on certain episodes. And the physical work is good for me because it keeps me in shape. I'm looking forward all the way to our 40th year. I will leave when I can no longer hold the bird's head high.

SR: Do you have any sense for whether or not Big Bird will carry on after you decide to hang up the beak?

CS: Oh sure, I'm sure he will carry on. When we lost Jim, you know, Kermit and Ernie went on and always will. I feel the same about Big Bird, someone else will carry on.

SR: I'm assuming you've told Big Bird and Oscar about the Lifetime Achievement honor you've received. What was their reaction?

CS: Oscar said, "I didn't deserve it." Big Bird said, "Whats that?" You know, though, the two of them, they don't know me very well. It might sound like multiple-personality stuff but a lot of the humor is based on what someone else says to them, reacting to other people. Sometimes Oscar just glares at me. I'm intimidated and I stammer to answer him. But he really has a heart of gold. He wouldn't want anyone to know that, so he hides it, but he really does have a heart of gold. On the other hand, Big Bird is all heart.

Steve Rogers is a writer, journalist and filmmaker living in Red Bank, NJ. He has been the chief correspondent of the Emmy® Awards for the last four years. He is also the Manager of Systems and Content for the Daytime Emmy Awards, and is currently directing a documentary about the state of New Jersey.

Lights Out in the Wasteland: The TV Noir

Depicting a dangerous, irrational place in which the individual has little or no control over his fate.

By Allen Glover and David Bushman

Film noir refers to a group of films produced in Hollywood during and after World War II and unified by visual and thematic representations of a dark, unstable world. Heavily stylized, yet bleakly cynical, pictures like “Double Indemnity” (1944), “Detour” (1945), and “Out of the Past” (1947) ushered in a new cinema of criminality and transgression, disillusionment and alienation, that reflected the flipside of the American dream—and, despite the sunny optimism of the postwar years, only grew darker and more fatalistic.

As a movement, lasting roughly from 1941 to 1958, classic film noir was perpetrated by a circle of writers, directors and craftsmen who melded the artifice and heightened theatricality of German expressionism with a plethora of other influences, including the hard-boiled fiction of dime novels and pulp magazines, poetic realism, existentialism and Freudian psychology, Depression-

era gangster tales, the lonely urban views of Edward Hopper and Reginald Marsh, Weegee’s tabloid photographs of human wreckage, cinematographic developments like faster film stock and shorter lenses, and a wartime austerity that encouraged innovation.

On television, the noir ethos is identified not so much by stylistic considerations (although there are exceptions), but by such elements as tone, atmosphere, narrative patterns, recurring motifs, and character archetypes. In its earliest incarnations, TV noir evolved simultaneously with film noir, drawing from many of the same roots while also taking inspiration from the thrillers, mysteries, and crime melodramas of radio. One of the earliest crossovers was *Crime Photographer* (1945), which followed a character concocted by George Harmon Coxe for the pages of *Black Mask* magazine: two-fisted lensman Flashgun Casey. Alongside such other pulp creations as Dashiell Hammett’s

Sam Spade, Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, and Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, Casey was one of the prototypes for the noir seeker-hero. As befitting his line of work, he inhabited the hours between sunset and sunrise, seeking to render the strange, violent carnival of the night in terms of clarity and accessibility. This lonely journey through a darkness both literal and figurative is the defining narrative of the TV noir.

The TV noir tableau is a dangerous, irrational place in which the individual has little or no control over his fate...The source of much of this apprehensiveness was the Cold War, in particular the twin anxieties of the Red Scare and the A-bomb.

As befitting its origins, the TV noir tableau is a dangerous, irrational place in which the individual has little or no control over his fate. Beginning in the late 1940s, the source of much of this apprehensiveness was the Cold War, in particular the twin anxieties of the Red Scare and the A-bomb, which not only charged television with a political urgency—as evidenced in the J. Edgar Hoover-sanctioned espionage drama *Illegals* (1953-56)—but introduced an aura of impending menace to everyday life. Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64), which put forth a pantheon of citizens forced to question their own realities, was one of many shows to provide an oblique filtering of the zeitgeist. Paranoia, queasiness, a dislocated sense of self—these are common states of being for the inhabitant of the TV noir.

Unlike its cinematic counterpart, TV noir cannot be said to have had a classic

period of programming. Rather, it is best characterized as a mosaic progressively updated to reflect shifts in the social and cultural fabric. Regardless of genre, its inhabitants roam a milieu where truth shades into lie, righteousness into brutality, stability into confusion. The unceasing corruptive influence of a society rotting from within is well served by television's lack of closure; the episodic nature of prime-time drama only

reinforces the notion that the messiness of the world continues, unabated, week in and week out. Societal order is, at best, a myth, for the protections instilled by its institutions, its courts and precincts, banks

and churches, have either diminished or become displaced. Identity and familial security are fluid, transitory notions. In the diorama of the TV noir, nothing is what it seems.

**Watching the Detectives:
The Private Eye**

The hard-boiled private eye is one of noir's enduring character archetypes. Television, more so than cinema, had paraded forth legions of these knights errant, men who observe their own code of honor in a quest for the truth. Initially, many of them—*Man Against Crime* (1949-56), *Martin Kane, Private Eye* (1949-54), *Charlie Wild, Private Detective* (1950-52)—were listless refugees from radio. Blake Edwards's *Richard Diamond, Private Detective* (1957-60), starring David Janssen, was the first to successfully apply the visual iconography of noir to the form. Its terrain is outlined

in the title sequence, in which Diamond walks down an empty city street, alone, shrouded in blackness, and pauses to strike a match, at last illuminating his preternaturally weary face.

Craig Stevens, the dapper dick of another Edwards creation, *Peter Gunn* (1958-61), is the embodiment of the Playboy man—hip and handsome—but his heart is as cold as a morgue slab. His detachment is a necessary armor against the treachery he encounters on his travels through an underworld teeming with lowlifes and oddballs. The ivory-tickling gumshoe of *Staccato* (1959-60) displays a similar blend of self-sufficiency and toughness, but John Cassavetes, who starred in and frequently directed the show, went to great lengths to downplay the heroic qualities of his character, proclaiming “I want to not solve crimes too.” Both programs share the same highly charged *mise-en-scène* of smoky nightclubs, jazzy inflections, canted angles, and chiaroscuro lighting, but *Gunn* veers from the traditional asceticism of the noir detective by granting its hero a lavish lifestyle funded by trouble.

In Don Siegel’s remake of Robert Siodmak’s “The Killers” (1964), the investigators *are* trouble: a pair of philosophizing assassins (Lee Marvin and Clu Gulagher) so unnerved by the passivity of the man (Cassavetes, again) whose life they’ve just extinguished that they launch an inquest into his past. Naturally, what they learn is that he was undone by a woman, the duplicitous arm candy (Angie Dickinson) of a white-collar gangster (Ronald Reagan). In flip-flopping the narrative thrust from victim to perpetrator, Siegel’s version signals an acute reversal of values, while its harsh palette and garishly surreal process shots only heighten the absurdity of the

universe its characters inhabit. Although conceived for television (as the inaugural entry in Universal’s Project 120 series), “The Killers” was deemed inappropriate for broadcast in the wake of Kennedy’s assassination and shunted off to the drive-in circuit.

With *Harry O* (1974-76) and *The Rockford Files* (1974-80), the young, virile knights of the atomic age are replaced with rumpled, middle-aged shamuses sapped of their verve by the upheavals of the intervening years. Harry (David Janssen), who bears the malaise of the world in his creased mug, carries a slug in his back from his days on the force and is forever restoring an old boat, tellingly named *The Answer*. Having once escaped death, he is now killing time. The burden of the past also haunts Rockford (James Garner), who spent five years in the pen for a crime he did not commit. Although codified by honor, his existence, like Harry O’s, is one of rootlessness and alienation: a perpetual circulation through a landscape of hot dog stands, all-night coffee shops, discount drug stores, strip clubs, and shabby theaters.

Given the otherworldliness of the night, it is no surprise that other detective-seeker programs delved into the realm of the supernatural, such as *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* (1972-75), which followed an investigate reporter (Darren McGavin) with a knack for pulling unlikely truths, like werewolves and zombies, from unmitigated darkness, and *Angel* (1999-2004), which featured the ultimate creature of the night: the vampire as private eye. A supremely tortured soul, *Angel* (David Boreanaz) prowls the streets of Los Angeles, righting the wrongs he encounters in hopes of gaining redemption. *Angel* battles all types of demons, emotional and material,

but his ultimate torment is Darla, the femme fatale whose infectious fangs have forever locked him in the night world.

Strangers in a Strange Land: The Hunted and the Haunted

One of the preoccupations of noir is the existential dilemma, or search for the self, which is typically manifested in the narrative of the outsider. Most often, this figure is a victim either of fate (*The Fugitive*, *Run for Your Life*) or trauma (*The Loner*, *The X-Files*). Created, as was *Run for Your Life*, by former pulp writer Roy Huggins, *The Fugitive* (1963-67) was one of television's more potent exercises in fatalistic alienation. Unjustly accused of

killing his wife, Richard Kimball (David Janssen) is on the lam from the police after narrowly escaping execution. Shorn of identity, consumed with shame over his inability to save his wife, and pursued by the relentless Lt. Gerard (Barry Morse), he exists in a heightened state of anxiety and fear. He is the quintessential noir protagonist: hunted and haunted.

