

THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF TELEVISION ARTS AND SCIENCES

TELEVISION QUARTERLY

VOLUME XXXIX
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FALL 2007

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BY FRITZ JACOBI



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Goes
Wireless**

By John V. Pavlik

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Press in
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By Andrés Izarra

**He Does
No Such
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COVER: Paley Center CEO Pat Mitchell with film director George Lucas.

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The Paley Media Center: A TV Professional is in Charge

By Fritz Jacobi

Last June the Museum of Television and Radio—established by CBS Chairman William S. Paley in 1975 as the Museum of Broadcasting—changed its name once again: to the Paley Center for Media. The reason, according to an official announcement:

“To better reflect its evolution to a center that convenes media leaders and enthusiasts for programs that explore and illuminate the immense and growing impact of all media on our lives, culture and society.”

In an exclusive interview with *Television Quarterly*, Paley Center



Paley Media Center CEO Pat Mitchell

Kevin Parry / The Paley Center for Media

president Pat Mitchell, who had served as PBS president for six years before joining the MTR as chief executive in 2006, explained that MTR Chairman Frank A. Bennack, Jr., the former head of the Hearst Corporation, had discussed with her the need for a name change.

“Frank noted that our board reflected a much broader spectrum of media than just radio and television,” she said. “Now cable and the Internet are involved. Ed Ney, a distinguished advertising man, brought in a world-class naming organization, Landor, who donated their services. The change took six months. They landed on ‘Center’ because this is not an actual museum. Some visitors had actually asked for their money back when they discovered that we didn’t display such artifacts as old television and radio sets or Archie Bunker’s chair. Even though many young people never heard of Bill Paley, when they learned that he was a great innovator the response to the proposed new name was very positive.”

Ms. Mitchell said that while both the Manhattan facility, on West 52nd Street, and the Beverly Hills branch in California—established in 1996—will continue to make their identical collections of radio and television programs available to the general public, the West Coast Center will reflect the area’s greater interest in entertainment while the New York Center often spotlights public affairs. For example, the Los Angeles Center features the Paley Festival of ten days of current and classic television, with participation by casts and directors, while in New York “we use the collection to show how a program may have had a role in influencing foreign policy,”

Ms. Mitchell noted, citing appearances by such figures as Madeleine Albright and Henry Kissinger in public forums at the Center.

“We have a dual mission,” she added, “media-industry people and public programs.” She conducts many of the interviews herself. Having worked as a reporter for all three broadcasting networks from 1972 to 1992, she brings to the job an invaluable diversity of experience.

A recent example of a well-attended public program spotlighted Ms. Mitchell’s interview of Queen Noor of Jordan, the daughter of a distinguished Arab-American family who in 1978 married King Hussein, the father of Jordan’s present king. Taking place the very day the Museum changed its name to the Paley Center, the conversation covered Queen Noor’s devotion to such causes as women and children’s welfare, conservation and human rights, and also featured television clips focusing on these aspects of her life.

Ms. Mitchell attributes her facility as an interviewer not only to her extensive television-news experience but also to her previous work as a teacher. “Teaching prepared me best for my entire career in television,” she said. “Because in teaching, whether you were teaching sixth graders of college sophomores”—and she has done both—“you had to impart information in away that was engaging enough to be remembered and impactful.”

A major Paley Center project very close to Ms. Mitchell’s heart is “She Made It: Women Creating Television and Radio,” a tribute to the visionary women pioneers and contemporary innovators who have had a major impact on the artistic growth and financial success of radio and television. For



Pat Mitchell (left) with Jordan's American-born Queen Noor

Jimi Celeste/The Paley Center for Media

each of the past two years the Center has saluted 50 women—from Gertrude Berg and Pauline Frederick to Rosanne Barr and Judy Woodruff—who have been responsible for the development of the industry.

“These contributions have been largely ignored in standard textbooks,” Ron Simon, the Center’s television curator, wrote last winter in *Television Quarterly*. He added that “She Made It” spotlights the accomplishments of “exemplary women in four distinct realms: entertainment, news, sports and the executive suite. The project focuses on women’s contributions as producers, writers and directors as well as heads of networks.” Simon noted that the Center, in consultation with an advisory committee of women in the industry, is currently compiling a third list of distinguished women as 2007 honorees. Ms. Mitchell was so honored when she headed PBS.

In 2001, shortly after assuming the residency of PBS, Pat Mitchell was interviewed in these pages by the late Arthur Unger, former television critic

of *The Christian Science Monitor*. Unger asked her how, with so many competing cable channels, like the History Channel, A&E and Discovery, she thought PBS could survive.

“By being different,” she replied. “They’ve stolen our genres but not our thunder...They don’t do what we do. The History Channel is not doing history the way *The American Experience* does. We have the purpose of education in mind as well. So we don’t just put a program on television for entertainment. We make sure it has educational components that are translated immediately into classroom curriculum materials.”

Today she adds that PBS is drawing two and a half times the audience for A&E, the History Channel, CNN and Fox. “There is still a substantial audience for PBS based on its reputation,” she says. As to the increasing commercialization of PBS programs, she notes that “the underwriters demand it and PBS has no choice because it’s so underfunded.”

She added, however, that corporate underwriting messages do not interrupt PBS programs as they do on commercial television and that when Exxon/Mobil asked to place real commercials in the narrative flow of *Masterpiece Theater* she turned them down.

During her tenure at PBS she found government pressure “very tough and distracting,” as exemplified by former CPB Chairman Kenneth Y. Tomlinson’s hounding of Bill Moyers. “Tomlinson was soundly defeated,” she notes with satisfaction. “Moyers is my hero!”

Before joining PBS as President and CEO—the first woman and first producer and journalist to hold that position—Ms. Mitchell had served for eight years as an executive in charge of original productions for Ted Turner’s cable networks. Her documentaries and specials received 37 Emmy Awards, five Peabody Awards and two Academy Award nominations.

Pat Mitchell serves on more than a half-dozen prestigious corporate boards, ranging from Sun Microsystems to the Bank of America. She derives her greatest satisfaction, however, from her work for such eleemosynary outfits as the Mayo Clinic. “It sets very high standards for health care,” she notes, “increasingly taking a leadership role in health-care reform.” Other organizations she supports fight violence against women and empower women by giving them their own voice and their own independence. She is also vice-chair of the Sundance Institute, which trains independent film and theater artists. “This,” she says, “is great fun!”

Pat Mitchell is a busy woman. She and her husband, Scott Seydel—a chemical engineer and

environmentalist working, among other projects, on a massive waste-management project for New York City—have six children, ranging in age from 21 to 42. They include a lawyer, two MBA’s, two real-estate executives and a filmmaker. And there are 10 grandchildren, ranging in age from six months—a pair of twins, whose photo she proudly displays—to 16.

In the introduction to his 2001 *Television Quarterly* interview of Pat Mitchell as the new chief executive of PBS Arthur Unger wrote that “the reception area of the Public Broadcasting Service’s new headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, seemed boringly, almost monochromatically, gray-green. But when I walked into her office, the excitement was palpable. My eyes were almost blinded by a flash of white walls, a colorful rug and exciting paintings hung all around. And by a radiant Pat Mitchell—blonde, trim, in a beige pantsuit—bubbling over with ideas, enthusiasm and determination to return PBS to the full glory of its initial concept. Ms. Mitchell is handsome—pretty, bordering on beautiful—but her real beauty stems from her intelligence and intensity.”

Six years later, it still does.

The editor of Television Quarterly, Fritz Jacobi has been working in and around television—both commercial and public—since the time of Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca, Howdy Doody, Victory at Sea and The Great American Dream Machine.

Broadband Mobile Media:

Digital Video Goes Wireless By **John V. Pavlik**

Mobile media and broadband wireless technologies are converging rapidly as growing legions of the U.S. and global population adopt cell phone and other mobile media devices to talk, text and produce, view and distribute audio and video content. The implications for television are significant, as growing numbers of persons use cell phones and other mobile devices to watch video

programming, often in the form of television programs formatted for small screens or shortened for a viewer on the go. In June of 2007, Sony Pictures Television announced the launch of the

Minisode Network, which features four- to six-minute length versions of 15 vintage Sony television series, including *Charlie's Angels*, *The Facts of Life*, *Fantasy Island* and *Who's the Boss*.

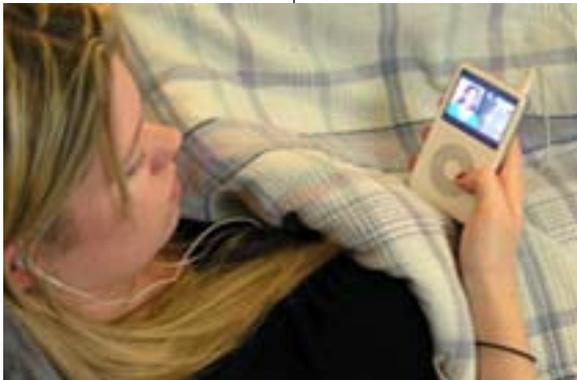
These programs originally aired in lengths of 30 or 60 minutes and have been edited down to Internet-compatible lengths for distribution via

MySpace. Honda is the sole sponsor of the Minisode Network, which is scheduled for eventual delivery to mobile devices, including cell phones. YouTube already offers a mobile video section, with 60 videos formatted for mobiles available on June 15, 2007. Among the offerings are mostly short-length (two to three minute) comedies, such as a satirical "Paris Hilton in Jail" music video, viewed by 4.5 million, rated four of five stars by more than 18,000

viewers and commented upon by more than 14,000.

Perhaps not surprisingly, viewers of cell-phone video tend to be younger and often watch video on mobile devices during

the afternoon of typical work days, thus expanding the potential television viewing audience in a time when other traditional television day-parts are seeing a shrinking audience share. Further, many of these cell phone video viewers are also capturing and distributing their own video, or video "gifted" from friends and family, or



John Carey

Vertical iPod: The display device may change but TV is still TV

watching video produced by various non-traditional sources or independent producers. The competition for the mobile video viewer is just starting to heat up in the U.S. and around the world.

As of May 2007, the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association estimates that more than 236 million persons in the United States

More than 70 percent of persons in the U.S. subscribe to a cell phone or other mobile, wireless device...The number of mobile-phone video users in the U.S. is expected to reach 20 million by the end of 2007.

subscribe to wireless communication devices such as cell phones (<http://www.ctia.org/>). This means more than 70 percent of persons in the U.S. subscribe to a cell phone or other mobile, wireless device. Roughly 11 percent of these mobile devices can display video. The number of mobile-phone video users in the U.S. is expected to reach 20 million by the end of 2007. These numbers represent a dramatic increase from 1990, when just some 4.3 million persons in the U.S. subscribed to cellular services, or less than three percent of the population, and none of them had video or even still image capability on their phone. The camera phone was not even invented until 1997, when Philippe Kahn created the first camera phone by soldering a camera and various circuits to his cell phone in order to shoot pictures of his wife's labor (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe_Kahn).

A notable mobile video trial is

emerging in Jackson, Mississippi. There, a Wireless Information Networks Laboratory known as MAN-RAN is being developed. Bruce Lincoln, strategic advisor to the Mississippi wireless project reported in a recent telephone interview that they are building a ultrabroadband wireless network, which will provide a platform for the delivery of video to mobile devices. A diverse array of content providers is planning to use the network to deliver video to mobiles, especially cell phones. Among those planning mobile video applications are distance learning, telemedicine, cultural and arts organizations, such as the

BB King Blues Museum, and tourism.

There are many other mobile video applications, as well, including the development of citizen journalism and a virtual newsroom. A virtual newsroom is one in which citizens or professional journalists alike can cooperate or even collaborate in covering current events, breaking news or community news in general via cell phones and other devices, making video, audio and text-based news reports available via blogs, podcasts or other forms of media amenable to mobile technologies.

Mobile video may have even greater potential outside the United States, at least in terms of numbers of users. In China, for example, more than 600 million persons subscribe to cellular telephone service, with 100 million more cell-phone users signing up each year. This data was reported by industry representatives at "Communication in the Digital Age: A

Global Perspective,” a conference at Jiao Tung University, Shanghai, last April where I gave an invited lecture. By the end of 2008 an estimated 32 million Chinese will be using cell- phone video. Eleven percent of Europeans are interested in mobile video (<http://www.itfacts.biz/index.php?id=P8490>), compared to 41 percent in the U.S. While nearly half, or 44 percent, want cell-phone video for free, 19 percent are willing to pay for it.

Most have used a cell phone for more than two years. Even nearly half of 5- to 9-year olds in the U.S. now have their own cell phones (<http://www.itfacts.biz/index.php?id=C041>). Young Americans are so comfortable with their cell phones that a growing portion is dispensing with a landline. As of 2007, 25 percent of U.S. adults 18-24 have a cell phone only. About 12 percent of the overall adult population has a cell phone only. Half (50 percent) of mobile video users in the U.S. are 25-36 years old. This reflects not only their growing comfort with the technology and preference to be continuously connected, but also the growth of broadband wireless technologies, which enables a variety of advanced applications, including cell phone banking, music downloading and mobile video.

A growing amount of research on cell-phone video usage is providing insight into the opportunities and challenges of delivering video to mobile devices. Among the leading

researchers on mobile media is John Carey, professor at Fordham University. Based on his research Carey has found that one of the significant problems with using cell phones to watch video is power. “Battery life is an issue especially with cell phones. Video eats up battery power much more than a telephone call or listening to music. In the case of the iPod, it’s not as bad as a cell phone. If the battery on an iPod goes, they can’t listen to music until they recharge. If the cell phone battery goes, they feel they are losing contact with their world.”

Apple’s iPhone, introduced June 29, 2007 offers about eight hours of talk time, seven hours of battery life when viewing video, and six hours when

An estimated 70 percent of 12- to 14-year-olds in the U.S. have their own cell phones and an even higher portion of 15- to 17-year olds do.

using the Internet (somewhat less time if the video is being streamed via the Internet). Competing smart phones provide about 25 percent less video playback time. Palm Inc.’s Treo and

Research in Motion Ltd.’s BlackBerry Curve deliver about four hours of video playback time while Samsung Electronic Co.’s Blackjack plays video for about 5.5 hours before needing to recharge the battery.

Carey’s research also provides insights into consumer reactions to mobile video, especially on a small screen. Carey’s research shows that “When you ask people how they feel about watching video on an iPod or cell phone, the reaction is more negative than if you show it to them. Many are surprised how well it works when they actually see it.”

“The screen on a cell phone may

seem small until you hold it up close,” notes mobile media expert James Katz, Professor of Communication at the School of Communication, Information and Library Studies at Rutgers University. “Audio is also very important,” Katz adds. “What you won’t have much of is people walking and watching video on cell phones. My hunch is not a lot of people will be producing their own video from cell phones or watching each other’s cell phone videos. People will want what the big media companies produce and send out specifically designed for cell phones.” Yet, there is a relatively new form of video that will also appear with increasingly regularity on cell phones. “You will start to see more live two-way video between cell-phone users,” Katz says.

Research also suggests that the use of video on cell phones may be poised to accelerate. “The use of video on portable devices has been evolving and is not as great a leap as it might seem at first,” Carey says. “Many have used the laptop as a second TV in the home to watch DVDs and now video over the Web. Portable DVD players have been around for a number of years. And, both iPods and cell phones have been used for video games. So, video is a next step, not big leap for many.”

Moreover, watching video on a mobile device does not necessarily mean

watching it while mobile. “Much use of mobile video is in the home, which seems surprising at first,” Carey points out. His research shows that “Many like to curl up with their iPod in bed and watch music videos or a favorite show. Cell phones are carried everywhere a person goes, so it is not surprising that they might take a short break at home and check out a video clip.” As a result, some call the cell phone the “third screen,” after the television and computer.



In the office: The picture quality on mobile devices has improved

John Carey

Among the most widely available broadband wireless technologies for mobile video are 3G and Wi-Fi. 3G is a wireless technology for delivering broadband to cell

phones. In-Stat reports that as of 2007 210 cellular carriers worldwide have deployed 3G or will do so by the end of the year (<http://www.itfacts.biz/index.php?id=C0341>). Western Europe leads the way with 68 3G networks deployed, followed by Asia Pacific with 54, Eastern Europe with 38, North America with 19, South America with 18 and the Middle East with 13. 4G technology, the next generation of ultrabroadband wireless, is now entering the marketplace, and promises even higher bandwidth capacity to deliver video to cell phones. It utilizes Internet protocols to deliver high bandwidth capacity.