Fittingly, Kimball's journey through the carnivalesque night world comes to an end in an abandoned amusement park, where his path finally converges with that of the mysterious one-armed man he saw darting into the shadows outside of his home the night of the murder. Unlike Kimball, who finds salvation, Paul Bryan

(Ben Gazzara) of *Run for Your Life* (1965-68) faces an irrevocable death sentence. Diagnosed with a mysterious illness, he has been given two years to live. Suddenly cognizant of his own mortality, he seeks not to avoid death but to affirm his existence. In "The Killing Season," Bryan, a lawyer, has second thoughts about the conviction of a man he sent to death row and mounts an effort to have the execution stayed. By the time he has gleaned a confession from the actual murderer, it



Gillian Anderson (left) as Agent Dana Scully and David Duchovny as Agent Fox Mulder in FOX's *The X-Files*.

is too late—the death sentence has been carried out, just as it must ultimately be against Bryan himself. In the TV noir, there are no guarantees of justice, only a predetermined measure of guilt and punishment.

In Rod Serling's western *The Loner* (1965-66), William Colton (Lloyd Bridges), like so many protagonists of classic film noir, is emotionally poisoned by his experiences in war. Given his condition, his connections with others are fleeting; incapable of settling down, or maintaining a meaningful relationship, he is doomed to a restless, searching existence—much like Fox Mulder (David Duchovny), the FBI Agent at the center of *The X-Files* (1994-2002). Traumatized by the childhood experience of witnessing his sister abducted by extraterrestrials, Mulder criss-crosses the country in hopes of finding empirical evidence of a government conspiracy to disguise, and possibly facilitate, the invasion of earth by hostile alien forces. Although given a partner, the skeptic Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson), he alienates himself from her, as well as his superiors, with his unwavering belief in the unbelievable. Ridiculed (and

marked for death) by the very government he serves, Mulder navigates a lonely road through a landscape of inexplicable darkness, all the while asserting that “The Truth is Out There.”

Just the Facts: The Docu-Noir

The co-opting of documentary technique marked an alternative strand of noir that traced its lineage, in film, back to Louis de Rochemont's “The House on 92nd Street” (1945), and on television, to Jack Webb's police procedural *Dragnet* (1952-59). By incorporating a low-key tone, accurate police jargon, and explicit demarcations of time and place (“It was Saturday, April 9th ... we were working the day watch out



Jack Webb (right), as Sgt. Joe Friday, the popular star of NBC-TV's *Dragnet* series with Frank Smith, played by Ben Alexander.

of the Intelligence Division...”), *Dragnet* strove to apply verisimilitude to the form. Webb, a staunch conservative, had no use for noir’s moral relativity—every episode affirms the sanctity of the justice system—and yet his creation unmistakably limns a milieu every bit as dark and brutal as that depicted in “He Walked by Night,” the 1949 film noir that served as his primary inspiration.

The Los Angeles through which Webb’s strangely somnambulist Sgt. Joe Friday makes his beat is tawdry and violent, full of seedy apartment units, boarding houses, coffee shops and bars. The victims, witnesses, and perps who pass through this world are lonely, disenfranchised, unfulfilled; they have five-o’clock shadows, wear cheap clothes and sweat profusely, regardless of whether they’re hiding anything or not (most are). The sheer banality of the places and people in *Dragnet* evokes a sense of baroque perversion entirely at place in the noir vernacular, such as the 1952 episode “The Big Cast,” which finds Lee Marvin, as a psychopath, sedately recounting his deeds of murder in between bites of a veggie burger at his favorite health-food restaurant.

A documentary-like approach is also utilized in *Naked City* (1958–63), a spin-off from Jules Dassin’s “The Naked City” (1948). Largely filmed in the sordid sections of New York captured so vividly by the photographer Weegee, it explores the roots of crime by focusing not only on the police, but also the criminals, who often turn out to be ordinary, decent folks driven to break the law out of economic or social desperation. As with *Dragnet*, the cycle of crime is unceasing—there are, after all, “eight million stories in the naked city”—resulting in a continuous reconfiguration of the same

fundamentally untrustworthy universe. Another naturalistic noir from the period is Robert Altman’s “Once Upon a Savage Night” (1964), which splits its narrative between a serial killer (Robert Ridgley) terrorizing Chicago and the besieged police captain (Phillip Abbot) on his trail. Shot entirely on location, at night, by ace cameraman Ellis “Bud” Thackery, it was the first production to use Kodak’s new high-speed Ektachrome stock.

The *vérité-noir* *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993–1999) prided itself on a muted palette, a disdain for glitz, and a visceral approach to the realities of containing crime in the city. Moreover it was bold enough to leave the fatal rape of a young girl in its premiere episode forever unsolved and, later, to have one of its cops joke about racking up overtime while probing the murder of a tourist in front of her children. When the distraught husband complains, squad commander Al Giardello (Yaphet Kotto) counters that death in Baltimore is a daily occurrence, and that the cop isn’t “going to feel what you feel. None of us are. ... You need him to solve your murder, not grieve.” The flawed cops of this bleak reality emerged from the Hill Street Blues/ Steven Bochco tradition, as did such descendants as *The Shield*’s vicious Vic Mackey; *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*’s disturbing Gil Grissom; and *The Wire*’s boozy Jimmy McNulty.

While all of these shows depict harsh, dissolute worlds, *The Wire* (2002–present) created by David Simon, who also wrote the book upon which *Homicide* is based, is a particularly powerful exploration of human anomie in contemporary times, harsh and cynical in its uncompromising portrayal of a callous, corrupt establishment. The series’ inner-city Baltimore is a maelstrom of indifferent

cops, self-aggrandizing politicians, charismatic drug lords, and swarms of young people tragically unequipped or unwilling to escape this vise of destruction. The city as a sprawling necropolis is further established in Michael Mann's *Robbery Homicide Division* (2002), in which a roving camera stalks an elite LAPD detective (Tom Sizemore) whose fearsome, cunning methods signify both an acute understanding of the night world and a deep affinity with its ways.

Crisis of Identity: A Mann's World

Conceived by Anthony Yerkovich, and overseen by Mann, *Miami Vice* (1984-89) offered a deeply cynical response to the excesses of the go-go Reagan years. Sonny Crockett (Don Johnson) and Ricardo Tubbs (Philip Michael Thompson) are two undercover detectives who lead lives of masquerade enacted to make their passage through the night world all the more convincing. Having forsaken the "light" world of family, stability, and normality, they exist in a moral twilight. Crockett, in particular, is constantly in danger of disappearing into his shadow self, a coke-crazed kingpin named Sonny Burnett. "It'd be nice if one part of my life was real," he says (as Burnett) in a bid to gain the companionship of a woman he's met—who, in true noir fashion, is a femme fatale already plotting his death.

Despite the persistent sunshine, a perpetual sense of hopelessness hangs over the decaying deco landscape of *Miami Vice*. Crockett and Tubbs encounter corruption at every level, even within their own ranks, and are regularly accused of being "on the take" themselves. The drug lords they seek to put away aren't just mindless cocaine cowboys, but ambitious practitioners of free enterprise armed with uncanny business acumen

and the ruthlessness of Wall Street raiders. In "Prodigal Son," the detectives follow the powder trail all the way to a Manhattan skyscraper, where they are greeted as interlopers by a sickly banking tycoon who warns them of meddling in "our Latin American brother's major cash crops." At a time when the president's wife was admonishing the nation's children to "Just Say No," the notion that corporate America was fostering the influx of drugs amounted to a radical inversion of good and evil.

A similar perversion of values marked Mann's brooding underworld serial *Crime Story* (1986-88), which depicted its crimebusters as active participants in the breakdown of societal harmony. Lt. Torello (Dennis Farina) may represent the law, but he certainly does not bring about any order. Unfettered by Miranda rights, he operates with a vengeance, regularly pummeling suspects, coercing witnesses, and perjuring himself. "When this is all over," he tells a gangster, "I will find the thing you love the most and I will kill it." Obsessive, intrinsically prone to violence, Torello is the good guy by default. On the other hand, his nemesis, Ray Luca (Anthony Denison), is presented as a poor kid from the patch whose attainment of wealth and power embodies the American ideal of success by any means necessary. Like Tony Soprano, Luca has a turbulent inner life, and his feelings of emptiness and betrayal, his marital woes and employee failings, all render him in sympathetic terms that belie his villainy.