According to research by Carey, “One reason some other countries are ahead of us in mobile video is the leapfrog effect. We are heavily invested in 2G technology and companies want to recover their investment before moving

Mobile video subscribers tripled between 2005 and 2006, and the number of users is expected to top 46 million by 2010.

on to 3G. In other countries with older technology, they were able to leapfrog ahead to the latest 3G technology.”

Wi-Fi technology provides wireless broadband connectivity that can be used by cell phones, but is more commonly used to connect laptops to the Internet. Wi-Fi is widely deployed in the U.S. and internationally, with hot spots particularly widespread in urban areas (<http://www.wi-fihotspotlist.com/>). Apple’s iPhone provides dual wireless options to view video. It uses AT&T’s cellular data network, which is a relatively slow less than 3G network. The iPhone also has built-in Wi-Fi capability, which can provide high-speed, or broadband, wireless Internet access. The iPhone is the first cell phone to play video using a technical standard known as H.264, and is able to play videos from a user’s iTunes library as well as more than 10,000 videos available on YouTube.

Utilizing Wi-Fi and other broadband technologies to deliver television programming to cell phones and other Internet-connected devices is the Slingbox, launched by Slingmedia in 2004 (www.slingmedia.com).

Consumers with a Slingbox use the device to stream live television from their home cable box or digital video recorder (DVR) to their Internet-connected computer. From there, it can be instantly accessed by the consumer from any location in the world, whether via a cell phone or other mobile device or desktop computer. A Slingbox enables the viewer to change channels and perform other DVR functions remotely. Slingbox software automatically adjusts to bandwidth levels, device capabilities and video quality to optimize video display.

Mobile video subscribers tripled between 2005 and 2006, and the number of users is expected to top 46 million by 2010.

Mobile video is also finding a profitable market niche. Revenue from mobile video increased more than three-fold (317 percent) worldwide for service providers to \$200 million from 2005 to 2006. Analysts expect mobile video revenues to triple by the end of 2007 (http://www.itfacts.biz/index.php?id=CO_4_1). Mobile video subscribers tripled between 2005 and 2006, and the number of users is expected to top 46 million by 2010. North America, especially the U.S., represents 10 percent of mobile video users in 2006. Asia Pacific leads the world in mobile video usage, with 57% of the world total in 2006. The European Union represents 31 percent of the worldwide total of mobile video users. The worldwide video industry is expected to top \$6 billion by 2011. The video content people in the U.S. most want includes concerts, television drama, home videos and reality shows (<http://www.itfacts.biz/index.php?id=P8490>). Also of interest are

sports and news.

Roughly a third of those mobile video users watch mobile television programming during the early afternoon, between noon and 4pm, reports consumer media research firm Telephia (<http://www.telephia.com/>).

ABC questions the assumption that mobile viewers want only short video programs on their cell phones and premiered full-length mobile versions of its popular shows.

Mobile video use drops dramatically to 9 percent during the regular television primetime hours of 8 pm to 11 pm.

Producers and distributors of mobile video are increasingly common as well. Traditional media companies of many types are creating video uniquely designed for mobile distribution and viewing. They are also repurposing existing video programming for mobile usage. Independent producers are also taking advantage of low-cost digital video production technologies to capture, produce and distribute mobile video. CBS has a new unit, CBS Mobile (<http://www.cbsmobile.com/>) devoted entirely to delivering mobile content, including extensive amounts of video programming for cell phones or other mobile devices. Among the programs are repackaged television shows, including *Dave TV*, clips from *The Late Show with David Letterman*, *ET to Go* and *CBS Sportsline to Go*, each of which costs about \$4 to \$5 a month for a subscription.

ESPN is producing video

programming for cell phones, including *Pardon the Interruption* and *Around the Horn*, and new shows such as *ESPN ReSet*, a show that summarizes the network's morning television programs (<http://espn.go.com/mobileespn/products?productId=2872888>).

ESPN Mobile also provides video coverage of the X Games, college football, and college basketball. The New York Times reports that 9 million people use the ESPN Mobile site each month (<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/17/business/yourmoney/17mobile.html?pagewanted=all>).

MTV is also producing mobile video programming, including music videos, television shows formatted for the small screen, and news programming (<http://www.mtv.com/mobile/>). Even the Associated Press (AP), the news service traditionally associated with newspapers, is developing video news products for mobile devices (http://www.mobilewirelessjobs.com/2006/04/the_associated_press_mobile_pr.html).

The News Corporation, which operates the Fox Network and Fox Studios, has invested in the production and distribution of mobile video programs, and has trademarked the name "mobisodes" to describe them. Although many of the early productions of cell- phone video have emphasized short, snack-sized clips for consumers on the go, ABC questions the assumption that mobile viewers want only short video programs on their cell phones and premiered full-length mobile versions of its popular shows *Desperate Housewives*, *Grey's Anatomy* and *Lost* on the Sprint wireless network (<http://abcmobile.playp.biz/>).

Disney ABC Television Group vice president Albert Cheng told the author in July, 2007 that delivering media content on mobile devices is vital to future growth for the television business. “My focus is to build a business based on wireless, video-on-demand, broadband, interactive television, and other electronically distributive devices and content,” says Cheng. “We expect our mobile video subscriber business to reach 14 million in 2009, up from about 200,000 today.”

One of the challenges is managing intellectual property rights for mobile platforms. “That’s one of the reason you don’t see a lot of content for wireless devices right now,” he said. “We own the shows *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives* from beginning to end of production, so now when we know a show will be good, we negotiate ahead of time to clear distribution on all platforms.”

Two areas being featured in ABC’s mobile media efforts are “Millennials” and mobile TV, Bernie Gershon, senior vice president/general manager of digital media for Disney ABC Television Group, told me last summer. Millennials are the 79 million Americans between the age of 8 and 27. Millennials, Gershon explains, multitask and “consume information on a variety of devices,” which is a key ingredient to mobile media.

Mobile video is also presenting opportunities to reinvent the business model for television. The three main forms of revenue that have emerged to date are advertising supported programming, pay-per-view and subscription.

ABC’s mobile broadband business includes streaming ad-supported

programs on ABC.com, selling \$1.99 shows via iTunes, and \$4.95-a-month subscriptions to ABC News Now. “Our strategy is aligned with the demands of the new consumer,” adds Gershon. ABC News Now reaches 25 million broadband homes and 2 million mobile users as subscribers. Since October, 2006, ABC has sold more than 5 million program downloads via iTunes. ABC.com has notched more than 2 million video plays since the launch of the service in June, 2007.

Increasingly common are pre-roll commercials, where the viewer must first watch an ad before the program begins. Oftentimes, the ads are very short, as little as five seconds. Also common are product placements embedded directly into programs.

As broadband wireless technology expands, a growing number of video, or even television, services will be made available for cell phone access and viewing. Mobile television is already widely available in a number of markets, including the United States, Latin America, Europe and Asia. In the U.S., Verizon Wireless, for example, launched in spring 2007 the delivery of full-length television programming to its cellular subscribers from several major television networks, including live television. The service provides eight television channels, and includes shows from NBC, CBS, Fox and MTV. New multimedia cell phones, such as the iPhone, featuring a 3.5 inch screen, make viewing television on a mobile communication device an increasingly attractive possibility to many cell phone users.

In Latin America, LAPT TV is offering live streaming of television programs to cell phones in Buenos Aires, LAPT V Manager Juan Mariano Sola told me last

year. This service utilizes 3G wireless technology that is already ubiquitous in Buenos Aires.

Lay citizens around the U.S. and internationally are also using these low-cost technologies, especially cell-phone cameras, to shoot and distribute mobile video. It is estimated that by 2009 there will be more cell phone cameras than all other cameras, analog or digital, sold in the history of photography. This ubiquity is facilitating an explosion of mobile video production and distribution. Virtually every public event is captured on cell phone cameras and more often than not made available via the Internet.

The 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech University illustrates the role that cell phone cameras can play in citizen journalism, as extensive video of the campus during the shooting rampage was captured on a student's cell phone and then made available online and via television news (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrI3H5jeX-Q>). Many private events are similarly captured and distributed, sometimes to later amazement, surprise and sometimes embarrassment of those involved in the event. Also on the horizon for mobile broadband is location-based video. This is video programming that is delivered to mobile devices in connection to specific locations. For example, when a person visits or passes a location, a video message tailored to that specific location is delivered on-demand to the cell phone user. Video commercials or programming related to a specific location are among the types of broadband content being tested. The author and his colleagues are designing a location-based video trial for the Blues Trail in Mississippi,

where visitors to the region carrying a mobile phone will be able to access video about the story of the development of blues in the Mississippi delta. Video segments will be linked to various Blues Trail markers now being deployed in the region.

Does the advent of mobile television and video programming for cell phones and other portable devices pose a threat to traditional television viewing? Probably not, as evidenced by the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences nominating the Fox 24: *Conspiracy* Mobisode when the Academy launched what *The New York Times* called "iPod Emmy" awards in 2006. But it does suggest that mobile media consumers want video news, sports and entertainment programming and they are not bothered too much by the small screen size. Many mobile consumers are even willing to pay for mobile video programming. And they do not seem to care about who provides the mobile video programming as much as how easy it is to access and what its entertainment value is.

John V. Pavlik is professor and chair of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at the School of Communication, Information and Media Studies at Rutgers University, New Jersey. He has written widely on new media, including the books Journalism and Media, Converging Media and the forthcoming Media in the Digital Age. He is also the co-developer of a new form of documentary, the "Situated Documentary," which utilizes wearable mobile media, wireless technology and the global positioning system.

Chávez Promotes Robust, Uncensored News Media in Venezuela

By Andrés Izarra

As a Venezuelan, watching television news evolve here has been watching the country's history unfold. For years, we had "controlled" news networks. Not controlled by Venezuelans or our government, but by the countries that dominate international news like the United States and the United Kingdom, or by large media companies with international ownership of local Venezuelan channels. We watched Latin American news through the eyes of CNN in Atlanta or the BBC in London or people with corporate agendas, whose priorities and perspectives are not always in line with those of the average Venezuelan. This has begun to change as Latin Americans have challenged corporate and foreign-owned media and created new, indigenous alternatives for mass media such as TeleSUR—the first 24-hour Spanish language international news channel to be based in Latin America.

There are currently more than twenty major television broadcast organizations operating in Venezuela, including private, state-run and public channels. This pluralism is in contrast to the widely held

view that the media in Venezuela is stifled or lacks freedom and diversity, often purported by politicians and the media outlets that report on them. FAIR (Fair and Accuracy in Reporting) and their publication *Extra!* recently chronicled the frequent mislabeling of our media by American publications as unbalanced and "muzzled" ("The Myth of the Muzzled Media" *Extra!* November/December 2006). The advent of TeleSUR further provides the average Latin American with greater access to the airwaves, reported from the region and for the region.

A Force for Regional Integration

To understand TeleSUR and the recent changes in Venezuelan media, they must be seen in the context of the broader changes taking place in our region and in our country.

We have expressed this desire for integration through regional economic and social cooperation agreements; financial, technical and energy assistance programs; and now, through the mass media. If integration is the end, TeleSUR is the means.

TeleSUR was born of a need in Latin America to develop a means by which

all the people of this vast region could have the opportunity of spreading their own values, revealing their own images, and debating their own ideas within a forum dedicated to freedom and equality. Until now, this was not possible in our region—the 24-hour news networks available to us were CNN en Español and previously, NBC's Canal de Noticias, both broadcast to us from the U.S. TeleSUR and other advances in the media provide alternatives which serve to represent the fundamental principles of an authentic source of mass media; one that adopts as its guiding principles the foundations of truth, justice, respect and solidarity.

TeleSUR provides news seven days a week through news programs, a daytime magazine show, hourly breaking news, journalistic analysis, stories, interviews and reports. TeleSUR has established the largest newsgathering capability of any TV news service in Latin America: fulltime correspondents in Bogotá, Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Mexico City, Havana, Montevideo, La Paz, Port au Prince, Managua, Lima, Quito, Washington and most recently Madrid and London, in addition to a network of contributors throughout the region. This depth guarantees broad and responsible coverage, within the framework of the network's mission – the truth without restrictions.

TeleSUR is majority-owned by the Venezuelan government (51 percent), with Argentina, Uruguay, Cuba and Bolivia owning the remaining 49 percent. While TeleSUR was a concept developed by President Hugo Chávez, we maintain complete editorial independence from the government, as with our colleagues at the BBC and other state-owned networks. Our team is comprised of journalists

committed to accuracy and integrity in our reporting, meeting every morning and as major news breaks to discuss what will be assigned, with no outside input.

TeleSUR's model is certainly not a new one. many other nations and regions have created similar programs and projects with the intent of providing an alternative to the Anglo-American perspective in the news. Al Jazeera was one of the first proponents of a network geared towards a region or affinity group, but others soon followed suit. The Russian government created in 2005 Russia Today, a global news channel from Russia that broadcasts in English and is owned by Russian news agency RIA-Novosti. France recently created France 24 to “create greater pluralism” by delivering news with a “French perspective.” In addition to French, English and Arabic broadcasts, France 24 will add Spanish in the coming years, giving even more freedom of choice within the Spanish language news landscape, something we at TeleSUR embrace.

Who Owns the Venezuelan Airwaves?

The second feature of our television news landscape involves a political change within Venezuela. Until recently, Venezuelan television news often became victim of media conglomerates with one-sided political interests. For example, the privately-owned channel Radio Caracas Television (RCTV), where I was once a journalist, failed to report on breaking news regarding the attempted coup against President Chávez in 2002. The channel ran only news that supported anti-Chávez forces, including a false resignation letter claimed to be signed by Chávez. RCTV instructed its reporters to avoid covering pro-Chávez events and opinions, and ran *Tom and Jerry* cartoons when Chávez was restored to his office. I resigned over this

failure and serious breach of journalistic responsibility. The actions by RCTV (and another TV network Venevision) were documented by two Irish filmmakers in “The Revolution Will Not be Televised.” The film includes one of the coup leaders thanking RCTV and Venevision for their efforts during that time.

Recent attempts to regulate the media in Venezuela therefore are not “attacks on press freedom,” as some have claimed—quite the opposite. They are efforts to diversify the air waves and overcome the oligopoly of ownership.

As the coverage of the attempted coup demonstrated, Venezuela’s media, including state TV, needs controls to insure diversity among media owners themselves, who routinely erased balance from the nightly news.

In Venezuela, television is considered a public good because it assures its people the right to information. As such, it is not to be hoarded, squandered or manipulated. The recent decision by the Chávez government not to renew the broadcasting concession granted to RCTV is another step toward the diversification and democratization of the airwaves. To many, RCTV represented the limitation of access to the airwaves by keeping it in the hands of a small oligopoly of magnates.

Therefore, the decision was a question of democracy. RCTV is still able to operate on public airwaves via cable and satellite: the government’s decision allowed RCTV to organize their own station and also allowed access to the airwaves for those traditionally excluded by the media oligarchy.

People who have long been ignored by the media finally have a voice. We can claim a robust, uncensored news media climate here in Venezuela, with Mark Weisbrot, co-director of

the Center for Economic and Policy Research commenting on our freedom of speech in the *Augusta Chronicle* on October 9, 2006: “Indeed they do, with the most anti-government media in the hemisphere.” This has been seconded by John McLaughlin of *The McLaughlin Group*. And as with many world leaders, Chávez has reacted defensively to the criticism. Not only has RCTV received censure from Chávez in speeches, but so have we, on numerous occasions.

The push for regional integration and



public access to information is driving the future of television news in Venezuela and Latin America. The result, I think, is a much more sophisticated media market, in which all people have access, in which all viewpoints are heard, and where we hope others can gain a window into our country and our region from around the world. We intend to play our role by standing by our mission of the truth without restrictions, which will be guided by values of honesty, accuracy, integrity, courage and fairness.