The influence of Mann is evidenced in a number of other shows whose morally ambiguous heroes tread the line between lawlessness and law enforcement. In *Wiseguy* (1987-90), Vinnie Terranova (Ken Wahl) is an undercover agent for the FBI who invariably experiences feelings



(l. to r.) Peggy Lipton, Dana Ashbroch and Mädchen Amick in *Twin Peaks*.

of guilt after betraying criminals with whom he has forged intense relationships. In one story arc, Vinnie and mob boss Sonny Steelgrave (Ray Sharkey) are locked alone inside a country club, where their confrontation harkens the unraveling of a dysfunctionally married couple. “I want you to know, there’s a lot about who you are that I feel close to,” Vinnie tells Sonny, who, rather than face prison, electrocutes himself—but not before confessing, “I loved you, man.” Vinnie’s dual existence and fierce emotional connection to the sociopaths he pursues signify a conflicted, but utterly noir, conception of his role in society.

The Corruptive Influence

By the 1990s, noir had become a

brand, serving not only as a potent marketing tool, but as a cultural touchstone. The mournful *EZ Streets* (1996-97) was one of many shows to make conspicuous reference to the noir lexicon. Set in a rotting, crime-infested urban jungle rife with corruption and sadistic behavior, it follows the trifurcate narrative of a tainted cop, a charismatic hoodlum, and a vulnerable parolee caught between the lures of light and dark. It opens with one of the more disturbing fade-ins in television history: in the wee hours of the morning, on a desolate wharf, a half-dozen policemen fish an oil drum out of the sea. As they pry open the lid, a crimson-red puddle seeps out over their shoes: inside, some

poor soul has met a tortured end. In this grisly, despairing, neo-noir world, death begins the day.

Twin Peaks (1990-91), the warped creation of David Lynch and Mark Frost, offered a feral inversion of the urban noir. Often described as a “noir soap,” it begins with a series of shots depicting an idyllic town in the Pacific Northwest—a montage that culminates with the discovery of the hometown prom queen washed up on a lakeshore, her naked body wrapped in plastic. Summoned to assist the local sheriff, FBI Agent Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) enters a place where, as he reports to his trusty pocket recorder Diane, the Douglas firs are “full of secrets.” Indeed, as Cooper soon learns, the impulses of the festering city have not

only taken root in this idyllic corner of America, they have quietly blossomed into a full-blown orgy of murder, drugs, pornography, and lust.

The suggestion that the corruptive influence of the city was imbedded within the heartland was a potent one. Equally stringent was the manner in which the question of who killed Laura Palmer was resolved—not with a token restoration of moral order, but with the revelation that it was the innocuously named BOB, an evil spirit capable of infesting anyone's soul. The darkness lies within all us. We are all partners in crime: dark, deceitful, depraved. Crises of identity, collective guilt, the darkness lurking beneath the deceptively placid veneer of society—the

ingredients of noir continue to haunt the television landscape, from the teen sleuth show *Veronica Mars* (2004-present), in which the heroine probes an inverted suburban paradise seething with debauchery and decadence, to the paranoid post-9/11 thriller *24* (2001-present), where corruption and betrayal reach all the way to the highest seats of power, to the unvarnished Western *Deadwood* (2004-present), with its implicit suggestion that the cornerstones upon which the nation was built are bathed in blood, murder and vice. The history of TV noir is a genealogy of the medium, encompassing every genre and form of programming where nothing is as it seems.

David Bushman, a television curator at the Museum of Television & Radio, is a former television editor and critic at *Daily Variety* and *Variety*. Allen Glover is assistant curator at the Museum, where he has co-programmed an annual documentary festival.

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The Prime-Time Presidency: *The West Wing* and U.S. Nationalism

By Trevor Parry-Giles and
Shawn J. Parry-Giles

*University of Illinois Press, Urbana and
Chicago*
(248 pages, cloth \$50; paper \$25)

By **Bernard S. Redmont**

Nationalism represents one of the great evils of the modern world, spawning wars and terrorism. This being so, Americans rarely think of the U.S. as nationalistic.

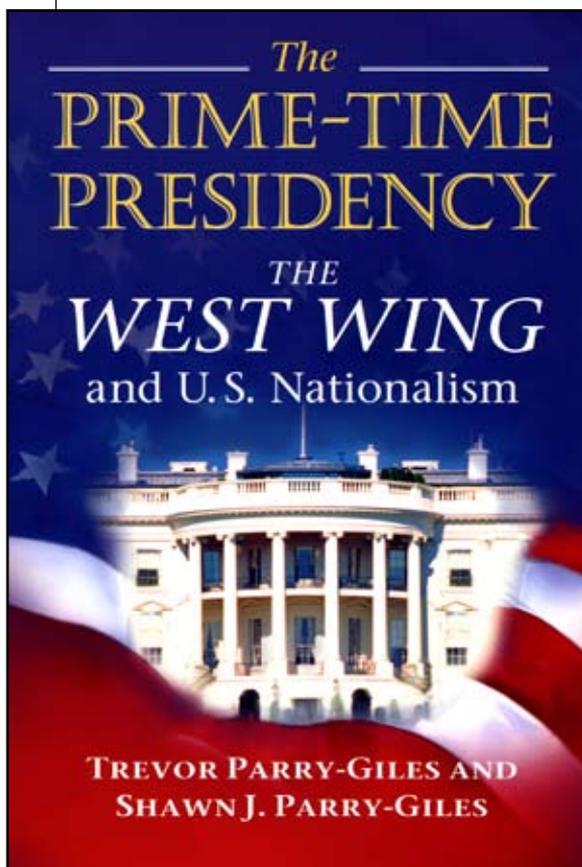
Now we have two American scholars who enjoy a rare double specialty—U.S. nationalism and *The West Wing*. They have come up with a startling and original work linking the two subjects, and in the process, the American presidency.

The two researchers, Trevor Parry-Giles and Shawn J. Parry-Giles, are a husband-and-wife team, professors of communication at the University of Maryland. They have spent endless hours dissecting—and enjoying—one of the most popular prime-time programs in the history of American television, *The West Wing*. Avid viewers since the debut in 1999, they followed it through its critical acclaim that included Emmy

awards in 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 for Best Drama, two Peabody Awards, several Golden Globe nominations and three Television Critics Association Awards.

The NBC show created by Aaron Sorkin is history now. But its authentic, behind-the-scenes glimpse of what life is like in *The West Wing* captivated the public for years. Many reveled in its sophisticated blend of tackling U.S. political complexities, probing into the national identity and showing the interaction of gender, race and military pressures around the presidency.

Critics on the right saw the program as a forum for the expression of “decidedly liberal politics.” *The West*



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Wing's president and hero Josiah "Jed" Bartlet (played by Martin Sheen) is a liberal Democrat, and Republicans and conservatives are often portrayed in negative ways.

At the same time, *TWW* has been criticized for offering an overly conservative message. One critic on the left (*The Progressive* magazine) asserts that it demonizes Arabs and underrepresents minorities in the White House.

It's not that simple. The central premise of the authors of *The Prime-time Presidency* is that "the drama reflects the ideological history and contestations of U.S. nationalism from the country's inception through its contemporary conflicts." They situate the drama "in the sweep of commitments to nationalism prevalent in U.S. history and politics."

Dictionaries define nationalism as "devotion, often chauvinistic, to one's own nation and to its political and economic interests or aspirations, social and cultural traditions, etc. It is the belief or doctrine that among nations, the common welfare is best served by independent rather than collective or cooperative action."

The authors don't make a judgment in the right-left orientation debate. They do conclude that *TWW* is "a nationalistic text," although they concede it doesn't present "a single, patriotic, pro-American vision of the United States."

For the authors, *TWW* offers a multilayered, complex but romantic vision of the U.S. presidency. They go on to examine what they call "the gendered, racial and then militarized implications of U.S. nationalism as reflected in *TWW*."

Strong women are shown in powerful roles, such as press secretary C.J. Cregg (Allison Janney) and First Lady Abigail Bartlet (Stockard Channing), but they are "routinely sexualized," and "the presidency is defined quite clearly in the show as a patriarchally dominated family."

The entire senior staff is depicted as white, but in response to criticism, the producers chose an African American, Charles Young (Dulé Hill), to play the personal assistant or "body man" to the president.

TWW's President Bartlet appoints a Latino, Roberto Mendoza (Edward James Olmos), to the Supreme Court, has an African-American woman, Nancy McNally (Anna Deavere Smith), as national security advisor, and an African American, Adm. Percy Fitzwallace (John Amos), as Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In the authors' view, nationalism "perpetuates and reinscribes the power of the U.S. presidency in international affairs." It emphasizes the president's commander-in-chief role.

They give us little direct allusion to the George W. Bush Administration, but there is a curious reference to President Bartlet's self-doubts and moral concerns about fighting terrorism when the book says the program offers "an alternative to the moral certainty of the Bush Administration."

TWW originally was not supposed to be about the president, the book reveals. The initial focus was on the staff, but then shifted to the presidency, held by an individual who was "simultaneously heroic and human, romantic and flawed." The result, say the authors, was a version

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of the U.S. nationalism that “sees the world as chaotic and in need of guidance from the president individually and from the United States more generally.”

Arguing against the view that *TWW* is liberal, the authors point to incidents in the drama in which communications director Toby Ziegler (Richard Schiff) belittles protesters and criticizes peace movements. They cite other story lines that demonstrate cold war attitudes. They say that *TWW* validates a view that presidents should use their covert powers to ferret out communists infiltrating the government and committing espionage.