Andrés Izarra was news director of RCTV, the network recently taken off the air by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Izarra later served as Chávez’s communications minister and is now president of TeleSUR.

Chávez Does No Such Thing:

Press Freedom Conditions Have Seriously Deteriorated Under His Regime.

By Carlos Lauría

The decision to take Radio Caracas Televisión, known as RCTV, off the air responds to a premeditated strategy by the government of President Hugo Chávez Frías to replace the domination of private broadcasters with state domination. Venezuela's oldest private television station was forced off the air at midnight on May 27, in a decision that thwarts Venezuelans' right to seek and receive information and represents a setback for democracy in this country.

Although he was first elected in 1998 with the support of some media outlets, Chávez soon broke ties with them after announcing plans to rewrite the constitution. As his nationalist agenda became more radical, private media outlets took an openly partisan role, and without any neutrality and objectivity, sought his ouster while embracing the positions of his political opponents.

After the coup that briefly ousted Chávez in April 2002, the Venezuelan administration came to the conclusion that the state communication apparatus was in clear disadvantage compared to the power of private media.

Until 2002, the state owned only three media outlets: Radio Nacional de Venezuela network, Venezolana

de Televisión (VTV), and Venpres, the official news agency. Since then, the Chávez administration has defied the private media's control through investment in state-owned and community media projects. According to official data, the administration has budgeted 362 billion bolívars (US\$169 million) in the last two years alone.

Since the coup, the administration has invested heavily to increase the size of the government's communications portfolio. By stacking its personnel with government's followers and supporters, Chávez has certainly influenced content while guaranteeing vast amounts of uncritical coverage.

The president himself has used *cadenas*—his nationwide simultaneous radio and television broadcasts that preempt regular programming on all stations—as a government megaphone. Chávez takes advantage of his broadcasts to argue against the private media's news coverage and to single out individuals for censure, often lambasting journalists and media owners.

The Chávez administration has not only invested in new national broadcast and cable outlets but also created a network of alternative and community media, including TV and radio stations. At the same time, it

has opened newspapers and Web sites full of government advertising. Since 2003, the Venezuelan administration has financed the creation of ViVe TV, a cultural and educational television network with coverage throughout the country; ANTV, which broadcasts sessions of the National Assembly on the airwaves and on cable; and Ávila TV, a regional television station run by the city of Caracas.

TeleSUR is the government's most ambitious media project. This 24-hour news channel, labeled a Latin American alternative to CNN and Fox by officials, was launched in July 2005. Venezuela owns 51 percent of the channel, while the governments of Argentina, Cuba, Uruguay and Bolivia own minority stakes. TeleSUR, which has several news bureaus in Latin America, the Caribbean and Washington D.C., plans to start a news agency and open bureaus in London and Madrid soon.

TeleSUR's signal is broadcast from Venezuela's capital via satellite, and can be received in Latin America, in most of the United States and in Europe. Cable systems in a number of Latin American countries have signed agreements to distribute the network's programming.

Andrés Izarra, the station's president, said that the network was "looking for greater diversity and deeper views on subjects." Critics say TeleSUR should really be called "TeleChávez," as the government funnels public funds to finance a network that is oriented to give Chávez and his supporters in the region positive coverage.

In December 2006, TeleSUR purchased the broadcast television channel CMT, which is based in Caracas. The move is intended to

expand TeleSUR's reach beyond cable and satellite subscribers.

With a strong boost of public funds, the Venezuelan government has been able to balance the influence of the private media, while investing in technology on state-owned media. However, the administration keeps pointing to the concentration of media ownership in private hands and refuses to acknowledge the drastic change of the media landscape since 2003.

Some government officials have spoken publicly on the government's media strategy. In a January 8 interview with the Caracas daily *El Nacional*, TeleSUR president Izarra clearly stated that the administration of President Chávez is building an "information hegemony." Izarra explained that this hegemony did not mean the end of dissent, and that media that criticize the government would continue to operate.

The Committee to Protect Journalists found that press freedom conditions have seriously deteriorated.

"For the new strategic scenario that is discussed, the struggle that falls in the ideological field has to do with a battle of ideas for the hearts and minds of people," said Izarra, former minister of communications and information. In the interview, Izarra, who was news director of RCTV until the 2002 coup against Chávez, explained that "we have to prepare a new plan, and the one we are proposing is aimed at achieving the state's communication and information

hegemony.”

The Committee to Protect Journalists found that press freedom conditions have seriously deteriorated.

In a report launched in late April after a fact-finding mission to Caracas, CPJ found that press freedom conditions have seriously deteriorated in this country. The report, titled “Static in Venezuela,” describes the decision not to renew RCTV’s broadcast concession as “arbitrary and politically motivated,” casting a doubt on Venezuela’s commitment to freedom of expression.

While Venezuelan officials insist on promoting free expression, journalists working for the private media say that they have increasing difficulties while doing their jobs. Reporters and editors are concerned that the government punishes critical news outlets by blocking access to government events and sources, withholding public advertisement, filing criminal defamation complaints and imposing content restrictions.

Since 2005, the Venezuelan administration has enacted legal measures that restrict the work of the media. In January 2005, the National Assembly drastically increased criminal penalties for defamation and slander, contradicting international standards on freedom of expression. Changes in the penal code also expanded the categories of government officials protected by disrespect provisions, which criminalize expressions deemed offensive to public officials and state institutions, and drastically increased criminal penalties for defamation and

slander. The maximum prison term for defamation, for example, went from 30 months to 48 months under the measure.

Also in effect since 2005 is the Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television, which had been approved by the National Assembly and signed into law by Chávez in December 2004. The Social Responsibility law has been widely criticized for its broad and vaguely worded restrictions on free expression. Under Article 29, for example, broadcasters who disseminate messages that

Since 2005 the Venezuelan administration has enacted legal measures that restrict the work of the media...and drastically increased criminal penalties for defamation and slander.

“promote, defend, or incite breaches of public order” or “are contrary to the security of the nation” may be forced to suspend broadcasts for up to 72 hours. If a media outlet repeats the infractions within the next five years, its broadcasting concession may be suspended for up to five years. Article 7 of the law forbids “graphic descriptions or images of real violence” on the air from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m., except when the broadcast is live and the content is either “indispensable” or emerges unexpectedly.

The non renewal of RCTV’s

concession fits perfectly in the government's logic on the state information hegemony. The decision, first announced by Chávez before a military group in December 2006, has been clearly designed to force the main critical media off the air. Two of the three other private broadcasters, *Televén* and *Venevisión*, have softened their critics and got rid of their most critical programs. Curiously, *Venevisión*'s concession was renewed shortly before it expired on May 27.

With RCTV off the air, there is only one broadcaster that continues to criticize the Venezuelan government. But Chávez and officials from his administration are not so worried about *Globovisión* because this station can be seen as a broadcast channel in metropolitan Caracas and the state of Carabobo.

Although the station's concession expires in 2015, *Globovisión* executives are concerned about what they describe as government intimidation against the network. The day RCTV went off the air, the minister of Communication and Information Willian Lara filed a complaint with the attorney general's office accusing *Globovisión* of inciting violence against Chávez. The action was motivated after the station aired file footage of a 1981 assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II. *Globovisión* Director

Alberto Federico Ravell rejected the accusation.

RCTV's frequency has been replaced by a new public-service broadcaster called Venezuelan Social Television Station (TVES). The new channel began broadcasting early on May 28. While the government said that the news station's editorial line would not be dictated by administration officials, analysts said that the broadcaster will effectively operate as a government propaganda machine.

According to a President's decree, five of the seven members of the board of directors will be appointed by the executive. The pressure that the Venezuelan administration is exerting over the private media represents a setback on freedom of expression, and indicates a serious blow to Venezuela's commitment to democratic values.

A native of Argentina, Carlos Lauria was managing editor of the regional newspaper Diaro La Union before becoming the U.S. bureau chief for Editorial Perfil, the largest magazine publisher in Argentina. He is Americas senior program coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists and is a columnist on free-press issues for the New York-based daily El Diario.

So You Won't Have Nixon to Kick Around Any More?

A look at “Frost/Nixon” and the real thing.

The villain in the play is *television!*

By Greg Vitiello

Richard M. Nixon was not a likable man. His critics called him “Tricky Dick” and branded him graceless, duplicitous, paranoid and worse. The criticism mounted to a national roar of outrage at his complicity in covering up facts about the Watergate break-in.

So when a new play titled “Frost/Nixon” premiered in London, then came to Broadway in the spring of 2007, you might have assumed the villain in this two-man face-off was the former president.

Wrong.

The villain, in Peter Morgan’s entertaining but facile play, is television. Please bear with me, because this will take a bit of explaining. Morgan’s play is based on television personality David Frost’s 1977 series of interviews with Nixon, which were shown in some 70 countries and garnered the largest global audience of any television news program in history. The conversations spanned many aspects of Nixon’s career, culminating with Watergate – and ending dramatically with a quasi

confession by the former president, in which he admitted to letting the American people down.

The play “Frost/Nixon” draws upon the interviews selectively, often rearranging historic moments for dramatic effect. And though we, as viewers, know the outcome of the interviews, we wait on tenterhooks to see how Frost will catch Nixon. The play’s path to this historically thrilling,

The actual “Frost/Nixon” interviews show that television is capable of more than reductive snapshots.

though contrived, moment is sometimes laborious, especially when it lingers on Frost and his television advisers. With its studio set and large grid of television monitors in the background, “Frost/Nixon” is at its most effective when it presents the confrontation between the two men, particularly during the portion devoted to Watergate.

In the play, each man hopes the



Photofest

The real David Frost (left) with the real Richard Nixon

programs will help restore his career. Nixon has fallen the furthest, from the presidency to the isolation following his impeachment and ensuing resignation. Frost also has fallen, from his glory days of the 1960s and early 1970s when he had popular interview shows in Britain and the United States to his current television base in Australia – too far from the real action for Frost. And indeed, Morgan presents Frost as a journalistic lightweight and playboy,

who dresses like a peacock and needs to be propped up by his advisers as he struggles to find a “hook” on which to impale Nixon.

The play comes to life whenever it focuses on Nixon (played ingeniously by Frank Langella). The former president is seen as canny, though self-pitying, in his eagerness to capitalize on the interviews. He plays hardball with Frost over the payment he’ll receive, extracting a promise of \$600,000



Michael Sheen as David Frost (left) with Frank Langella as Richard Nixon in the Broadway production of “Frost/Nixon”

© Joan Marcus 2007

plus a share of the profits from the syndicated programs, though Frost is having difficulties generating interest from broadcast networks. Nixon dominates the stage with the force of his grandiosity. Stoop-shouldered and shambling, with a rumbling, pompous voice, Langella interprets the essence of Nixon rather than caricaturing him (as so many cartoonists and mimics have done, accentuating his ski nose, baggy-eyes, jowly cheeks and clumsy manners). In media interviews, Langella has described how he eventually discarded the visual research he'd done on Nixon and homed in on the man's "essence." And here, on the stage, is the essential Nixon, reminiscing self-aggrandizingly about his meetings with Chinese Chairman Mao-Tse-Tung and Russian Premier Leonid Brezhnev and deriding his former rival John F. Kennedy ("that man screwed everything that moved"). With Frost, he tries to be alternatively steely and jocular, as when he suddenly inquires about the interviewer's previous evening: "Did you do any fornicating?"

And yet, despite his gauche asides, Nixon remains in charge almost to the end. We get a privileged glimpse of his inner turmoil, in a scene that is not based on real events, when he phones Frost one evening to confide that he recognizes a bond between them. Drunk and rancorous, Nixon claims that they are both victims of a life-long inferiority complex that manifests itself regardless of how much they achieve in life. "That's our tragedy, isn't it, Mr. Frost? No

matter how high we get, they still look down on us." He continues, "We still feel like the little man. The loser they told us we were. The smart asses at college. The high-ups. The well-born. The people whose respect we really wanted, really craved."

During the next day's taping, Nixon seems to be in total command, engaging in self-serving digressions and skillfully brushing aside the interviewer's efforts to force a confession from him. However, Frost surprises him by quoting from unpublished conversations he had with his chief counsel Charles Colson. Sweaty and twitching, Nixon becomes a trapped man, who suddenly confesses his failures. Pushed by Frost to acknowledge his guilt, Nixon admits: "I let down my friends, I let down my country." The litany continues, punctuated by: "I let the American people down and I have to carry that

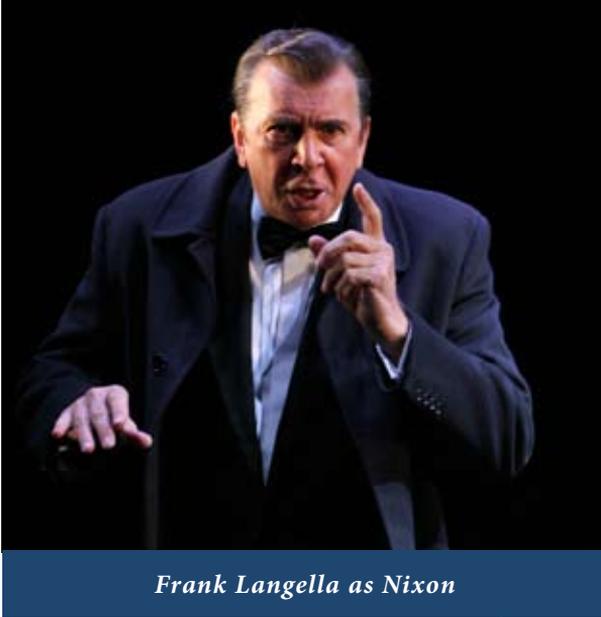


Michael Sheen as David Frost

© Joan Marcus 2007

burden the rest of my life.”

The moment has resonated through time. Nixon, already a pariah in the three years since he had left office, lost his one chance to reclaim his reputation and become an eminence grise of American



Frank Langella as Nixon

© Joan Marcus 2007

politics (the fantasy that prompted him to agree to the interviews).

Certainly the revelation qualifies as one of the great moments of American television. Or does it?

In “Frost/Nixon,” just as the audience is relishing the scene’s catharsis, Morgan presents his moral judgment not on the former president but on television. James Reston, Jr., one of Frost’s advisers on the show, steps forward and indicts the medium for trivializing—and, at least implicitly, distorting—history. He sums up television’s culpability by saying: “The first and greatest sin of television is that it simplifies. Diminishes. Great, complex ideas, tranches of time, whole careers, become reduced to a single

snapshot.”

And indeed, in the play’s climactic moment, when Nixon confesses to a degree of complicity, the giant grid of television screens behind him shows the face of the anguished, trapped former president. Morgan has given us the close-up—or snapshot—that demonstrates his premise.

Throughout the play, Reston and other characters have stepped forward to provide context – a primer on the Vietnam War, insights into Nixon. The device is both awkward and intrusive. And here again, at the climactic moment, Morgan can’t resist the chance to enunciate his message.

I think he protests too much. Television has its failings, not least in its frequent oversimplification of news events.

And yet it is capable of more than reductive snapshots. The actual Frost/Nixon television interviews are one cogent example.

The March 1977 discussions comprised 28 hours during 12 days of taping spread over the period of one month. Frost and his team subsequently edited the material

The actual Frost/Nixon interviews show that television is capable of more than reductive snapshots.

down to four 90-minute segments for showing to a global audience in the fall of 1977. “The programs were presented in an irregular way,” says Ron Simon, television curator of the Paley Center for Media in New York. “Frost had to create his own

network for these four interviews and offer them as a syndicated series of specials, which was very difficult to pull off.”

Frost’s success in creating a syndicated network hinged on whether the interviews would make news. In the minds of the media and the public, the only newsworthy topic was Nixon’s role in Watergate. But would the former president implicate himself? This was Frost’s challenge. Part of that challenge involved waiting for the proper moment.

Even without Watergate the interviews would have been a riveting experience for viewers with an interest in the conduct and abuses of a presidential administration.