Even though women are shown in important positions, the authors point to many examples of sexism in the script. C.J., for example, is sexualized and portrayed as lacking the knowledge of her male counterparts. Politics is seen as men’s business.

For the authors, nationalism, militarism and presidentiality “assume a symbiotic relationship.” The drama highlights America’s superiority and the president’s mythic force, they contend.

“Militarism is conflated with masculinity and masculinity with romantic heroism, which are integral components of U.S. nationalism.”

In other sequences, say the authors, the script upholds militarized nationalism “by giving it a powerful extended justification so it overrides all other civic concerns such as freedom or speech and freedom of religion.”

As academics, the authors tend to over-analyze on the one hand, and on the other, fail to critique some common complaints of ordinary viewers. Nowhere in the book is notice taken of the fact that dialogue in *TWW* is often garbled

or inaudible. Characters often speak too fast and over each others’ lines, shout while rushing past each other, and articulate poorly, until it becomes gibberish. It’s as if producers decided to sacrifice clarity for verisimilitude and authenticity. Better direction could have avoided this common complaint.

The language of the book is not oppressively academic, but ordinary readers will have occasional griefs with the scholarly jargon.

On the plus side, TV professionals, researchers and simple mavens will be grateful for two unusual appendix listings—an episode directory and a character directory.

All in all, the Parry-Giles team recognizes for us the powerful role television plays in fostering cultural beliefs. The book is well worth reading, provocative as it is, for it analyzes *TWW* as a site of meaningful discourse about presidential leadership and national identity.

Bernard S. Redmont is Dean Emeritus of Boston University College of Communication and a former correspondent for CBS News and other media outlets. A frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, he is also the author of *Risks Worth Taking: The Odyssey of a Foreign Correspondent*.

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Impresario: The Life and Times of Ed Sullivan

By James Maguire

Billboard Books, New York
(352 pages, \$24.95)

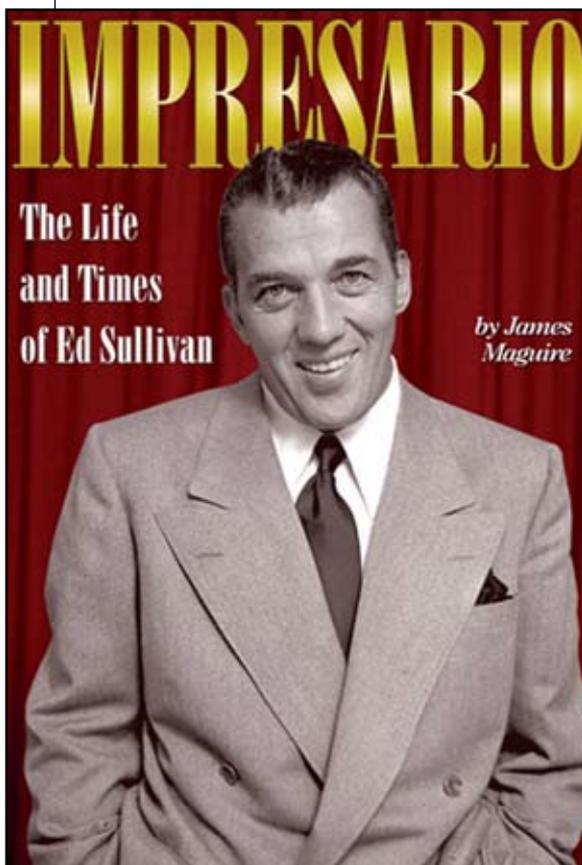
By Ron Simon

Ed Sullivan was an axiom of the three-network era of American television. Although awkward and fumbling, he hosted the definitive and longest-running variety series in history (1948-71). *The Ed Sullivan Show* became a Sunday-night institution on CBS and fulfilled the democratic mandate of the variety genre: to entertain all of the audience most of the time. But Sullivan himself was an enigma. Without any performing ability, he relished showmanship and had a keen eye for emerging talent, but was so wooden in posture and speech that every impressionist did a parody of Sullivan's robotic movements and his "really big shew" lingo. Alan King once quipped that "Ed does nothing, but he does it better than anyone else on television."

As columnist and master of ceremonies of charity shows, Sullivan had been a fixture on Broadway since the early thirties. But, until now, the only books published about "the great stone face" have been reminiscences of his legendary TV show. James Maguire,

a commentator on culture, technology and the American scene, has engagingly written the first major biography of the host who helped to shaped entertainment in postwar America. *Impresario* reveals the man in front and behind the curtain, a Wizard of Oz-like manipulator who was full of contradictions, very much like his show.

Sullivan was middle-aged when he became host of *The Toast of the Town* (renamed *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1955) Maguire devotes more than 100 pages to examining Sullivan's career up to his television debut when he was not actually the toast but a would-be player in Manhattan. Born in hardscrabble Harlem, Sullivan had a burning desire



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to be noticed. As a fledging sports reporter, he covered the games by day and frequented nightclubs by evening, nattily attired in hand-tailored suits. In the early thirties he replaced his lifelong nemesis, Walter Winchell, as gossip purveyor at the *New York Evening Graphic*. The success of his wise-guy column, *Ed Sullivan's Broadway*, led to a short-lived radio show, in which Sullivan introduced Jack Benny for the first time to a radio audience. He regained influence by writing five columns a week for the *Daily News* and even had a stint in Hollywood covering the movie business. Maguire effectively brings to life Sullivan's growing ambition to not only write about but also participate in celebrity culture, a sort of real-life *Sweet Smell of Success*.

In 1948 Sullivan was hired as a stopgap host because CBS could not find anyone else to compete with Milton Berle. CBS head William Paley, who was born on the same day as Sullivan (September 28th), was hopeful he could eventually buy the services of a professional host and signed the newspaperman to a contract that could be canceled with a two weeks notice. But Sullivan surprised the entire corporation by devising an updated vaudeville show that would appeal to an entire nation. From the premiere show on, Sullivan adroitly alternated contrasting acts, briskly mixing highbrow and lowbrow, old masters and ambitious neophytes. Critics, especially Jack Gould of the *New York Times* ("the choice of Ed Sullivan as master of ceremonies seems ill-advised"), were not impressed, but the American public was fascinated by this electronic grab bag.

Although Sullivan seemed the

respectful host, Maguire documents how as the show's producer he "took dictatorial control over every aspect of its production." He not only chose and sequenced the acts, but often demanded what material the artists performed. He shortened and changed routines immediately after dress rehearsal, even reshaping animal acts, which became especially hard on the tigers or monkeys who worked by rote. Throughout his career, Sullivan relied on his time-tested instinct, shaped by "his long education" in show business.

But the seen-it-all showman could not have predicted the rise of rock 'n' roll, an outgrowth of the burgeoning baby-boom generation. According to Maguire, Sullivan tried to play it both ways, keeping his big tent as inclusive as possible. At first dismissive of the Elvis phenomenon, the headline-conscious host signed the explosive singer to the biggest contract of any guest, a whopping \$50,000 for three guest appearances. But to assuage the fears of the more square members of his audience, he was very careful in how he used the Pelvis, infamously only shooting him from the waist up during his last appearance. In the end, Sullivan helped legitimize rock as a cultural force in American society.

By the time of the Beatles, Sullivan was more into mythmaking—his own. He claimed that he first encountered the hysteria of the Fab Four at a London airport when the group was coming back from a concert tour. It was a great serendipitous story that Sullivan retold many times: the wise impresario literally spotting the next trend of entertainment with his own eyes. Maguire separates fact from fiction by demonstrating there

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was never an overlap between Sullivan's stay in London and an airport ruckus. Sullivan probably discovered the Beatles by reading the press clipping sent by his European talent scout, Peter Prichard, who was later quoted as saying "if it would have happened, he would had a photograph of himself there."

Despite his appreciation of public taste, Sullivan is portrayed by Maguire as essentially a loner, an introvert with few friends. Much of the texture and color of *Impresario* comes from placing Sullivan in a larger cultural context; he was not a man of psychological depth or spiritual warmth. He was succinctly, in Maguire's words, our "Minister of Culture," a puritanical guardian of the show-biz tradition.

Impresario reads like a tale of yesteryear, when one man could define culture each week for an entire nation. The Vietnam War, which fractured the country politically, also splintered the democratic assumptions of Sullivan's vision. The instant gratification of the new technologies also made the variety show seem antiquated: there was no reason to wait for a favorite act when you had immediate access to any programming desired. But Sullivan also helped to create our appetite for celebrity, and Maguire paints a resonant portrait of a man who was a mirror and mediator for his time, an era when 40 million people hungered for his taste.

Ron Simon has organized several retrospectives of *The Ed Sullivan Show* at The Museum of Television & Radio, where he serves as curator for both media. He also teaches at Columbia and New York universities.

I'm Proud of You: My Friendship with Fred Rogers

By Tim Madigan

Gotham Books, New York
(208 pages, \$20)

By Carla Seal-Wanner

"L'essential est invisible pour les yeux."
(What is essential is invisible to the eyes.)