Early conversations about the Nixon Administration’s foreign policy allow the former president to boast of his triumphs, spin out anecdotes and excoriate his many enemies. And yet even in Nixon’s area of greatest strengths, Frost is ready for him. Far from the lightweight we see on stage, Frost reveals himself in the actual interviews as thoroughly prepared, knowledgeable and intrepid. Despite his casual manner, Frost demonstrates real toughness when he quizzes Nixon on subjects such as the CIA’s role in the assassination of Chile’s President Salvador Allende. Nixon rationalizes these actions by saying that Chile and Cuba represented a “Red Sandwich” that might have spread communism throughout Latin America. He supports the right-wing dictatorship

of Augusto Pinochet, which supplanted Allende, “because they don’t threaten our security interests.” Frost quickly rebuts his argument that a right-wing dictatorship is preferable to a left-wing dictatorship by saying: “Under Allende, Chile was a left-wing democracy, not a dictatorship.” Thwarted in the argument, Nixon turns to the all-too-familiar tactics of distorting and demeaning (in this case, attacking the CIA’s intelligence in Latin America and elsewhere).

When the subject switches to domestic politics, Frost again places Nixon on the defensive by challenging his support for former Vice President Spiro Agnew, who left office over allegations of corruption during his term as Governor of Maryland. Nixon blames the press, arguing that because Agnew was a conservative, he got tougher treatment. “He wasn’t a liberal pin-up boy,” Nixon concludes with a sneer.

The interviews provide an in-depth view of Nixon’s policies, tactics and psyche. Even without Watergate, they would have been a riveting experience for viewers with an interest in the conduct and abuses of a presidential administration. And yet without Watergate, Frost would have been unable to sell them. Even with the revelations, he wasn’t able to garner a slate of prestigious advertisers. Instead, he would have to settle for a mixed bag, including commercials for Weed-Eater trimmer, Alpo dog food, Certs breath mints and *Us* magazine.

Frost saved Watergate for the

final hours of his actual interviews and came well prepared. “Frost was a more complex character than the play led us to assume,” says Simon. “He’d already shown himself to be quick witted and well prepared in the lengthy interviews he’d done with politicians of all stripes. In the play, they accentuate the collision of entertainment and politics and create more of a cat-and-mouse game, particularly regarding Watergate. But the actual interviews show a different picture.”

During one exchange, Nixon tries deflecting Frost’s argument by legalistic definitions of the statute involving obstruction of justice, quoting that “one must corruptly impede a judicial endeavor” before adding, “I did not have a corrupt motive.” But Frost is intrepid, repeatedly quoting Nixon’s remarks from the White House transcripts that were released to the public at the time of the Watergate hearings. Suddenly Nixon becomes testy, saying: “You are doing something I haven’t done. When you read something back, it could be out of context.” Frost later remarked that Nixon seemed “disconcerted by the amount of research we’d done.”

At one point, Nixon tries to rationalize his behavior by saying, “When the President does it, that means it is not illegal.” But Frost pushes on, suggesting words Nixon might use to explain his behavior: “I’d like to hear you say, ‘First, that there was probably more than mistakes, there was wrongdoing. Second, I did abuse the power I had as the President. Three, I put the

American people through needless agony.” Nixon tries deflecting Frost’s logical build-up of incidents that demonstrated the President’s culpability. He becomes maudlin, recalling President Eisenhower’s agonies over a scandal involving one of his aides. He gives tearful accounts of the pain inflicted on his own aides, Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, when they were forced to resign. He inveighs against the “fifth columnists” in the “five-front war” he was forced to wage because of Watergate. Finally, he says, “I brought myself down. I gave them the sword and they stuck it in and twisted it with relish.”

But Frost isn’t done. At his prodding, Nixon finally acknowledges his complicity, saying “I let the American people down and have to carry that burden the rest of my life.”

Viewers of the play have heard these same words. The difference here is that in the interviews, Frost hasn’t had to rely on surprising Nixon. Rather, he has built a case against the former president. And Nixon has inexplicably conceded.

“Historians have used these interviews as part of the process of rethinking Nixon and his era,” says Simon.

Frost has achieved this feat through solid journalism, not by simplifying or diminishing history. And that’s a standard for which television should always strive.

Richard Nixon must have been an irresistible target for a writer/director with a handy message about television's shortcomings. Sometimes Nixon succeeded in using the medium for his own devices, such as when he made his "Checkers" speech in an effort to rebut charges that he had accepted illegal campaign contributions. (He derided notions of his wealth by pointing out that his wife Pat wore a "respectable Republican cloth coat" and claimed the only gift he'd accepted was the cocker spaniel "Checkers.") At other times, television was his nemesis, most memorably in the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon presidential debates when his five-o'clock shadow and baggy eyes made him appear less vigorous (and dare we say "presidential"?) than Kennedy. In 1962, he went on national television following his defeat in the California gubernatorial election to tell the American public, "You won't have Nixon to kick around any more."

Six years later, in 1968, he was back, savvier about presenting himself on television. I was working in a New York studio when Paul Niven interviewed him for National Educational Television. Nixon's advisers had clearly primed him for the occasion, but were taking no chances by letting anyone distract him before the program began. I argued that our photographer needed access to him so that we could send out publicity pictures of the event. I was told that Nixon would make himself available after the interview. Knowing this was just a ruse, I waited until his assistants had moved from the set to the viewing room. I then told the photographer that as soon as I left the set, he should approach Nixon and begin shooting. I assured him that when Nixon's aides complained, the NET crew would look for me to do something about it. And I was right. The photographer introduced himself to Nixon, explained that he just wanted to take a few shots and was greeted with the future president's most synthetic grin (though not his trademark "V" sign). Snap snap snap went the camera, before I heard my name being called over the intercom. "Vitiello, there's a goddamn photographer on the set. I thought we told you no photos." I ambled back from the bowels of the studio where I'd been hiding. After returning to the set, I thanked Nixon for posing for the photos. I too got the synthetic grin of a man well prepared that day for his encounter with the television medium. In fact, Nixon proved to be a flawless interviewee, skillfully dodging questions that might have proven awkwardly newsworthy, particularly about Vietnam.

Nine years later, he was back, in an improvised studio near his San Clemente, California, home, hoping television would give him the trial – and vindication -- he never had following his resignation in 1974. The Frost interviews and "Frost/Nixon" are the outcome. – G.V.

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

Bob and Ray

A Rocky Start on Network Radio and Television in 1951 By David Pollock



Bob Elliott (left) and Ray Goulding in old-time radio days

Photofest

The comedian Fred Allen observed that in 1949 “television was already acting provocatively, trying to get radio to pucker up for the kiss of death.”

By 1951, to finance their fledgling television operations, the networks were dependent on the less and less deep pockets of their radio divisions. But as the television audience rose, radio’s dropped proportionately, forcing the companies to cut their radio advertising rates. Ironically, by subsidizing the birth of television, radio was speeding up its own death.

It was in the middle of these countervailing forces that NBC’s brand-

new radio comedy team of Bob and Ray – Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding – were to find themselves that October. They were only in their fourth month of national network exposure with a daily 15-minute late-afternoon show at 5:45 plus an hour Saturday-night program. The prominent 6:00–8:30 early morning spot on the network’s New York flagship, WNBC, had been added in late August.

In Elliott and Goulding’s corner was another hard working team: enthusiastic agent and manager John Moses, from the powerful GAC talent agency, and 39-year-old, ruddy, NBC vice president Charles C. “Bud” Barry.

If that October Barry was feeling

confident about his new comedy team, he had good reason to be. Critical response had been mostly favorable: The *Herald Tribune's* esteemed radio and TV columnist John Crosby had praised their “deadpan, deadly satire” while *Variety* had called the two “the brightest pair of young comics to hit the web in some time.”

As television performers, Elliott and Goulding were funny, irrepressible and endearing. But what they weren't was experienced.

Moses and Barry now contemplated adding to Elliott and Goulding's grueling 17-and-a-half hours a week of airtime by exposing their unique tongue-in-cheek style to television. The fact that they had absolutely no background in television was of less significance than might be assumed. In 1951, nobody did.

The only question was where on NBC's schedule to put the team. Improbably, the answer suddenly appeared when two advertisers dropped their partial sponsorship of another popular team, *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*.

The delightful “Kuklapolitan Players” and their revered creator, Burr Tillstrom, had been fixtures in the Monday through Friday, 7:00–7:30 time slot since 1948. Nevertheless, in November of 1951 a decision was made to cutback *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* to 15 minutes with a new *Bob and Ray Show* taking over at 7:15.

Predictably, Tillstrom was not happy. And it didn't help him stomach the

change when he inadvertently learned of the decision in a phone conversation with the manager of NBC's Milwaukee affiliate who referred to a company memo identifying the new show only as having “better audience appeal.”

The press was quick to pounce, *Variety* headlining its story: “Bob & Ray As Kukla TV Mates.”

A particular pre-production concern was how to transplant the team's popular *Mary Backstayge* and *Linda Lovely* daily soap opera parodies to the new medium. On this score, according to Elliott, “we had a lot of anxiety.” In addition to the listeners, he and his partner, too, had pictured the characters in their own minds for years. But now, those mental images would obviously be shattered.

“Ray was going to do Mary or Linda Lovely somehow, we didn't know,” Elliott recalled recently. “And then we said, ‘You know, we've got to have a real character – a real person.’”

Ultimately, the compromise was to hire an actress for the part, but not have her speak. Linda would only be a visible presence as the other characters talked about and around her.

After interviews with several actresses, the team's TV producer, Pete Barnum, settled on the young, pretty daughter of an Episcopal missionary in China, Audrey Meadows.

Recalling the interview in her autobiography, *Love, Alice*, Meadows wrote, “...With being out of work adding to my nervousness, I went into my nonstop spiel, babbling along, cascades of words, words, words ... Bob hesitatingly raised a hand. I paused to inhale. ‘Do you think you could start on Monday?’ he asked.

On opening night, November

26, 1951, the *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* audience had no difficulty discerning Burr Tillstrom's state of mind. Mocking his new, enforced trimmed format, Ollie ordered his fellow Kuklapolitans to talk at a rapid fire pace in order to preserve precious time. Thus was the lead-in to the TV premiere of *The Bob and Ray Show*.

That first show, with music provided by the organ stylings of courtly, dapper Paul Taubman, opened with a parody of the then popular *Lights Out* program. Next, Goulding, in his patented character of Mary McGoon, offered a recipe for frozen ginger ale salad, which called for the cubing of a marshmallow.

The McGoon segments were shot as if looking through the frame of a picture window into her "experimental kitchen," with Mary (Goulding in a dress) only visible from the top of her apron to her waist. As she went about her various cooking demonstrations, director Doug Rodgers would cut to a close-up of just her hands (unmistakably Goulding's) as she prepared frankfurters for Valentine's Day or demonstrated how to keep meatballs hot after they reach the table by knitting a meatball cozy out of spaghetti.

The first TV installment of the always ad-libbed *The Life and Loves of Linda Lovely* followed. True to the plan, Audrey Meadows had no dialogue. Other characters would only refer to Linda as she went about various stage business, such as feeding an "exotic rubber plant, unaware it was really deadly nightshade;" or, stretched out on a couch, napping between them, her arms flailing about as she slept.

But, inevitably, this device would

prove unwieldy, to say nothing of being a waste of Meadows' talent. So by the second week, it was decided to have Meadows speak. "Audrey fell into the whole bit beautifully," recalled Goulding's widow, Liz. "And after she got her voice – or was able to use her voice – it was a funny voice, too."

At the same time, announcer

"It looks like amateur night in West Newton!"

Bob Denton was added. His sober, businessman's visage, but wry delivery, introduced many of the sketches.

At tight budget and the limitations of a live show demanded simple sets and a minimum of ambitious physical or visual components. Thus a contest parody in which viewers were asked, "How would you like to own one of the Great Lakes?" simply required the two sitting behind a desk on which were placed five different sized glass fishbowls containing goldfish swimming in water ("flown in from each of the Great Lakes courtesy of Sturdley Airlines").

With this reliance on the verbal rather than the visual, which, of course, played to Elliott and Goulding's strengths, many of the new radio sketches were now adapted for television.

According to Elliott, with so many hours of radio airtime to fill, initially there had been concern at the network level and with "Barry, particularly, [about] 'this ad-lib stuff they're doing.' ... I think a lot of them said, rightly, 'How can these guys keep it up?' Or, 'They can't keep it up.' Barry did have a meeting with us and John and Mitch Benson, his second in command, and [NBC executive] Les

Harris. He said, 'You know, you're going to need writers.'

Barry's first choice was a recently semi-retired New Englander then living in Salem, Mass., Raymond Knight, who had been a major radio star and broadcasting trailblazer of the 1930s with his long running, *The Cuckoo Hour*. It had been broadcasting's first send-up of itself.

Besides starring in the show, Knight also created, directed and wrote it, as he did numerous other projects, including *Wheatenville*, a popular program of family life. Both *The Cuckoo Hour* and *Wheatenville*, serendipitously, had been boyhood favorites of, as well as major influences on, Elliott and Goulding.

Knight's keen ear for the conventions of broadcasting and, particularly, the inanities of advertising lingo, soon became evident in various new Bob and Ray take-offs of contemporary programs and commercial parodies. ("...The Flash Loan and Collection Service enables you to borrow money with the left hand and repay it with the right in practically one simultaneous motion.")

Perhaps Knight's most popular commercial spoof was for an enigmatic little item called Woodlo, "the new wonder product." The audience never knew its use. Its only reason for being was solely as something to be advertised. It was Madison Avenue to the ultimate: a commercial in search of a product. ("Remember, Woodlo not only can, but it does. And it's immunized!"). "He'd been agency oriented all his life," said Elliott. "So he knew it inside and out."

If there ever was any resentment on Knight's part, having once been a top star now suddenly a writer for two network upstarts, Elliott and Goulding never saw it. "He was always gracious," Elliott said, though he had heard Knight once remarked to a friend, "They're doing everything I did 20 years ago."

As on radio, Elliott and Goulding's television personas were basically identical – perfect counterweights. Neither was a straight man, both could be funny and do any number of voices and accents.

The team's ingenuous, matter-of-fact manner, with never a hint that they thought what they were doing was funny, made each premise all that more sublimely ridiculous, as when the two announced their campaign to move the celebration of the 4th of July to November 1st, to avoid the hot, muggy weather, ("an idea that we feel needs public support, before going to higher authorities").

As television performers, Elliott and Goulding were funny, irrepressible and endearing. But what they weren't was experienced. Unlike entertainers who had come out of vaudeville, they were not polished sketch actors. They were now forced to deal with physical movement, camera angles, props and cue cards. It was learning on the job.

In March of 1990 Ray Goulding died after a 12-year battle with kidney disease.

"I remember them drawing chalk marks on the floor for where they were supposed to stand," his widow, Liz Goulding, recalled. "And they were kidding about, 'We can't look

down and see where were supposed to stand.’ ”

Years later, looking back on those shows, Liz recalled her husband being “appalled at how really naïve they were about what to wear and how to appear.” She said, “He didn’t like to have some of the older shows reviewed because it was infancy for television. He felt they were very unprofessional. I think Bob felt that way, too.”

“We were kids,” Elliott agreed. “They’re embarrassing. But [from] a mindset of when it was in the life of TV, that really was inventing television. We knew we were on what would be the biggest thing since movies, but we didn’t know it was the golden age or whatever we were.”

This uneven, seat-of-the-pants quality was not lost on the critics. While John Crosby’s review in the *New York Herald Tribune* was overwhelmingly positive, referring to the teams “special essence” and “exquisite parodies,” he also noted that “Bob and Ray will have to get a little used to television.”

The influential Jack Gould in the *Times* was not so kind, writing that “Bob and Ray tried hard, to be sure, but it looks as if they are in over their heads.” Gould called their efforts “incredibly inept” and “monstrously unfunny.” “*Kukla, Fran and Ollie* trimmed from a half hour,” started the lead sentence of *Variety*’s critique, which went on to report that Elliott and Goulding were victims of “jitters” and “unfamiliarity with a new medium.” Jack O’Brien in the *New York Journal American* wrote that Elliott resembled “a scared Buster Keaton” and Goulding “a convicted

Thomas Dewey.”

In his vast corner office at NBC in Rockefeller Plaza, Bud Barry and his lieutenants Mitch Benson and Leslie Harris were in total shock. Barry, a blustery, larger-than-life-size man with a hearty if somewhat vulgar manner, announced, “It looks like amateur night in West Newton!”

It was a line that would forever reverberate in Elliott and Goulding’s psyches and find its way into the team’s routines for decades; frequently in reaction to the *Mary Backstage* troop’s numerous opening-night debacles.

Barry took immediate action. It was quintessential network-think. His quick-fix remedy was to hire a mentor and tutor to advise his new team on humor. If that wasn’t ignominious enough for Elliott and

Jack Gould of *The New York Times* called their efforts “incredibly inept” and “monstrously unfunny.”

Goulding, his selection to be their comedy guru, inexplicably, was not a television expert, but a retired radio pioneer from the crystal-set era named Phillips Carlin who had been on staff way back before there even was an NBC.

After returning from World War I, Phillips Carlin had worked in the silk business before starting with station WEAJ in 1923, three years before it was absorbed into the newly formed National Broadcasting Company. Primarily a sportscaster, he was long associated with the fabled Graham McNamee, with whom he broadcast three World Series in the 1920s.

If Phillips Carlin had any comedy credentials, they completely escaped Elliott and Goulding. It seems Carlin, who had left NBC years earlier, was long owed a favor. It was the “friendship angle,” Elliott recalled. “They threw him a bone ... We had to have breakfast with him once a week, every Tuesday morning...and he would tell us what we did wrong on this bit or that bit. We used to dread that morning. We’d do the local morning show and then go down to the drugstore there at Radio City, Cromwell’s ...He would come in with specific notes. ...I seem to remember he always wore an overcoat and an old-fashioned sports announcer’s type snap-brim fedora, which he always kept on. ...He was a pleasant enough guy but square as all get out.”

Through that winter, Elliott and Goulding, still in their late 20s, dutifully reported to the same booth at Cromwell’s on Sixth Avenue every Tuesday morning. During one breakfast, Elliott remembered, referring to a previous night’s sketch that had called for Audrey Meadows, supposedly unnoticed by the team, to make an entrance on roller skates, Carlin pointed out: “‘You had the girl come in on roller skates and you didn’t mention it.’ He didn’t get it. He couldn’t figure out why she came skating through...It was such a chore for us. [But] we were obeying orders.”

Reflecting on those long-ago Tuesdays, Liz said, “They would come home holding their heads.” She also remembered her husband leaving for those breakfasts and his ruefully commenting, “This will be another interesting one.”

“They couldn’t stand it,” recalled Ann Goulding King, Goulding’s younger sister,

then just 20, who had started that August as the team’s secretary. Ann’s specific instructions whenever Carlin should call were that they “weren’t there.” Frequently his calls came from downstairs at Cromwell’s, announcing, “‘They haven’t shown up,’” she said. “‘Well, I’ll see if I can find them.’ And they never would call back if they could avoid it.”

One time, recounted Ann, Carlin finally told the two, “‘You have a very stupid secretary. She never gives you my messages.’”

In addition to Carlin’s weekly comedy lectures, Pete Barnum invited stand-up comic Jackie Miles, an equally incongruous choice, but for different reasons, to attend the show’s rehearsals and then impart his advice. Intuitively “we knew this was wrong,” said Elliott.

Miles was an excellent monologist and a particular favorite of fellow comics. Skinny, downtrodden, with a soft, shaky voiced delivery, his material usually centered on hard-luck losers at the track and in life. One of his classic lines concerned a sad sack cashing his one-cent relief check. “How do you want it?” asked the teller. “Heads or tails?”

In persona, style and material, however, Miles was the complete antithesis of Elliott and Goulding. They were satirists and he was a storyteller.

The first meeting took place in the mezzanine of NBC’s cavernous, old Center Theater. During the rehearsal for that evening’s show, Miles stayed by himself and watched intently. When it was over, as Elliott and Goulding cooled their heels, he went off in a corner and huddled with Moses and Barnum. “Afterwards, John said, ‘Well, he didn’t have much to offer,’” Elliott recalled. “Nothing!”

It was the first and last such meeting. To be fair to Miles, there’s a good chance he,

too, recognized the folly in trying to meld broadcasting and nightclub mentalities.

*David Pollock and his partner Elias Davis have written for The Steve Allen Show, Mary Tyler Moore, All in the Family, M*A*S*H, Cheers, Frasier and The Carol Burnett Show. They have won an Emmy, Writers Guild, Peabody and two Humanitas awards.*

The next issue of Television

Quarterly will reveal Elliott and Goulding's abrupt ending to one of their long-continuing serials and the appearance of 26-year-old Cloris Leachman in one of her earliest comedy roles as Mary Backstayge, Noble Wife. Also covered will be the team's celebrated advertising and animation enterprise, starting with their longest-running TV success as the voices of Bert and Harry Piel, the fictitious owners of a real brewery.



Bob Elliott (left) and Ray Goulding, by Al Hirschfeld

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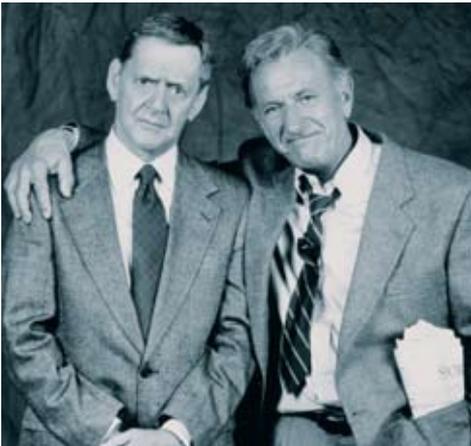
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Sitcoms? Wrong Name

A critic notes that situations are not funny: It's what the people in those situations say and do that make them funny. **By David Horowitz**

Here's the situation: a couple is lying in bed discussing a dream the man had. Pretty funny, huh?

Not really. Not unless it's Bob Hartley in the classic closing scene in *Newhart*, Bob Newhart's second series. Newhart closed the series by reuniting with his TV wife, Emily (Suzanne Pleshette) from his first series, *The Bob Newhart Show*, telling her about the dream he had about running an inn, the premise for the long-running (1982-90) Newhart series. The ending, which was suggested by Newhart's real-life wife, Virginia, was tabbed as #1 on the TV Land/TV Guide "100 Most Unexpected TV Moments" list, the



Tony Randall (left) with Jack Klugman
in *The Odd Couple*

Photofest

basis for a December 2005 special on the TV Land cable channel.

Here's another situation: a conveyor belt is moving fast, items scooting past a worker. Hilarious, right?

Not really. Not unless it's Lucy, trying valiantly to keep up with the candy zipping past her.

That's why there's no such thing as a situation comedy—a sitcom—because situations in and of themselves, are not funny. It's what the people in those situations say and do that's funny. Or not. It's the talent of the writers and actors that make it work. Robin Williams as Mork was a perfect fit, and it would be difficult to name someone else who could have pulled off that role that well.

How about this situation: a group of twenty-somethings are living and working in New York? Wow. Is that hysterical or what?

Not really. Not unless one of the characters is named *Seinfeld*. Or Chandler Bing (*Friends*).

The history of television is littered with the bodies of series whose situations are supposed to be the basis

For every mismatched pair of buddies, there's only one *Odd Couple*

for big laughs. For every mismatched pair of buddies, there's only one *Odd Couple*. Even the show that's credited for saving "sitcoms," *The Cosby Show*, had this classic setup for a comedy: a family. Duh.

Comedies are one of two things: funny or not funny. Most funny comedies succeed, although many don't, for a variety of reasons. Conversely, most unfunny comedies—pardon the oxymoron, it's a matter of taste, I know—don't.

Maybe this is all semantics, that the term "sitcom" is just handy shorthand for media writers, but that begs the question: what kind of "situation" is inherently funny, let alone not funny in and of itself?

How's this for a howler of a situation: an operating room. A killer situation, right? Well, in the case of the CBS series *M*A*S*H*, which ran for 251 episodes over 11 years (1972-1983), yes. However, in the case of *E.R.*, the comedy series that ran a whole 14 episodes on CBS in 1984-1985, no. So, some doctors are clearly more entertaining than others. At least George Clooney survived that experience to go to another *E.R.*, the NBC series on which he appeared in 106 episodes. Some of the other E/R cast members also went

on to do pretty well on the small screen: Mary McDonnell (*Battlestar Galactica*), Jason Alexander (*Seinfeld*), and Elliott Gould (*Friends*), among others.

For me, comedies—successful ones—should be called "witcoms," not sitcoms. A witcom (and I think I was the first to make this word up) is a comedy show that depends on the dialogue, style, look, interaction and appeal of the individual characters—and yes, their reactions to situations—to make us want to watch, and more, to care about them and the show, rather than the situational setup of the show. The show's appeal must come from the characters, what they say, what they do, and how they make us feel about them. A neurotic psychiatrist or two? Funny,



*Bob Newhart (left) with Tom Poston on
The Bob Newhart Show*

Photofest

if they're Niles and Frasier Crane (*Frasier*). Otherwise, not much.

By contrast, a "sitcom" depends on the situation to create the laughs. Almost everything is pegged to the

Successful comedies should be called "witcoms," not sitcoms.

situation. The characters either like it, hate it, can't do anything about it, don't do anything about it, do something about it and succeed, do something about it and fail, and so on. And while it's also difficult to do well, at least there's the convention—the "situation"—to fall back on if the words aren't working.

But, as noted, situations in and of themselves aren't funny, and even if there's a spark of originality in the situation, pretty soon a one-joke premise is bound to fall flat. It's not

the throwing of the pie that's funny, it's the landing.

For instance, after seeing Jethro unable to deal with a ringing doorbell on *Beverly Hillbillies* one too many times (Hear that sound? I bet somebody'll be knocking on the door real soon), it's clear that any humor in THAT situation comes from Jethro being dumb as a bag of hammers, not from the doorbell being rung.

And that's what's at the bottom of my uneasy feeling about comedies based on situations, the literal basis of

"sitcoms." They all seem to pay off the gags the same way every week, because that's all they can do, and that's what the audience wants them to do. Sure, that familiarity is what breeds acceptance, and occasionally good ratings, and that's how we keep score.

Then there are the grownups who are either dumber than or disrespected by their smart-mouth kids. Setting aside the brickbats from the "let's not make fun of parents... ever" groups, there's the fact that it's rarely amusing. Check out the harried dad (Michael Rapaport) on Fox's *The War At Home* if you don't believe me. On the other hand, there's no arguing with the success of Bart Simpson in Fox's longtime hit *The Simpsons*. The epidemic of smart-



Bebe Neuwirth with Kelsey Grammer on *Frazier*

Photofest

aleck kids was enough to set off Bernie Mac as he was developing his Fox series, which debuted in 2001 and ran for five years.

As he told *Jet* magazine in a 2001 interview, "The network wanted to do a show with kids talking back,"

he explained. "I told them I'm from a black family, and that's unheard of. In the show, Vanessa has to grow up fast because her mother is on drugs. She has an attitude because she's suddenly in a strange city and she's frustrated. He lets her slide a bit. But, I told the writers he ain't going to let her keep talking to him like that. Something's going to have to give. The police will be out there sooner or later because he's going to slap the ---- out of her. You aren't going to be in a man's house talking to him like that. I know her mama's in rehab, but she's going

to be in the hospital too with a broken jaw if she keeps talking to him like that.”

Enough already with those pesky kids and their manufactured dialogue. I guess I just plain don't like to see people acting weird simply because the situation demands it. I'd rather have screwballs in my living room acting weird because they are weird.

I loved addled driver Reverend Jim and snarky dispatcher Louie DePalma in *Taxi*. I loved Bob's neighbors Larry, his brother Darryl and his other brother Darryl in *Newhart*. I loved Basil Fawly, owner of the delightfully zany hotel on *Fawly Towers*. I loved MTV's animated troublemakers *Beavis & Butthead*. And now I love Deputy Trudy Wiegel of *Reno 911* and, of course, I'm nuts for *The Office's* Dwight Schrutte, Assistant to the Manager of the Dunder- Mifflin paper company in Scranton.

In a business sense, television comedies are no laughing matter. Hip-hop isn't the only world where it's all about the Benjamins (hard cash to those of you not familiar with the slang term for a \$100 bill).

In the April 27/May 4 2007 issue of *Entertainment Weekly*, in her piece about *Ugly Betty*, Gillian Flynn wrote, “And while I'm pleased that our Betty is no longer the object of total ridicule that she was at the season's start, it's still not funny when she runs into walls... A comedy should make people laugh because of sharp dialogue and clever situations.”

Right. And a comedy should also, ideally in the minds of its producers, run for at least 100 episodes to hit the syndication jackpot. Whether it makes me laugh is irrelevant, as long as it makes enough people laugh for at least 100 half-hours.

The lack of creative premises is becoming even more critical for the networks. In his *New York Times* op-ed piece on May 14, *New York Sun* writer David Blum wrote, “Going forward, the real problem for the networks will be finding fresh ideas for comedies from the junk heap of pitches and pilots. Even a good *Friends* episode starts to wear thin after the 50th viewing, I happen to know. It speaks to the scarcity of the next-big-things that ABC actually produced a pilot based on a handful of 30-second Geico ‘Cavemen’ commercials, despite the lack of a coherent narrative, recognizable stars or even a logical concept.”

If Blum is right, some television comedy producers—in what can only be termed an alarming move—have now seemingly migrated from copying classic situations to eliminating them. Sigh.

In choosing comedies for the fall launch of the 2007-08 season, the networks had the usual outstanding array of concepts from which to choose. How to pick between these offerings, as outlined in *Television Week* (April 30, 2007)?

1 A comedy about two people who meet at a funeral and can't seem to stay away from each other

2 When a successful Wall Street guy dies and Hell is too full to accept him, he is assigned to “Hell on earth,” where he is stripped of all the luxuries he once enjoyed

3 A 10-year-old boy tries to navigate life in his high-achieving, overstressed family with the help of his crazy grandfather

4 A down-on-his-luck guy befriends a

man who uses a wheelchair and moves into his group home for the disabled

5 The absurd and surrealistic adventures of two high-powered soda salesmen on a never-ending business trip

6 Two brothers who differ politically are forced to live together after one suffers and accident that leaves him using a wheelchair

None of the above made the cut. Here are some of the situations in which the networks have placed their bets for the fall or midseason, taken from their websites.

ABC

Cavemen

Over the last hundred thousand years, mankind has evolved from primitive creatures to sophisticated beings, except for a small minority who unfortunately didn't evolve physically at all. Now three sophisticated cavemen (who already have a fan base from their popular GEICO commercials) are living in modern-day Atlanta, where they are at odds with contemporary society as they struggle to overcome their physical appearance and the accompanying stereotypes.



Cavemen stars *Bill English, Nick Kroll and Sam Huntington*

ABC/Bob D'Amico

Cashmere Mafia

From the creator and executive producer of *Sex and the City* and the writer of "Working Girl" comes a comedic drama focusing on four dynamic women, friends since their days at business school together, who support each other through rocky marriages, ridiculous dates, parenting challenges, professional rivalries and the hunt for the perfect apartment. Mixing the sass and wit of the film "The Devil Wears Prada" with insight of the novel *I Don't Know How She Does It*, this nuanced dramedy taps into the thoroughly modern, but eminently relatable dilemmas of today's working women who valiantly struggle to "have it all."

Miss Guided

You can run and you can hide but you can never escape... who you were in high school. Becky Freeley thought she had left her teenage self behind when she returned to her old school to work as the guidance counselor. But when her gorgeous former nemesis joins the faculty, Becky's cover is blown. From producer Ashton Kutcher and Emmy Award-winning director Todd Holland (*Malcolm in the Middle, The Larry Sanders Show*) comes a show about second chances.

NBC

Chuck

Chuck Bartowski is just your average computer-whiz-next-door. He spends his days working for Buy-More with his band of nerdy cohorts, longing to find a woman who can appreciate him. But when an old

friend, who happens to be a CIA agent, sends Chuck a mysterious encoded email, the world's greatest spy secrets are embedded into his brain.