This phrase from *The Little Prince*, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, hung on a wall in Fred Rogers' office, writes Tim Madigan, as he sets out to convey how this penetrating idea describes Fred Rogers the person, the theologian, the children's television creator and host of the signature PBS Series *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Through the story of their friendship he reveals what Fred Rogers himself described as; "A lifelong search for what is essential, what it is about my neighbor that doesn't meet the eye."

This compelling tribute to Fred Rogers the mentor, friend and "television neighbor" to children of all ages is a must read for anyone who admired and/or was mystified by this endearing anomaly in the children's media industry. The author, a Texas journalist who met Fred Rogers when he wrote a profile of him for *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, writes movingly about the evolution of the life-long bond that developed between them. This pocket-sized treasure of a book takes you on the intellectual and personal

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journal that resulted in these two men sharing everything from readings in theology to discussions of the state of the world, family, marriage, love and death. Almost as a public thank-you to Fred for his love and guidance, the author “plays forward” this generosity by eloquently demonstrating that “*Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* revealed only a fraction of his human greatness.”

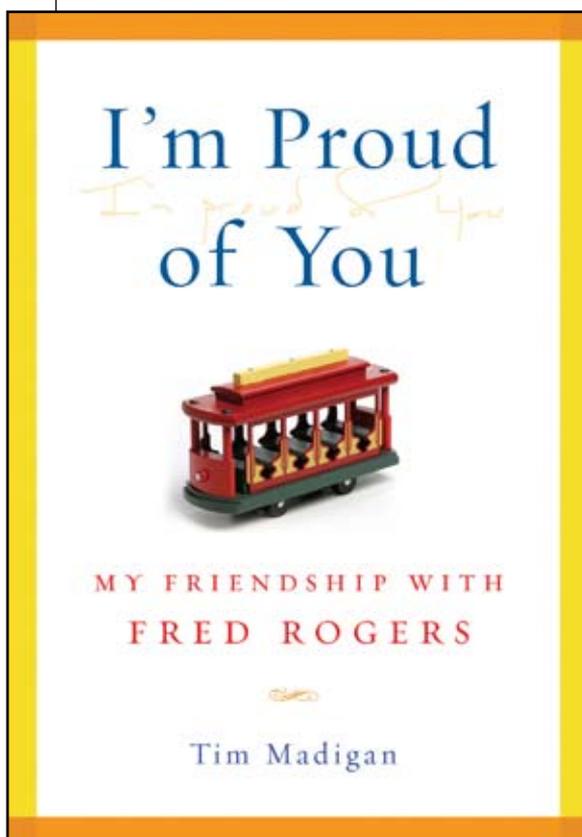
Fred Rogers the person and the television presence touched lives across ages, professions and continents. His familiarity is so widespread that he is the only children’s television host to become a regular satirical character on both NBC’s *Saturday Night Live* and NPR’s *Prairie Home Companion*. Yet what do we know about Fred Rogers the person?

If any of us, diehard Fred Rogers fans or not, ever doubted that the character he played on *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* was different in true character than the real man under those vintage wool cardigans, Tim Madigan puts those doubts to rest.

This book had special meaning for me as a developmental psychologist, children’s television professional and long-time admirer of Fred Rogers. Since I was a graduate student in the late seventies I have thought a great deal about the unique contributions of this brilliant man and *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, a presence on PBS since 1967. It is, much like the quote from *The Little Prince* implies, a program crafted around what Fred Rogers deemed *the essential* experiences early learners should have to help them develop into clear-thinking, feeling,

giving, loving and loved citizens of the world. And Tim Madigan gets it just right; it all boils down to the fact that for Fred Rogers, “neighbor” was a spiritual concept.

His concept spanned both the literal and figurative definition of neighbor. In *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* he meant it literally; everything was literal because that is the developmentally appropriate way to present information to this young audience of two-to-five year olds. However, the more philosophical way he used the concept of neighbor did not escape thoughtful adult observers. The brilliant metaphoric vehicle for the neighborhood, which, by the way, has stood the test of time over the many seasons that this program has delighted



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young viewers, symbolized much more. Fred Rogers meant neighbor in an almost biblical sense; a synonym for brother or fellow traveler. As such, we were all worthy of an intimate commitment from him—child or adult, friend or stranger. In his words and work for children on and off television he symbolized the political activist's mantra "*act local* (with your neighbor), *think global* (it will have universal impact). Namely, you will improve the world with each small act of humanity. Watching Mister Rogers made us notice the sad fact that in our fast-paced lives our actual neighbors are often the least likely people with whom we develop close relationships.

Worrying that some may think Fred Rogers approach was too innocent or naive, Tim Madigan wrote this book in part to describe the depth and breadth of the philosophy of life that drove his creative and personal contributions. "He was a man fully of this world, deeply aware of and engaged in it difficulties, speaking often of death, disease, divorce, addiction, and cruelty and the agonies those things wrought on people he loved," writes Madigan. The recipient of many national awards for his public works, the praises sung for Fred Rogers by the author provide a rare glimpse into how his philosophy of life manifest itself "behind the scenes."

It is these qualities that led Fred Rogers, for example, to study the work of such educational scholars as Jonathan Kozol. Kozol has devoted his life work to addressing the causes and consequences of poverty on the educational attainment of America's most disadvantaged

children. He and Rogers became friends and colleagues working on this issue in their different spheres of influence. In a speech given at the recently established Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media, William Isler, a friend and former colleague of Fred Rogers, and the executive director of the Center at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, PA, said; "He was especially intrigued by the fact that Jonathan never flinched from the responsibility to let people know about the struggles which some children have to live, the struggles of the adults who are closest to them, and the responsibility all of us have to them and to our own children."

These same values are the terra firma of the themes explored on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Through Mister Rogers' unique direct-to-camera delivery no child watching the television version of this "insistence on intimacy" could feel anything but "special." Mister Rogers spoke directly to his young audience about the things that mattered most to them. He modeled for them the love of learning and discovery, of exploring the realms of the imagination through fantasy, and most of all the love of self and others.

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood started out and remained a unique entity among increasingly fast-paced and less educationally grounded formats in the children's schedule. Through his performances as the host or as the voice of Daniel Tiger, Fred Rogers inspired children in the real world as well as the world of make believe that they so often frequent while growing up. He indulged the naturalness of using your imagination to leave reality for a while to see things

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from a different perspective. Although his approach seemed traditional on the surface, it was actually quite radical – he never forgot to communicate to children from their point of view.

As I was writing this review my 15-year-old daughter (a long time *Mister Rogers* fan who has now moved on to other media heroes) was watching Michael Moore's stunning film, *Bowling for Columbine*, for possibly her 20th time. In this film the director ponders why many thousands more people die from gun violence in American than in any other country. In the context of this query, he interviews a Canadian teenager about why Americans lock their doors and most Canadians do not. The teen replies, "I guess Americans don't trust their neighbors." Fred Rogers would no doubt agree with this assessment. He devoted his life to making the world a place where neighbors would be as trusted as family and as worthy of our generosity. Tim Madigan's book provides an up-front-and-personal view of what Fred Rogers extolled on television and in life:

"It's such a good feeling, a very good feeling. The feeling you know that we're friends. Won't you be my neighbor?"

Dr. Carla E.P. Seal-Wanner is the founder/president of @access4@ll, a public-interest advocacy organization promoting universal access to quality interactive media for children. A former professor at Columbia University, where she created and directed the graduate program in instructional technology and media, she received her doctoral and master's degrees in developmental psychology from Harvard and her BA in psychology from Hampshire College.

Desperate Networks

By Bill Carter

Doubleday, New York
(389 pages; \$26.95)

Seinology

By Tim Delaney

Prometheus Books
(280 pages, \$19)

By Earl Pomerantz

It's always somebody. The network Boss Man (or Boss Woman) – the only person who matters – holding the show creator's future in the palm of his (or her) hand. The names change over the years, but the question remains the same, always asked with anxiety and trepidation:

"What did Freddie say?"

"What did Harvey say?"

"What did Brandon say?"

"What did Stu say?"

"Stu's out. It's Jamie."

"What did Jamie say?"

"Jamie's out. Stu's back."

"What did Stu say?"

"What did Warren say?"

"You mean Scott."

"Who's Scott?"

"The new Warren. Or is that Garth?"

"What did Scott and/or Garth say?"

"What did Jeff say?"

"It's Kevin."

"Not Jeff?"

"Jeff was promoted. He appointed Kevin."

"What did Kevin say?"

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“What did Steve say?”

“He answers to Bob.”

“What did Bob say?”

“But Steve can decide.”

“What did Steve say?”

That’s how it feels from the outside, creative people at the mercy of the “suits” who hold total sway over their fates. Who are these all-powerful television executives? How did they get where they are? What goes on behind the scenes that results in their crucially important decisions?

Bill Carter’s highly readable *Desperate Networks* illuminates those mysteries. If you’ve been on the creative side or you’re just curious about the inner workings of network TV, *Desperate Networks* is for you.