He never asked to become the government's most powerful weapon, but the fate of the country suddenly lies in his unlikely hands. Hopefully, this won't take away from his video game time! International terrorist plots, sexy spies and cold pizza – it's all in a day's work for our trusty hero...Chuck.

CBS

The Big Bang Theory

Meet two brainiacs with a lot to learn. Leonard and Sheldon can tell their quarks from their quantum physics, but have no clue how women add up. Leave it to that pretty new neighbor, just off a messy breakup, to teach them a thing or two in *The Big Bang Theory*.

FOX

Back To You

In the '90s, the local TV news scene in Pittsburgh was dominated by one team: Chuck Darling (Kelsey Grammer) and Kelly Carr (Patricia Heaton). They had that elusive quality all news teams need: chemistry ... at least on-screen. Off-screen, Chuck was a bit of a self-centered womanizer, Kelly a bit of an uptight know-it-all. So when Chuck got the call to move up to a larger market,

no tears were shed.

But after an embarrassing on-air tirade ended up on the Internet, Chuck found himself on the downswing career-wise. He even questioned whether his lifestyle of chasing women and living in hotels was as exciting as it used to be. So when he got the call to return to Pittsburgh, to reunite with Kelly and try to take the newscast back to No. 1, it was an offer he couldn't refuse.

(There's also, you guessed it, "an overstressed news director, an affable, endlessly inappropriate sports anchor, and perennially put-upon field reporter who always seems to get left out in the snow.")

On the page, there's no way of telling which of these "situations" will lead to the next *Everybody Loves Raymond* or *Seinfeld*, but I didn't spot a cranky father-in-law—or a wheelchair—in the bunch.

And while any list of the worst sitcoms—situations designed for laughs—is by nature subjective, here's one person's nomination for the absolute number one position: the 1990 British series, *Heil Honey, I'm Home*. The situation? Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun find themselves living next door to a Jewish couple. Hilarity ensues.

David B. Horowitz is a free-lance writer and marketing consultant in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A 25-year TV veteran in the U.S. and Canada, he also teaches writing and advertising at Washtenaw Community College.

REVIEW AND COMMENT

A Shadow of Red: Communism and the Blacklist in Radio and Television

By David Everitt

Ivan R. Dee, Chicago

(432 pages, \$27.50)

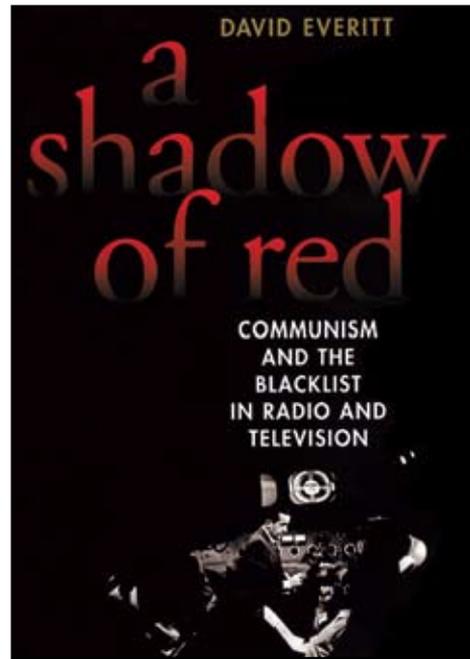
By Bernard S. Redmont

The United States in the 1950s suffered what historians consider a national nervous breakdown. It was called McCarthyism, the witch-hunting era, and the age of the blacklist.

Although it generally infected the political world and public and private life, nowhere was this pestilence more virulent than in the broadcast industry and in Hollywood.

Those were ugly times. Playwright Lillian Hellman dubbed the period “Scoundrel Time.” Most Americans born in the past half century have little knowledge of the hysteria, the totalitarian-like fear, and psychological terrorism unleashed by the inquisitors of the time under the pretext of anti-communism and the cold war.

The witch hunters cast a wide net. Many New Deal liberals were slandered as Reds. Victims were grilled by legislative committees, questioned about their beliefs, opinions and associations. Many were blacklisted, lost their livelihoods and their passports, fled into exile abroad, were jailed, committed suicide or died of heart attacks.



Caught in the grinding gears of the blacklist were many of the most prominent performers, writers and directors on radio and television—luminaries like Orson Welles, Edward G. Robinson, Gene Kelly, John Henry Faulk (the folksy talk show entertainer of the time on CBS), Lucille Ball (the star of TV’s most popular sitcom), veteran character actor Philip Loeb, the stripper turned writer-actress Gypsy Rose Lee, singer Hazel Scott, actor John Garfield, actress Judy Holliday, script writer Peter Lyon, comedian Zero Mostel, producer-writer-director Norman Corwin, children’s programming personality Irene Wicker, actor Everett Sloane, commentator Howard K. Smith and many others, well known or not.

Among the casualties of the blacklist were Loeb and CBS newsman Don Hollenbeck, both of whom committed suicide; actress Mady Christians, who

REVIEW AND COMMENT

died of a cerebral hemorrhage; and actors J. Edward Bromberg and Canada Lee, who died of heart attacks.

The media blacklist erupted in 1950, as the Korean war began. A booklet called *Red Channels* appeared, listing 151 suspected Communist sympathizers in broadcasting. A purge of the airwaves ensued. It involved some of broadcasting's top figures, including Edward R. Murrow and Frank Stanton of CBS. To appease the blacklists, the liberal-minded Murrow and Stanton went along with a CBS loyalty oath. FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover once told CBS held William S. Paley that the network might best be called the Communist Broadcasting System.

Once the heart of broadcast liberalism, CBS became the harshest of the networks in enforcing the blacklist. But Murrow also led the campaign against McCarthyism. Along with *Red Channels*, a newsletter called *Counterattack* joined the assault on candidates for the blacklist.

Author David Everitt tells the story in an unusual way in *A Shadow of Red*. He sees the blacklist as being instigated by five anti-Red watchdogs—three ex-FBI agents, a former naval intelligence officer and a grocer-supermarket magnate from Syracuse.

The ex-FBI agents, united in a hatred for Communism, were John C. Keenan, Kenneth M. Bierly and Theodore C. Kirkpatrick. They had worked together in the FBI's New York City Communist Squad before establishing an anti-Red company called American Business Consultants and launching the newsletter *Counterattack*.

The fourth man was a Syracuse grocer,

Laurence A. Johnson, who grew his business into a supermarket chain and whose passionate avocation was fighting Communism. He alerted his customers to boycott the sponsors of suspect radio and television personalities.

The fifth was Vincent Hartnett, a radio and magazine writer and former intelligence agent, who joined the three ex-FBI agents as a partner to help them build a data base. Hartnett wrote the seven page introduction to *Red Channels*. Religion played a role in the crusade. An ardent Catholic like two of the agents, he was so impassioned about his anti-Communist cause that he believed there was a blacklist against anti-Communists in radio.

Hartnett was the most prominent and most notorious of the broadcast Red hunters. He became a major anti-Red talent consultant for both sponsors and advertising agencies. He and others among the blacklists were accused by Jewish organizations of anti-Semitism. Hartnett published a typewritten, loose-leaf book entitled *Confidential Notebook (File 13)*, an updatable listing of broadcast personnel and their alleged front activities, more detailed than *Red Channels*. Perhaps in an effort at balance, Everitt writes sympathetically about Hartnett. This gives his work a confused and contradictory tone.

The book, oddly named *A Shadow of Red*, is not merely a scholarly history of the blacklist, filled as it is with reference notes on documents, personal correspondence, interviews and court transcripts. Yet, it is not the study one would have expected about this sordid era. Everitt seems to be ambivalent and ambiguous about the blacklist. He

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regards it as excessive, destructive and contrary to American values. But he does not see the blacklisters as “deluded hunters of an imaginary menace,” as the publisher’s book jacket puts it. He sometimes reads as if he agrees with the anti-Communist fervor of the blacklisters.

Everitt writes: “Too often the portrayals of these blacklisters have failed to rise above the depth of caricature, reducing them to little more than political bogeymen in a partisan political melodrama. Only by constructing a more complete picture of these people and their time can we understand how something like the blacklist could occur in a free society.”

Everitt’s publicity spokesmen make clear that he does not see the conflict in the broadcast media “as a simplistic morality tale of persecutors and the persecuted, or a witch hunt of right-wing fanatics hounding political innocents whom they insisted were agents of the Communist devil.”

About a quarter of the book is devoted to the libel suit filed against the blacklisters by John Henry Faulk. Faulk was a major star in broadcasting, not only as a talk show host but also on the syndicated TV show *Hee Haw*. He believed his career was damaged if not destroyed by accusations that he had Communist associations and sympathies. The suit was conducted by the flamboyant attorney Louis Nizer. Everitt covers the courtroom drama in great detail. Faulk’s victory with a hefty judgment against the blacklisters, the biggest an American jury ever awarded, was considered the beginning of the end of the blacklist.

Faulk later wrote a memoir called *Fear on Trial*. It was shown as a film and on TV. The author of the book, appears to doubt the veracity of Faulk’s anti-Communist protestations, and is clearly unsympathetic with his comportment.

A former magazine editor, Everitt writes frequently on entertainment and the media for *Entertainment Weekly*, *Biography*, *American History* and *The New York Times*. He is the author of *King of the Half Hour*.

Some other chronicles of the blacklist era have appeared that tell the story more incisively—Victor Navasky’s *Naming Names*, and John Cogley’s *Report on Blacklisting: II Radio-Television*, for example.

Could the Red Scare happen again? Everitt says no. He concedes that there have been parallels echoing some of the element of the blacklist period. After radical activist Danny Glover harshly criticized President Bush at the beginning of the Iraq War, conservative MSNBC commentator Joe Scarborough denounced the actor on the air and organized a protest among his viewers, demanding that Glover be fired as spokesman for the phone company MCI on its TV commercials. The campaign had its effect and Glover was fired. But unlike many blacklist victims of the 1950s, Glover continued to work regularly on TV and films. The same held true for other anti-war performers like Sean Penn. To date no organized blacklist has reappeared.

Everitt says in the end that the blacklist “remains a warning tale for other times of emergency and war, when emotional partisanship runs high on both sides and the temptation

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arises to silence the opposition or at the very least to unleash reckless conspiracy-mongering that poisons the public debate. On a more hopeful note, the blacklist period, like earlier times of drastic wartime measures, demonstrates the resiliency of the American system, its ability to correct itself and return to more levelheaded civil libertarian values. The question is, once polarization and emergency measures take hold, how long does it take the country to recover? Once the political fabric has been shredded, how quickly can it mend itself?"

Bernard S. Redmont, a survivor of the 1950s blacklist, went on to report for Westinghouse Broadcasting Company Group W and CBS News. He became dean of Boston University's College of Communication and the author of Risks Worth Taking: The Odyssey of a Foreign Correspondent.

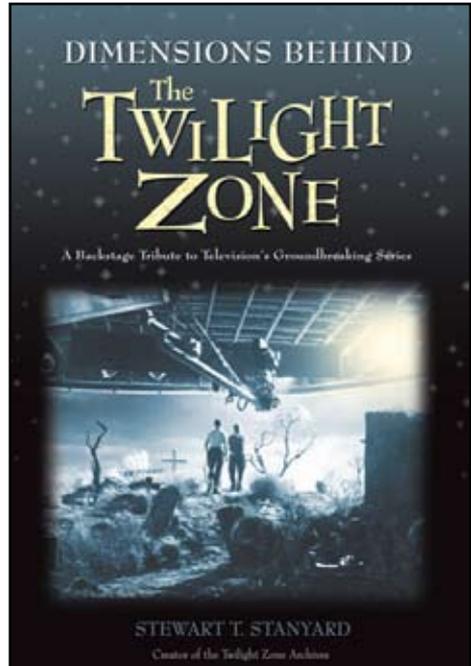
Dimensions Behind: The Twilight Zone

By Stewart T. Stanyard
ECW Press, Toronto
(292 pages, \$21.95)

By John V. Pavlik

Books about *The Twilight Zone* are abundant and vary widely in quality. Stewart T. Stanyard's 2007 book, *Dimensions Behind The Twilight Zone* is a welcome addition to this collection of work. Stanyard's book provides a

detailed examination of the scenes and people behind the production of the classic show. Stanyard is a lifelong fan of the show, and spent years poring over archives about the production of the Emmy award-winning program. The book is as much a tribute to Rod Serling, *The Twilight Zone's* creator, as it is to the show itself. Yet, it is not simply a long cheer for a well-produced show and the talent behind it. *Dimensions* is a thoughtful assessment of the diverse forces that shaped the anthology, including the people, technology, limited finances and early development of the medium of television in which *The Twilight Zone* was produced. The reader sees how all these forces, both seen and unseen, inspired the program's development, but also how the standards of excellence that Serling and his team brought to the five years of *Twilight Zone's* original production



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contributed to what we today call “the golden age of television.”

Dimensions is divided into three main parts. First is a series of five original chapters by the author in which Stanyard discusses Serling himself and his creative genius, the team that worked with Serling on the show, themes addressed in the anthology, the unexpected comedy sometimes offered in the show and the directions Serling’s work took after *The Twilight Zone*. Second is a series of short commentaries by more than three dozen of the actors, writers, directors, producers and various talented individuals who worked on the show and with Serling. The third main section of the book is a series of a dozen essays offering appreciation to Serling and the team he developed for the show. These are written by various family members of the cast and crew, friends and Hollywood talent with some connection to the show. Part one, Stanyard’s analytical chapters, is superb. It is well written, offers fresh insight and is a delight to read, whether for *The Twilight Zone* fan or uninitiated. Stanyard’s chapters are based largely on his original analysis of *Twilight Zone* archives.

The second main part of the book, the commentaries and essays by actors, producers, directors and others associated with the show and its creator, are uneven. Some are insightful and fascinating, while others are bland and repetitive with what is already fairly well known about the show or Serling. Among the more valuable contributions is the essay by actor Cliff Robertson. Robertson starred in the

fascinating *Twilight Zone* episodes, “A Hundred Yards over the Rim” and “The Dummy.” In his essay he writes about these episodes. “There was one called ‘A Hundred Yards Over the Rim,’ and I had done my research, because it was about a family going westward on a covered wagon, and they become discouraged because they hit this desert, and a boy was sick.” Robertson explains how, based on his research, which showed that the people traveling west at the time were generally very poor, “the clothes they wore were always those black wool things, which is all right in the winter, but god forbid you hit a desert.” Robertson wanted to dress the part, “So I went to the wardrobe and I picked these clothes, and then I picked a stovepipe hat.” Unfortunately, as Robertson explains, the producer thought Robertson’s hat was the wrong look and didn’t want him to wear it. Finally, the producer called Rod to make the decision and Rod declared Robertson was right, and it was that stovepipe hat that gave “Over the Rim” perhaps its most memorable look.

Dimensions pays particular attention to the writers who provided the show so much of its impact. They provided the stories, as is noted throughout the book. One of the show’s most important core writers (in addition, of course, to Serling), was George Clayton Johnson. Stories he wrote became various *Twilight Zone* episodes, including “The Four of Us Are Dying,” “Execution” and “A Penny for Your Thoughts.” He also provided one of the most interesting essays in the book. He writes, “I wrote ‘All of Us Are Dying,’ a short story that Rod Serling bought that he retitled ‘The

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Four of Us Are Dying,' and he wrote a marvelous script for it. The same thing happened with a story called 'Execution.' When I originally wrote it, I called it 'The Hanging of Jason Black.' Rod changed the man's name to Joe Caswell, and the title to 'Execution.' The third story I sold him was called 'Sea Change,' but then I had to buy it back because of censorship problems [the cutting off of a man's hand]."

Although the show was among the most imaginative of television's golden age, it is perhaps not surprising that some of the stories were specifically written for particular actors, existing sets or props (e.g., Robbie the robot from the movie "Forbidden Planet" inspired a *Twilight Zone* episode). As a CBS program, the show had access to the MGM back lot, and this was a fertile and diverse resource, as is noted by several of the book's contributors.

The final major section of *Dimensions*, the appreciation essays, are also somewhat uneven, but worth the read, especially those contributions that offer a technical perspective on the series. It is apparent from many of the appreciation essays as well as the commentaries, that *The Twilight Zone* was not just inspired by brilliant minds acting on their own initiative, but because of severe budgetary and time constraints (i.e., producing a weekly show), the writers, producers, directors and actors all had to dig deep into their imaginations to create believable sets and overall production techniques for the show. One particularly illuminating essay is written by John Ottman, who has composed soundtracks for many films, including "Superman Returns,"

"X2" and "The Usual Suspects." Ottman's essay provides a unique perspective on the music that helped define the show and maximize its impact. As Ottman notes, talented composers and conductors such as Bernard Herrmann, Jerry Goldsmith and Franz Waxman all created music for *The Twilight Zone*. Ottman explains how music not only helped give the show its unique character, but also how the widely recognized "Da da Da da" theme came to be. "The first part, ("Etrange 3") contained the weird guitar motif we all identify as the *Twilight Zone* "theme," and the second part spliced onto it from "Milieu 2" was the familiar downward chromatic wrap-up to the segment we all know and love," Ottman writes.

Throughout *Dimensions*, Stanyard has liberally illustrated the book with more than 350 photographs taken during production of the show. These photos offer a rare and entertaining perspective on the production of the show. "Looking through these behind-the-scenes photos brings back many fond memories of Rod Serling and those early days working on such a remarkable piece of television history," writes actor William Shatner, who starred in two memorable *Twilight Zone* episodes, "Nick of Time" and "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet" and later as Captain Kirk in *Star Trek*. Echoing this view is Carol Serling, Rod's widow. *Dimensions* is "a worthy addition to *Twilight Zone* lore. The arrival of this treasure trove of 'lost' photographs and interviews with the Zone inhabitants is therefore a stupendous event."

Adding to this is Bill Mummy,

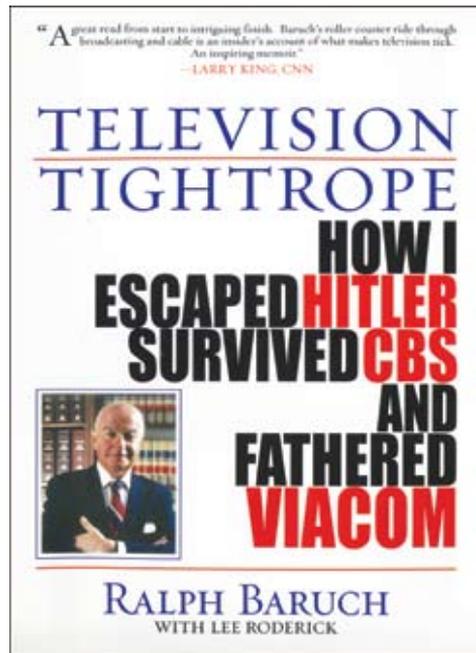
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who starred as a child in several *Twilight Zone* episodes, including the unforgettable “Long Distance Call,” “It’s a Good Life,” and “In Praise of Pip” and later as “Will” in *Lost in Space*. “Stewart Stanyard has pulled out all the stops here. Packed with an abundance of rare behind-the-scenes photographs and fresh interviews with those who were there, it brings insights to the myth of Rod Serling. This is a good book, a real good book. Read it, or I’ll send you to the cornfield!”

The photos and their captions often reveal insights into how shows such as *The Twilight Zone* were produced, and some the unique challenges faced in creating an anthology show that bridged between fantasy and science fiction and in varied venues. The caption for a photo of actor Cliff Robertson as settler Christian Horn in Serling’s “A Hundred Yards Over the Rim” illustrates. “The desert scenes were filmed on location near Lone Pine, California, and to save money on the budget, this episode was filmed along with “The Rip Van Winkle Caper.”

Dimensions Behind The Twilight Zone is an excellent book. Stewart Stanyard has conducted exhaustive research and assembled a rich blend of perspectives, people and pictures to help us understand one of the most lasting and influential of programs from television’s golden age.

John V. Pavlik is professor and chair, the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Rutgers. His article on Broadband mobile media appears on page 7 of this issue of Television Quarterly



Television Tightrope: How I Escaped Hitler, Survived CBS and Fathered Viacom

By Ralph Baruch, with Lee Roderick
*Probitas Press, Los Angeles, North
Logan, Utah and Washington, D.C.*
(356 pages, \$27.95)

By Fritz Jacobi

This is an odd amalgam of family memoir, television history, industry analysis, gossip and personal score-settling by one of television’s most eminent and distinguished executives who has a fascinating story to tell but

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is, alas, not a storyteller. Nor, for that matter, is his writing collaborator. Ralph Baruch, now 84, reflects on an extraordinary life. His father, a World War I German officer, and his mother, an educated daughter of privilege, were Jews who fled Hitler from occupied France in 1940. His chilling tale of escape includes carrying his grandmother on his back as they climbed the Pyrenees. He was 17 years old.

The narrative of these early days may be the best part of *Television Tightrope*. After the family's arrival in the United States he writes, "At last we were free." Like so many immigrants, he worked hard, including at a shoe factory, while moonlighting as an usher for \$6 a week. He became a top international executive at CBS through diligence, intelligence and successful salesmanship. He subsequently ran a tiny new enterprise named Viacom, which was nearly destroyed by CBS before it became the largest entertainment company in the world.

The trouble with this story is that the author includes every detail of every transaction in a mind-numbing manner. Whether it's "Viacode," an experiment with pay cable for individual movies not endorsed by the cable industry; Baruch being snubbed by and then resigning from the National Cable Television Association or FCC Chairman Richard Wiley's intransigence about imported cable signals, there is just Too Much Information. Then there is Motorola's possible interest in joining Viacom for pay-cable activities or Baruch's difficulties with CBS CEO Tom Wyman; or Marvin Davis misquoting Baruch to Paley and thereby doublecrossing

him. No file card is left unturned.

Since he is also writing a history of television, there are inexplicable errors and lacunae: A few examples: Spelling John Cameron Swazey as "Swazy"; listing some of Pat Weaver's greatest contributions like *Today*, *Tonight* and *Home* without mentioning Weaver's name; identifying early Viacom board member Jack White as president of the Cooper Union engineering school but failing to note that he had led National Educational Television for many years.

And although the author acknowledges the help of his editors, one wonders where they were when they failed to spot such gaffes as "they did excellent in school," "kidnaping," "rarely if ever has a U.S. president and the national news media" and let "shrunk" stand in for "shrank." And missing such misplaced antecedents as "while [I was] on the road ..my mother's heart condition grew progressively worse." The late Lauri Strauss's name is spelled "Laurie" in the next line. This reviewer knows from painful personal experience that proofreading is a tiresome chore, but such an enormous accumulation of errors is simply inexcusable.

This is not to say that *Television Tightrope* is not without significant redeeming features. There are some vividly accurate descriptions of former CBS President Jim Aubrey, "widely known as the smiling cobra, who thought nothing of having a producer cool his heels for half a day in his outer office, then dispatching a secretary to tell him to come back another time." There are hilarious portrayals of meetings with Paley and other top CBS brass, lively stuff when it doesn't

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get too intramural. And there is such admirable candor as “I had a distaste for the whole Hollywood scene and went out there as seldom as possible...I had notoriously bad judgment of which series were likely to succeed and made it a point not to get involved in programming projects.”

The author must be saluted for noting that “Except for PBS, broadcast television is no longer a public service, operating in the public interest, convenience, and necessity. It is a moneymaking machine, still driven almost completely by newly developed rating services.”

Finally, Baruch movingly describes his personal sorrows, crowned by the death of his first wife, leaving him a widower and the father of four daughters at 36. He later married a wonderful woman who restored the family.

Nonetheless, the bulk of *Television Tightrope* does not do justice to Ralph

Baruch’s extraordinary achievements, which should be the subject of an important biography. This is not it.

Fritz Jacobi is the editor of Television Quarterly. His article on Pat Mitchell and the Paley Center for Media appears on page 3 of this issue.

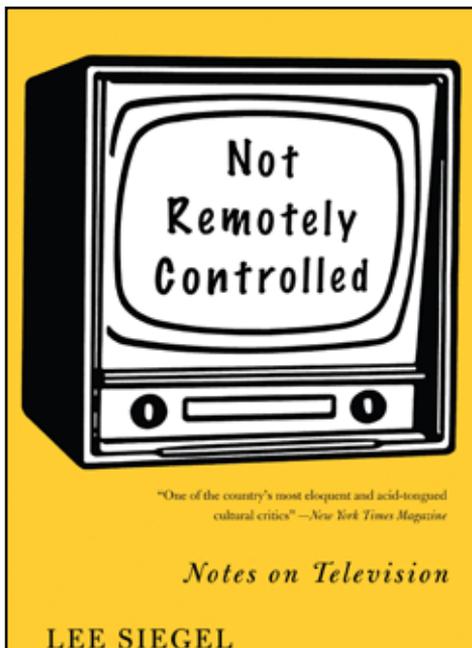
Not Remotely Controlled: Notes on Television

By Lee Siegel
Basic Books, New York
(356 pages, \$27.95)

By Earl Pomerantz

During the 1940’s, Lester Rodney wrote about baseball for the Communist newspaper, *The Daily Worker*. Between 2003 and 2006, *Not Remotely Controlled’s* Lee Siegel wrote about television for the political weekly *The New Republic*. I have no idea what those publications were thinking. They’ll come for the box scores and stay for the editorials on the exploitation of the proletariat? They’ll enjoy our observations on their favorite TV shows and forget about our early enthusiasm for the war in Iraq? I don’t understand it. How many new subscriptions did these marketing schemes bring them? Four?

It can’t be easy covering television for *The New Republic*. You walk into the office, and there’s a guy doing an “in-depth” on the firing of the Federal Attorneys; another’s looking at health care; another, the crisis in the Middle



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East; they look up and say hello, they ask what you're working on, and you say "The cultural implications of *Deal or No Deal*."

In his introduction, Siegel writes, "The marketing people are going to kill me when they read the following, but if you've picked up this book looking for straightforward television reviews, you're going to be disappointed." Read differently than the writer may have intended, this lighthearted disclaimer also serves as a screaming announcement:

"I'M NOT A TELEVISION REVIEWER!"

as in...

"What does your son do for a living?"

"He's a television reviewer."

"I'M NOT A TELEVISION REVIEWER! OKAY???"

Message received. Lee Siegel is not a television reviewer. He's a television critic. And by the way, it's for *The New Republic*.

This sensitivity is understandable, not just for a commentator for a respected periodical but for any writer covering television. Television reviewers – and television critics for that matter – have zero power. Remember *Action*? Remember *Bette*? Remember *Arrested Development*? Reviewers praised them; nobody watched. Television reflects unfiltered democracy. Nothing matters but the audience. It's like the joke about the dog food with the finest ingredients, the snappiest ad campaign, the perfect shelf placement in the supermarkets, but it still doesn't sell. Why? The dogs don't like it. In television, the audience is the dogs.

For me, when I don't understand a book's title, it's not an encouraging sign. *Not Remotely Controlled*. What exactly is that supposed to mean? I know it's a play on the word "remote." A "remote" is a device that allows you to perform various applications from a distance. The word "remote" is defined as "unlikely" or "improbable." One word, two definitions. But where's the connection?

Is the writer implying that the medium of television isn't *remotely* controlled, as in "there's not a chance in hell it's controlled"? That can't be it. Television is intensely controlled, by advertisers, or on premium cable, by executives' decisions geared towards boosting subscription numbers. Does he mean television itself is out of control? It doesn't seem to be. The medium's controlled down to the second or with advanced editing, tenth of a second. Television is researched and measured for every imaginable variable. They won't let it get out of control.

Does the title mean the audience's viewing habits are not remotely controlled? Maybe not from the outside, but they control them themselves; audiences watch the same shows over and over. Maybe it means the device is out of control; you press Channel 8 and you get Channel 52. Nah. You'd get a new remote, and you're back in control. And besides, that doesn't happen.

I'm thinking *Not Remotely Controlled* doesn't mean anything. But that can't be true. The guy's not an idiot; he writes for *The New Republic*. If only there were an explanatory chapter to clue me in. Unfortunately, there isn't.

Not Remotely Controlled, a

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compilation of essays, quasi-reviews and celebrity profiles from Siegel's column in *The New Republic* magazine and on its website, are all relatively short. His subjects cover the television spectrum from NBC's *Joey* – he liked it; he was wrong – to *Stump the Schwab* on ESPN, with stops at The History Channel's *Crusades* and Cinemax's *The Children of Leningradsky*. If you're more than a casual television watcher, you'll be intrigued by Siegel's never-uninteresting perspectives. His insights are always challenging and frequently on the money.

"Jack Lemmon, whose success as an actor was to perform failure to perfection." I think that's right. "Anyone the media builds up, regardless of his or her accomplishments or lack thereof, has to immediately get torn down. Yet, since most media constructions of instantaneous fame are driven by commercial purposes, the rapid backlash – which seems to come more and more quickly – is a healthy corrective to an empty phenomenon." Nourishing food for thought. And, of course, his writings gracing a left-leaning political magazine, there's always room for a shot at the president. "Under a better legal system, Bush would not be president; he would be captain of his cellblock's softball team." Not saying I agree, but I'm tickled by the imagery.

Then there are observations, which, while reading the book, I printed in the margins beside them the letters "IDK." "IDK" stands for "I don't know," meaning, "I do not know what he's talking about." There were a number of these. "Monk elevates intuitive genius by demonstrating how it elevates and

transforms suffering, and by presenting suffering as a condition that everyone shares, no matter what their gifts may or may not be." I read that one three times, I still didn't get it. On the cable cartoon series *Boondocks*: "It's striking how deep an affinity prejudice and satire have with each other. In both cases, the Procrustean idea of a person shapes and disfigures him into a caricature doomed to that idea." It's close, I can hear it; nope, it's not there. Then there are "tweeners." Critiquing Elvis: "He translated urban energies into a rural idiom, and vice versa." I got the first half, but he lost me on the "vice versa."

Let me not leave the impression that if you're smart, you shouldn't write about television. No one should be barred from this stimulating pursuit. I merely suggest you consider the enormously muscular football player who, when shaking hands, is careful not to squeeze too hard. When critiquing the People's Medium of television, you need to be vigilant not to cripple your audience with your super-powerful thinking ability.

Okay, one last guess about the title. Maybe the title means the writer himself is not remotely controlled. He's hired to write about television but simply uses the gig as a springboard for writing anything he wants. As Siegel explains, unlike novels, paintings and poetry, "thick" with interpretable meaning where "you have a great deal of work to do before you can start talking about the world outside," television is so "deliciously thin...you can dive right through the small screen into the world outside it." There's your opening – "thin" television driving

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your interpretations beyond “The Box.” Don’t blame the writer for dragging in Nietzsche, Vilfredo Pareto and Mircea Eliades’ *Shamanism*. The medium made him do it.

I’ll reserve the final word for Siegel himself: “Oh, the self-consciousness of [particularly] the [television] critic.” Okay, two words were mine. But he said it on page 40.

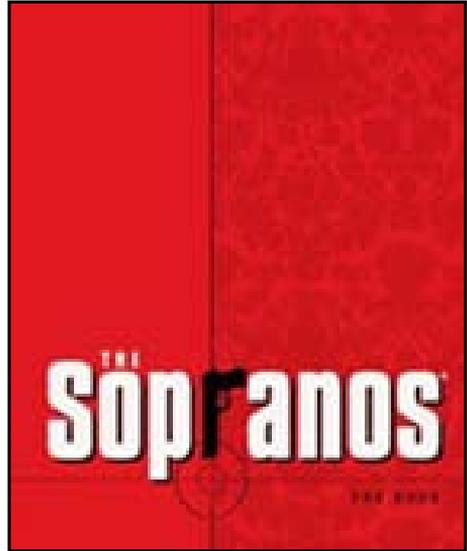
Emmy-award-winning writer Earl Pomerantz has recently completed a book of political commentary titled Both Sides Make Me Angry.