I’ve read some negative reviews of *Desperate Networks*, which criticize the book for underemphasizing the rapidly evolving technologies. Bottom line, success in television is not about technologies, but as James Carville might have put it he’d worked in television, “It’s the programs, stupid.” To me, Carter’s focus is the correct one.

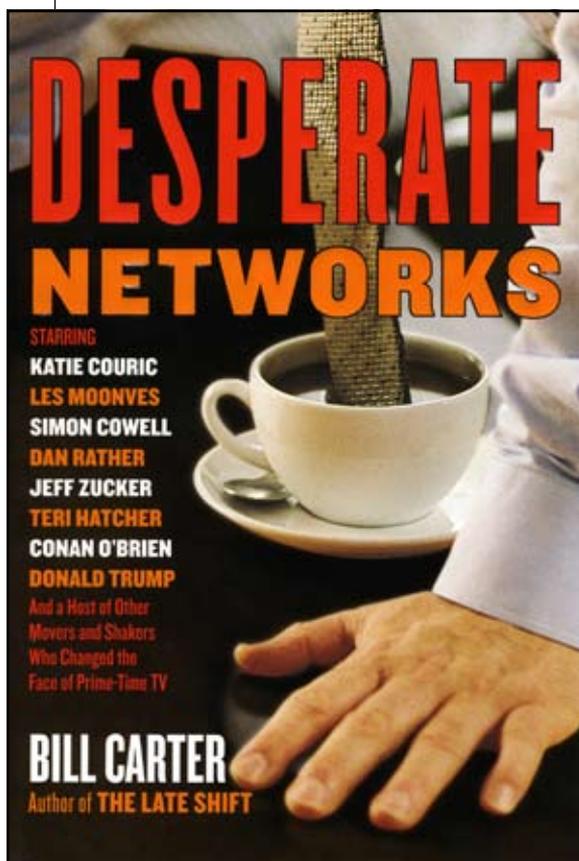
Desperate Networks is about people and, more importantly, about hits. Hit shows can rescue schedules and resuscitate networks. Paid-for rebroadcasts merely reinforce their significance; nobody buys rebroadcasts of a flop. As Les Moonves, who runs the CBS Corporation, tells us, “Content is essential.” “If anything, [the television business] is going to be more hit-driven than ever.”

Every year, television executives sift through hundreds of series

“pitches”, trying to ferret out The Next Big Thing. *Desperate Networks* chronicles their efforts.

The bad news: NBC passed on *Desperate Housewives*; ABC passed on *Survivor* twice; and everyone including the lowly UPN passed on *American Idol*, (which may never have gotten on at all if Fox’s owner, Rupert Murdoch, hadn’t barked “Don’t look at it, buy it. Right now”). The good news is that these and other tough-sell hits-to-be (*CSI* and *The Apprentice*) ultimately got on the air.

Still, a lot of executives missed a lot of boats. I saw a cartoon once where an angry child cried out to his father, “Why did you have me?” to which the father replied, “We didn’t know it was going



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to be you." A similar dynamic seems at play in the television selection process: "Why did you pass on *Survivor*?" "We didn't know it was going to be *Survivor*!" The difference between a parent dealt the genetic crapshoot of an offspring and a network executive misreading the potential of a future hit is "Why didn't you know?"

Here's one reason why. Before the proliferation of genres, television executives could measure the proposed series against a reliable template. Not anymore. The aforementioned mega-hits are significantly different in their formulations, nothing from another planet, but different. "Different" scares executives. (Peter Tortorici, former CBS Boss Man, now an independent producer: "Anytime you're doing anything that's not on the air, no matter how many times they tell you, 'Well, that's what we're looking for,' it's not.") Executives can get fired for championing a risky show that flops. The problem is they can also get fired for passing on a risky show that becomes a hit at another network. As someone once said in a different context, it may have been me, "There's gotta be an easier way to make hundreds of thousand of dollars a year."

Another factor leading to executives' mistaken decisions is the essential natures of the individual networks. *Desperate Housewives* had no chance at macho-oriented NBC. CBS would not even look at "that dark stuff that Les hates." ABC was hamstrung by a "labyrinthine and maddening decision-making process", and Fox offered divided considerations. Sandy Grushow, one-time head of the Fox television studio and network: "I, personally, would

rather fail with quality than succeed with garbage." Mike Darnell, Fox's head of "alternative series", encompassing everything from *American Idol* to *When Animals Attack*: "It's best not to have an opinion about a show until you see how big the ratings are." Gail Berman, former head of Fox Entertainment, fell somewhere in the middle but with one deal-breaking proviso: "No one dies on my watch." It's good to have standards.

Of course, there's always the issue of money, where being cheap can be extremely costly. In the early nineties, *Friends* was rejected by Fox because of a hundred and fifty thousand dollar penalty fee that Fox would be required to pay if the script wasn't ordered to be made as a pilot. Fox balked at this demand. NBC said "No problem." They snapped up *Friends*, their decision bringing them mountains of money, not to mention a ten-year juggernaut on Thursday nights.

Characters abound in *Desperate Networks*, show business historically serving as a haven for people who'd have considerable difficulty fitting in anywhere else. Among these fascinating figures are Marc Cherry, a legitimate "rags to riches" story; Mike Darnell, a diminutive troublemaker with outlandish programming tastes; and former Las Vegas tram driver, Anthony Zuiker, whose first network pitch finds him "literally bouncing up and down on the couch with excitement."

The "Title Card" pits CBS's Les Moonves against NBC's Jeff "Morning Boy" Zucker ("Morning Boy" because he made his reputation running *The Today Show*) whom Moonves, apparently needing an adversary, routinely referred to as "Zippy." The bout is a serious

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mismatch, since Moonves' achievements at CBS were formidable, while Zucker oversaw NBC's steep rating decline; Zucker's most noteworthy achievements in programming included suggesting, "Why not just make our good shows longer?" and paying the *Friends* ensemble millions of dollars not to leave. One senses a Moonves-favoring in this recounting – and in the book in general – as if, responding to Zucker's only meaningful challenge, "in the press coverage department", Moonves had made himself more available to the writer. At least twice Carter mentions that Moonves and his now-wife, *The Early Show* co-anchor Julie Chen, were truly in love when nobody was suggesting otherwise.

A chapter on the precipitous disappearance of network news anchors and a section on NBC getting back NFL football, as well as a retelling of the Janet Jackson "wardrobe malfunction" fiasco, seem extraneous to the concept of the book. Also, as an unintended consequence, though a handful of "creatives" are mentioned – *Housewives'* creator Marc Cherry, *CSI's* Anthony Zuiker and *Lost's* J.J. Abrams – by focusing on the efforts of network executives, the book oversells their significance to the process. The essential credit belongs to the people originating and executing the concepts, not to the people whose PR machines siphon off the attention.

Desperate Networks entertainingly describes savvy executives withstanding the heat and making difficult calls. But if it weren't for their "creatives," their scheduling boards, delineating programs and their time slots, would be totally empty.

When I was a kid, a friend told me about the time his cooking-challenged father fixed him dinner. The dinner he prepared was potatoes and corn. That was the whole dinner – potatoes and corn. Staring at the meal his father set before him, the son bewilderedly asked, "What kind of a dinner is potatoes and corn?" The father replied very simply: "You like potatoes and you like corn. What could be bad?"

For me, Tim Delaney's *Seinology* is like potatoes and corn. I thoroughly enjoyed Sociology in college, and I adore *Seinfeld*, in my view the greatest half-hour comedy of all time. Potatoes and corn. What could be bad?

Well, let's see.

Academics seem determined to break into crossover publishing; that's because there's no money in textbooks. So, we get Metta Spencer's *Two Aspirins and a Comedy* – a book I reviewed in the last issue of *Television Quarterly* – which championed propaganda through programming but was marketed as breezy entertainment. And now there's *Seinology*.

The smartest comedies (and comedians) chronicle the patterns and behaviors of everyday life. Sociology does the same thing. So, the thought must have arisen, why not travel that road together? *Seinfeld* borrowed from them. In "The Apartment" when considering the issue of whether men wearing wedding bands have an easier time attracting women, Jerry remarks, "That would make an interesting sociological experiment." If *Seinfeld* can hijack sociology for comedic purposes, why can't sociology co-opt *Seinfeld* for purposes of its own?

And that's what Delaney does. Like

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the dullard who brings a comedian along on a date to insure that his girlfriend will be properly entertained, Delaney guides us through a myriad of sociological ideas accompanied by the funniest show in history so we won't feel we've been suddenly kidnapped and taken to college. Trekking through sociological terrain, Delaney references no less than 153 episodes of *Seinfeld*, some as many as five times, and one, "The Foundation," six times.

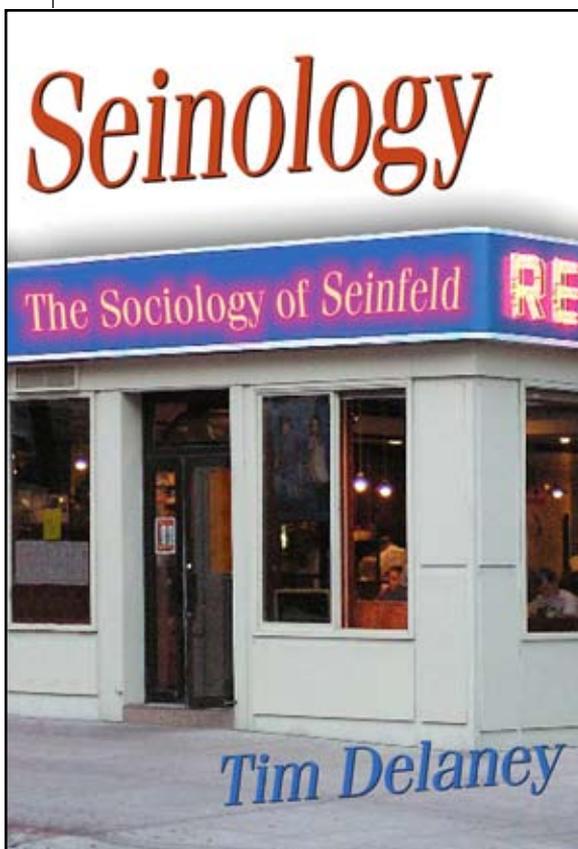
"Some of the material covered by sociologists is boring because some aspects of life are boring," Delaney admits. There you have it – the motive for bringing an iconic comedy along for the ride.

"As with *Seinfeld*, sociology is a discipline about everything, including the study of culture, socialization, groups and organizations, sex and gender, race and ethnicity, crime and deviance, marriage and family, religion, health and fitness, aging and death, and sports and leisure." These topics form the chapters in Delaney's book. Each represents an area of sociological exploration, and is made up of a mixture of Delaney's lecture material, supporting citations from the superstars in the field – Marx, Durkheim, Goffman and Parsons, among others – and, adding a spoonful of landmark comedy sugar to help the medicine go down, relevant examples from episodes of *Seinfeld*.

The examples are carefully chosen and appropriately applied. "The Wizard," the episode Delaney reveals, "led to the idea of writing

a book on the sociological relevance of *Seinfeld*," is selected as a springboard for an examination of the thorny subject of race. "The Suicide" introduces us to Durkheim's four types of suicide, linking each to the degree of integration into, or regulation by, society. Appropriate social behavior, a ubiquitous *Seinfeldian* theme, offers dozens of examples for evaluation such as (again from "The Suicide") the question of "coma etiquette," as in "How long do you have to wait before dating the girlfriend of a comatose man?"

Seinology is at its most imaginative in using selected episodes to illuminate sociological concepts. In "The Boyfriend" episodes, we remember Keith Hernandez, a sports hero and Jerry's new friend, asking Jerry to help him



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move too early in their relationship, a blatant example of “boundary jumping.” “The Label Maker” examines the subject of “re-gifting.” And after George’s set-to in “The Implants,” who of us will ever “double dip” a chip without at least considering if it’s socially acceptable to do so or if “that’s like putting your whole mouth right in the dip”?

The book’s writing is serviceable and relatively jargon-free, the episode summaries clear and succinct. Sometimes, however, the relationship between the sociological point and the episode is noticeably strained. One example of a “stretch” is “The Opposite,” wherein Elaine inadvertently foils a takeover of her employer’s publishing company by the Japanese; Delaney uses this as an opportunity to offer an extended discourse on globalization, a subject only peripherally related to the story. The Costanzas’ retirement to Florida in “The Money” is linked to the fact that “The median net worth of older white households in 2002 was at \$205,000. The statistics paint a gloomier picture for older black households as their net worth is estimated at \$41,000.” Tangential in the extreme to “The Maid” is a list Delaney provides us of occupations with the highest number of fatalities per year, the most dangerous job being – stop reading if you don’t want me to spoil the surprise – logging. Delaney’s blending of sociology and comedy is not consistently smooth.

Then there’s the “Duh” information, obvious yet still deemed necessary for the author to include. “A ‘bookie’ [is] someone who takes illegal bets.” “At the top of the medical hierarchy are doctors.” “Adultery occurs when a married person

has sex with someone other than their spouse.” Helpful definitions and distinctions are also found in *Seinology*, but information known to say, everyone, could easily have been left out.

Finally, from a stylistic standpoint, Delaney makes some questionable choices. At one point, Delaney turns into a shameless cheerleader for his chosen field: “There is no other discipline that equals the level of expertise on the study of sex and gender than sociology.” At others, he abandons his discipline’s signature objectivity, mutating into a middle-aged scold: “Oddly, young people think smoking makes them look cool – it certainly does not.” Delaney also engages in the peculiar habit of ending chapters with a wish. The chapter entitled “Health” ends with “Here’s wishing everyone good mental and physical health.” “Population, Aging and Death” ends with “Here’s hoping life is filled with many moves before the final one arrives.”

One disagreement with the author: *Seinology* maintains from the beginning that “...*Seinfeld* was much more than an entertaining show about nothing. It was a show about everything.” I don’t believe it was. *Seinfeld* was a show about funny occurrences. When I once met Larry David and asked him about his process, he responded, “I’m just looking for the funniest situations. ‘What’s the funniest thing that could happen?’” That’s the comedy writer’s Holy Grail, looking for the funniest possible situations and developing them into stories. But, and this is what made *Seinfeld* stand out, the situations were required to be identifiably real. When in the episode “The Pilot,” George explains the show

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is about nothing, what he means is it's about the funny things that happen in everyday life, as opposed to the ridiculous contrivances of standard sitcoms. "The boss is coming and I burned the roast." "My kid swallowed the car keys." "I accidentally slept with my sister-in-law." *Seinfeld* was never about these things—the things that only happen in sitcoms—but it was never about everything. It wasn't about politics; it wasn't about the economy; it wasn't about world affairs; it was barely about anyone beyond Jerry, George, Kramer and Elaine.

What it comes down to in the end is a question of context. As a textbook, *Seinology* is an entertaining introduction to the study of sociology. But crossover marketing requires a tastier offering than potatoes and corn.

An award-winning television comedy writer, Earl Pomerantz is the author of "What's So Funny?" in this issue of *Television Quarterly*.

Watching Wildlife

By Cynthia Chris

*University of Minnesota Press,
Minneapolis*
(320 pages, \$19.95)

By Geoffrey Hammill

Growing up during the 1950s, I had two passions: baseball and animals. The former was addressed on sandlots with friends, a bat, a ball and a glove. AM radio helped me stay in touch with my adopted team (the Cleveland Indians) while early television added the occasional visual connection (in dusty black and white). The live play-by-play over the airwaves reinforced the aliveness of the game—here was something in which a boy could be involved regularly and actively. But my other passion—animals—could not be addressed so actively. Our family dog and parakeet gave me a tiny window to actively pursue this interest. But it would be up to books and, most vitally, television to fill my desire for information about wild creatures.

I'm not certain where the fascination with animals came from but I know how that interest was nurtured. By Marlin Perkins' *Zoo Parade*, grainy Frank Buck "Bring 'Em Back Alive" films, Tarzan movies and *Ramar of the Jungle*. Any show that had images of wild animals had my rapt attention. In the Cleveland area there was also a local animal expert, Jungle Larry, who appeared on local kids' shows with his menagerie of wild animals. All of this plus any book I could

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find at the library filled my imagination with gazelles and chimpanzees and lions and eagles.

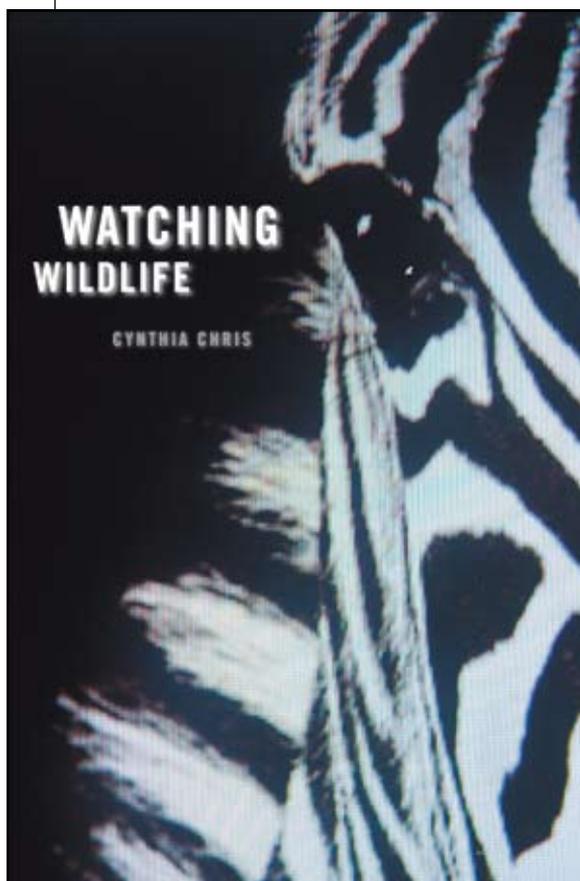
In *Watching Wildlife*, author Cynthia Chris has undertaken a broad examination of wildlife films and television programs. She explains the origins and evolution of this genre and provides a context for it which transcends the zoological and draws in the cultural, anthropological and ideological as well. Her text provides a cogent history of the genre from the earliest still representations of animals (incorporating Muybridge and Marey and their early motion studies) through to the contemporary glut of reality television programs as presented by the Discovery Channel and Animal Planet among others.

Chris' five chapters are arranged to detail the development of the genre. Chapter One presents the fascinating earliest years of wildlife study as affected by visual media beginning with panoramas and dioramas in museums and exhibitions. These precursors to film had a persuasive effect on their audiences.

Her discussion of the cultural implications of the earliest camera-hunter and expedition films provides a concise summation of the powerful effects of these images upon the European and American audiences who were "shown" that the wild animals and primitive peoples were characters in a world existing for the examination and understanding of what was seen as the eminently superior European world. The films of Martin and Osa Johnson, Cherry

Kearton and others, while no-doubt presenting some legitimate images from exotic locales, succeeded mostly in reinforcing the concept of a white male hegemony in which both "Others" and women were relegated to the same level as the animals which were the primary objects of the films. Examining Paul L. Hoefler's *Africa Speaks*, Chris notes the obvious use of editing to create such a statement, observing that "... it tacitly devalues African human life as expendable, fueled by the same racist bravado that pervades the Johnsons' films."

The "Disneyfication of Nature" began in 1948 with animal films that were "sentimental, anthropomorphizing, and



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steeped in postwar ideologies of progress and individualism, homeland prosperity, and so-called family values.” From this point, animal films would be focused on animals without the presence of humans. The films would examine either a single species’ life cycle or the wildlife of a given area. In this, the genre moved closer to the films of today that allow the audience to identify the “protagonist” and “antagonist” and to imbue the animals with human attributes. In a later discussion of the film “March of the Penguins,” Chris joins others in commenting on how the Christian right anthropomorphized the penguins and identified them as a representation of family values. “Here, the penguin is understood (even if it was not so intended by the filmmakers) as not only a signpost for the ‘natural,’ but a sign of the holy, however removed from its own daily experience is the concept.”

Chapter 2 traces the evolution of television wildlife programming focusing largely upon the shows of Perkins, Jacques-Yves Cousteau and David Attenborough, noting that their shows also conveyed some of “the aspects of ideologies of race, sexual difference, and the exploitation of nature” of pre-television wildlife films. Chris here and in Chapter 3 engages in necessary examination of the development of the technology and business of the television and cable industries as necessary to the evolution of the genre. In particular, she makes the point that PBS’ *Nature* followed the Disney tactic of removing humans from the images, thereby “both ensuring its reusability in future projects and helping the filmmaker evade controversies over

land use or issues like human poverty that might turn away audiences looking to be entertained or uplifted.” Indeed, the business of television has had a significant role to play in the evolving genre of wildlife film/television and Chris addresses this well. Her detailing of the development of the Discovery Channel (and its corporate brethren) and the National Geographic Channel, their programming and the subsequent globalization of these channels and their subject matter is well-done and essential. So is her examination of the development of sensationalized wildlife programs such as *Fangs!*, *Crocodile Hunter*, *When Animals Attack* and *When Good Pets Go Bad*. Chris manages to touch on the several sub-genres and the varying recombinations within the genre to good effect.

The need to draw audience is at the root of the subject of animal sex, to which a chapter is devoted. “Part of the human fascination with images of animals is voyeuristic, deriving from curiosity about sexual activity, theirs and ours.” This chapter also deals with sociobiology, the field that arose in the 1970s which suggests that human behavior can be understood through the understanding of animal behavior. The author does an admirable job detailing the impact of this academic theory upon wildlife films and of pointing out how the theory has been embraced by many wildlife filmmakers. Some shows, like *When Animals Attract* make distinct claims about the similarities of human and animal mate-selection. Others are more restrained but sociobiology obviously has been an influence on wildlife filmmakers in dealing with

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sexually-oriented topics. From courtship through mating to birthing and raising young, the genre appears to offer the animal world as a tool to understand human behavior.

Chris touches briefly upon issues of “rape” and homosexuality as topics for wildlife film producers. Elements of feminism enter the discussion throughout the text but particularly in this portion as the author deals with the difficulty of language use (is “rape” the correct word for “resisted mating” among animals?) *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* comes into play in the discussion of “gay” penguins at New York’s Central Park Zoo. Using this satire as the springboard, the author examines the tendency of the genre to avoid same-sex issues which occur regularly among some species.

The tone becomes more geo-political in the chapter about pandas. Arguably one of the most media-friendly animals, Great Pandas have been used to define international political relations and to generate revenue for zoos. While interesting, this chapter tends to diverge from the book’s focus upon wildlife films although Chris certainly details television’s on-going fascination with the animal and the attempts of humans to help it propagate in captivity.

Chris has done an exhaustive job researching her topic. Her notes include a wide array of sources from the fields of media, biology, cultural studies, anthropology, zoology and more. One criticism would be the lack of a comprehensive list of cited sources and other resources. With this many sources, it is necessary. But this is a minor (if important) drawback. The book is well-

researched and generally well-focused (the panda chapter notwithstanding) and it consolidates a lot of other research into an accessible volume. The genre of wildlife films is one of long-standing. Indeed, animal films were among the first to be created (Edison and Howe among early producers). And animals have long been significant draws for audiences, both cinema and television. Humans have relied upon moving images to inform them of animals and their worlds and, as Chris points out, the genre has frequently misled us. Internalized images of Africa, India, South America, and Asia and their people and animals have formed the realities of millions of people and the images have usually been manipulated unrealistically. Wildlife filmmakers have used their medium to reinforce cultural, spiritual and political imperatives. We have assigned human motives and meanings to animal behaviors and we have used animal behaviors to explain human activities. While there has undoubtedly been truth to much of this content, there has also been much misrepresentation.

For a young boy growing up in the U.S.A. in the 1950s, television brought an eye-opening world of exotic animals and places full of adventure and danger. Wildlife footage from the 1930s and earlier which was incorporated into Tarzan movies and “jungle” TV shows taught me about a world I might never encounter. Like everyone, I never questioned the validity or the accuracy of what I watched. Seeing was believing. That confident acceptance continued through the National Geographic specials and PBS shows (*Nature* and others) of the 1960s and 1970s. But an

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insight gained from age and experience is the awareness that television is a business that packages programming primarily to attract audiences. Enlightenment is secondary if it is truly a consideration at all. So the cable and network animal shows that started appearing in the 1980s began to resemble nothing so much as network comedies and dramas complete with good guys, bad guys, comic relief and easily-digested morals.

Watching Wildlife will open the eyes of those who might cling to the naïveté of Disney's True-Life Adventures. More importantly, it will enlarge the scope of media scholars and those interested in the place of wildlife film in our mediated world. Chris has written a volume which necessarily places the genre within its proper historical, cultural and ideological context. While the book, as written, will not reach the youngster watching a network or cable animal show, it certainly adds to the weaponry of those who would become more media literate; the better to remind us all that our mediated messages are products of a variety of influences and that nothing is as simple as it is made to appear.

Geoffrey Hammill is a professor of electronic media and film studies at Eastern Michigan University. He specializes in media criticism and media literacy.

Alvin Cooperman Remembered

After working for Lee and J.J. Schubert in the theater since he was 16 years old, Alvin Cooperman, who died last August at the age of 83, got his first job in television: as NBC's production manager for the *Texaco Star Theater*, starring Milton Berle. Reminiscing in *Television Quarterly* about his first day on the set, Cooperman wrote that Berle pointed at him and asked, "Who are you?" "I'm Alvin Cooperman, the NBC production manager." Milton puffed on his cigar. "I hope you're better than the idiot we had last season, kid." Equally inauspicious was Cooperman's first program: because Berle refused to rehearse with props, he flooded the set during a shower scene, which ultimately became a blessing in disguise: "I was a celebrity in the office because the water disaster was what everyone was talking about," Cooperman wrote in *Television Quarterly*. "After all, I came from the theater."

And back to the theater he went. Gerald Schoenfeld, chairman of the Shubert Organization, lured Cooperman away from television to become the company's booker. The job involved poring over hundreds of scripts and buying the rights to those he considered best and matching them with the 22 theaters the company then had in New York and elsewhere. During the past half-century Cooperman was president of Madison Square Garden productions, establishing the MSG Network to carry Garden events, making it the first regional sports network in North America. He was also vice-president of special programs for NBC-TV, where he won Emmy, Christopher and Peabody awards. He held many other important posts, but, in Mr. Schoenfeld's estimate, "he had a good, winning way of dealing with creative people. He had good taste. These are the essential ingredients." Along with Walter Cronkite, Skitch Henderson, Sidney Lumet, Neil Simon and David Susskind, he was one of the original founding members of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences more than 50 years ago.

Alvin Cooperman's contributions to television and the theater are a precious legacy. He will be sorely missed. —Ed.



Alvin Cooperman (left) with Milton Berle
in 1951

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