The Sopranos: The Book:

By Brett Martin
Time Inc, New York
(192 pages, \$21.95)

By Ron Simon

Contrary to T. S. Eliot, a world can end with a bang and a whimper. We are talking here about the world of *The Sopranos* that concluded with a silent blackout that was heard loudly around the media universe. On June 10, 2007 eight years of America’s most watched mob family came to a startling finale as Tony Soprano, his wife and two children gathered in a diner for what was maybe their last supper. A mysterious stranger perhaps morphs into vengeful hit man, snuffing out Tony to the tune of Journey’s “Don’t Stop Believin’” just after the screen goes



dark. The audience did not stop debating Tony’s possible demise, and the finale, enigmatic and postmodern, has quickly entered the pop culture vernacular. Even a presidential candidate, Hilary Clinton, has parodied this ultimate scene in a political ad.

The Sopranos helped to define the artistic possibilities of television in a new century that was burgeoning with such new entertainment technologies as gaming and the Internet. The series was lauded in almost every publication, including *The New Yorker* and *New York Review of Books*, with most critics in agreement with historian Peter Biskind, who memorialized *The Sopranos* as “one of the masterpieces of American popular culture” in a *Vanity Fair* cover story. But after eighty-six episodes, running from 1999-2007, what remains of David Chase’s unique vision in the memory of the Soprano aficionado? What you can’t summon up in words is now commodified in auxiliary products from digital software to good

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old-fashioned books.

It should come as no surprise that the owners of the Sopranos franchise, Time Warner, rushed a lavish new volume to the marketplace. This book not only keeps the memory of the series alive for longtime fans, but also is an excellent starter kit for a new generation, who has to catch up on the phenomenon via DVD or the channel that purchased the rights for the next six years, A&E. It is chock full of insider knowledge of production that will make any viewer feel that he or she is now part of a secret Soprano society. As Tony well knows: "Once you're in the family, there's no getting out." The more than 200 photographs evoke an alternative mobster universe resonant with the Jersey look, that "hyperlectic" style of nouveau riche aspiration so characteristic of Tony and Carmela.

The Sopranos was one of the most textured series in the history of television. Every costume or set design summoned up an array of values and emotions that could not be communicated in dialogue. Costume designer Juliet Pulcan has stated that "from the moment the audience see a character, even before he or she speaks, you should know a lot about them—what kind of person they are, what class, what they find important." Every detail in the Sopranos frame, encompassing clothes and furnishings, elucidated the interior life of the conflicted characters whose professional code of ethics often collide with family traditions. One of the pleasures of the book is to isolate these defining details without the characters. We experience the sprawling Soprano McMansion, with all the signifiers of

Tony's ambition: the leather comfy chair, certainly an upgrade from Archie Bunker's chair now housed in the Smithsonian; the spacious kitchen with every showy convenience, including a gleaming knife set that was always threatening in the background; and the mock Renaissance painting, bringing good taste to the bed room. A half page is devoted to a true signifier of a Jersey moll girl, the elaborate, ostentatious nails. Seeing these nails, whose patterns included leopard and zebra stripes, as well as the logos of Louis Vuitton, we hear the nasally thick accent of the one character who expressed her desires through her fingers, Adrianna, the straight talking almost sweet wife of "Chris-tuh-fuh" who paid dearly for her conversations with the FBI.

Like the series, the book has a cinematic feel to it, with photos that take off from Annie Leibovitz's early artistic renderings of the Sopranos vibe. It combines the lucid, but never slavish prose of freelance writer Brett Martin and the visual flourishes of Headcase Design. This volume is a smart commercial product, a keepsake that does not embarrass the Sopranos aesthetic that Chase and team labored to keep consistent for six seasons. Most especially it is a souvenir to be dipped into when one wants to instantly recall the allure of *The Sopranos*, a necessity for many on Sunday evenings at 9:00 pm.

Beyond the surface appeal, which is considerable, there are also some new insights into the show's history and characters. Creator Chase considers Tony an extension of James Garner's Rockford, "TV's first postmodern, ironic detective." Chase had worked with

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creator Stephen Cannell on *The Rockford Files* and learned that the audience will forgive a character who has all-to-human frailties if he is good at his job. *The Sopranos* auteur decided to push the limits of audience identification with his murderous protagonist. Another central motif of the series is that the conflicted mobster, suffering from the intimations of mortality from the first episode on, decides to see a shrink and share many of his secrets with her. Analysts have applauded this use of therapy: "It's the best representation of the work we do that has ever been put on film or television," proclaimed Dr. Philip Ringstrom of the Institute of Contemporary Analysis. The writers reveal that they did not rely on the wisdom of a consulting psychiatrist; instead, since they all been in therapy, they trusted their psychoanalyzed collective gut.

The Sopranos: The Book also features special sections on the series' use of music, food and mayhem, each innovative in its own way. At the end, there is a recap of every episode, including the classic "Pine Barrens" show where the author asks the crew

the question plaguing every Sopranos addict: What happened to the Russian? *The Sopranos* succeeded with critics and the audience because it operated on many levels, from the purely visual to the deeply philosophical. This volume satisfies the hunger of the Sopranos fan on a tactile level: an enjoyable evocation of the characters and places that made the series so memorable. The Sopranos fan awaits the next book that delves into the deeper issues: the intersection of business and family in contemporary America and the show's relentless depiction of death and decay amid a debilitating loss of faith. Till then, we are left to ponder Tony's major theological statement: "even if God is dead, you still gonna kiss his ass!"

Curator Ron Simon organized the "Whacked Sopranos" seminar for the Paley Center for Media, where former cast members who were killed off conversed with executive producers David Chase and Terry Winter.

Same Time, Same Station: Creating American Television, 1948-1961

By James L. Baughman
Johns Hopkins University Press
(460 pages, \$ 35.00)

By Norman Felsenthal

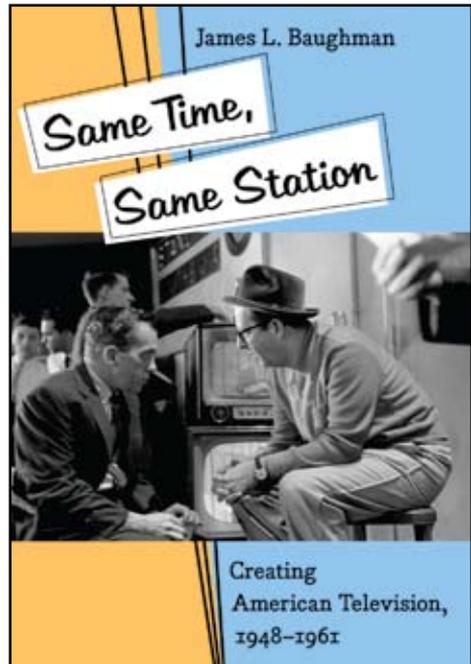
Same Time, Same Station is a fascinating book that provides a richly detailed and vivid analysis of television's formative years. The author, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, has compiled a carefully documented account of a 13-year period during which television evolved from a medium with cultural aspirations for an urban middle class to one almost totally dedicated to entertainment (and advertising) for the masses.

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Baughman has utilized numerous primary sources including manuscript collections as well as corporate, government and newspaper records to give the reader a careful accounting of the period. The first thing a reader notices is the extensive endnotes found on virtually every page. Most chapters have 100 or more notes and most notes contain two or more references. But this is no dull academic tome. It is instead a collection of observations, stories, and quotations woven together in a very readable prose.

The author discards the notion of a “Golden Age.” He reminds us that most television produced in the 1950s, however ambitious, does not hold up especially well today. Nor does much of the early comedy. Milton Berle’s scattershot approach – tell 10 quick jokes in the hope that some of them would provoke laughter – was tied to New York and other big cities. TV came later to smaller communities, particularly in the south and southwest, and Berle’s popularity declined.

Those executives designing television were split into two camps. The first, led by NBC, believed that TV presented an extraordinary cultural opportunity to break the monotonous formula of motion pictures and radio. The second, led by CBS, imagined a more imitative medium that re-created, for the small screen, entertainment that consumers had enjoyed on radio and in neighborhood movie theaters. “In perhaps the greatest irony in the history of TV,” writes Baughman, “the most creative response to the challenge of television was the least successful. By the late 1950s, the second or more



risk adverse of these two groups had won the argument.”

The author reminds us that, for all practical purposes, NBC and CBS were the only two networks with the stations and programs necessary to gain a meaningful audience share. ABC was a late arrival, handicapped by limited finances and a paucity of affiliates. Even worse, many of the ABC stations were saddled with a UHF frequency, a decided handicap when many TV receivers didn’t even have UHF tuners. The fledgling DuMont network, also handicapped by UHF assignments and totally outgunned financially, ceased operation in 1956.

Baughman has scathing contempt for the Federal Communications Commission of the period whose duty it was to assign channels and station licenses. The Commission proved to be an incompetent and, on several

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occasions, corrupt licensor, says the author. He labels the Six Report and Order as “the best mislaid plans” and insists that the FCC’s reliance on UHF turned into a policy disaster. However, he also notes that the CBS and NBC duopoly was not the worst thing to happen since both networks made heavy initial expenditures in network programming.

The most fascinating chapters of the book involve the jousting between NBC President Sylvester L. “Pat” Weaver and CBS Chairman William S. Paley for network supremacy. Paley is described as an intensely competitive man who rejected the suggestion of his number two executive Paul Kestin that CBS Radio settle for a very profitable second place. Paley would have none of that, fired Kestin, and replaced him with Frank Stanton. Baughman tells us that Paley even hated losing at billiards to his brother-in-law, John Hay Whitney, and accused him of taking lessons.

CBS and Paley had little interest in television, at least initially and when compared to NBC and David Sarnoff. CBS was very much NBC’s opposite. It’s main business was broadcasting, not electronics. Show business mattered; it was not an afterthought. It was this dedication to show business and broadcasting that led Paley to raid major NBC talent including Jack Benny. By September 1949, 16 of the 20 most popular radio programs were on CBS. While Paley’s intent was to increase CBS’s radio ratings, many of the radio stars, including Benny, did eventually migrate to television.

Sarnoff, says Baughman, all but detested the broadcast side of the

business. Consequently, he gave his newly hired network president Pat Weaver considerable autonomy in programming – something Paley would never do. Weaver, a former advertising executive, favored the theater as a model for television programs. He believed programs should originate from New York, the nation’s cultural center. And they should be live, not filmed. “Television,” said Weaver, “is too great and too powerful to be shackled with chains of custom and usage from radio.”

Under Weaver’s direction, NBC produced spectaculars such as *Peter Pan* with Broadway star Mary Martin in the title role as well as productions of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* with Shakespearian actor Maurice Evans. These and similar programs were promoted heavily. Weaver hoped to build the largest possible audience by giving attention to the more sophisticated “light” viewer. (He and his wife restricted their own children to two hours of television a day.) And, since most of the spectaculars were in color, NBC would also be promoting the new RCA color receivers. Nine of the 10 highest-rated programs NBC aired in 1955 were spectaculars. But, as the cost of TV receivers declined and the increasing television audience began to more accurately mirror the nation’s population, viewers abandon the spectaculars in favor of CBS’s weekly comedies and filmed westerns from the upstart ABC.

Nor did buyers emerge for the very expensive color television sets. RCA had expected to sell 10.2 million sets in 1958; in reality, only 325,000 were purchased. Sarnoff didn’t wait for the dismal color TV sales report; he fired Weaver in

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1956 and replaced him with Robert E. Kintner, who had previously served in a similar capacity at ABC.

“To a very great extent,” notes Baughman, “Weaver and NBC had handed victory to Columbia. RCA had built the House of Television and Paley had moved into the master suite. Weaver was the great strategist; his competitors at CBS proved the better tacticians, far superior at the day-to-day, season-to-season plotting needed to win the great race.”

CBS had also established superiority in another area, news and public affairs. The network had earned its reputation during World War II, thanks in large part to the reporting of Edward R. Murrow and the other journalists that Murrow assembled for his broadcast team. Murrow moved reluctantly from radio to television where he teamed with producer Fred W. Friendly to create the documentary series *See It Now*.

“*See It Now* had the polish and professionalism absent in the slapdash newscasts,” notes Baughman. “It was deliberately targeted, not to the masses, but rather to the opinion leaders assumed to be Murrow fans.” The program made extensive use of film. It was budgeted at \$23,000 a week but sometimes exceeded \$100,000. Friendly and his colleagues were perfectionists, notes Baughman. They used 35-mm rather than 16-mm film and had as many as five camera crews attached to the program.

Baughman discusses the *See It Now* program dealing with Senator Joseph McCarthy but reminds readers that the Murrow attack on McCarthy was “late in the game.” He quotes playwright Arthur Miller, who greatly admired the

program but wrote that he “lacked the urge to applaud. ... [Murrow] had been so persuasive because he had said what everyone else had always known.”

Baughman reminds the reader that, overall, the *See It Now* ratings were never very high. “At first, CBS could live with [the program’s] modest ratings. But eventually it fell victim to CBS’s intensely competitive programming strategy. The program’s production costs were too high and its producers too high-handed.

“Murrow,” Baughman continues, “was caught in a time warp – it was still 1940. The Nation and the world were still at war. Paley had betrayed him. ... In retrospect, the remarkable aspect of *See It Now* was not that CBS had the audacity, given [the program’s] influential viewership, to cancel the series, but that the network, given its spendthrift ways, aired it in the first place.” Baughman reveals that Sarnoff approached Murrow about defecting to NBC, but Murrow, despite his anger, felt a greater loyalty to CBS.

In other chapters, Baughman discusses the emergence of ABC as a competitive network, the Quiz Show scandals, and the changing role of television advertising. In a final chapter, the author reviews some of the changes that have taken place since 1961. He briefly mentions the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 and notes that “Educational television became public television. Instead of being self-consciously instructional, the new system became self-consciously cultural.”

The author notes the growth of cable during the 1990s and suggests that this

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alternative medium represented “an abandonment of a 70-year broadcast ‘rule’ that prized large audiences above all other.” Cable also altered other broadcast rules. It relieved station and networks of their past obligations to produce programs for younger viewers while cable news became an excuse to reduce coverage of news events. Baughman also notes that cable, and particularly pay cable, allowed nudity and the use of obscenities.

Baughman ends the book on a note of regret. He laments that the aspirations and dreams that Pat Weaver and others shared for television and their conviction that television would be different from other mass media were never fulfilled.

Same Time, Same Station is an

enjoyable book. Readers unfamiliar with the first 13 years of television history will be well rewarded with an abundance of fascinating information about this important period. Those who have already studied this period will still enjoy the many insights and the fascinating stories that the author provides.

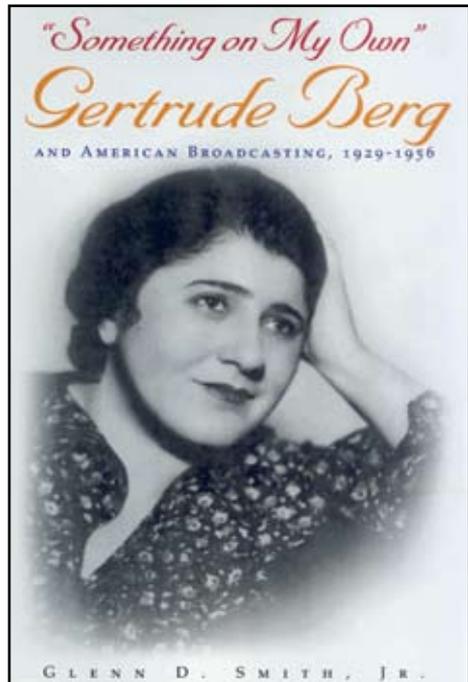
Norman Felsenthal is Professor Emeritus of Broadcasting and Telecommunications at Temple University in Philadelphia. He represents the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences as a National Trustee and also serves as Chair of the Scholarship Committee.

Something on My Own: Gertrude Berg and American Broadcasting, 1929–1956

By Glenn D. Smith, Jr.
Syracuse University Press,
Syracuse, New York
(293 pages, \$24.95)

By David Marc

There are a dozen good reasons for people interested in broadcasting history to be interested in Gertrude Berg. As a creative and performing artist, she conceived, wrote, produced,



and starred in her own network series, qualifying her as among the first in the industry to fit the contemporary

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description of “hyphenate” or auteur. As a businesswoman, she successfully retained her intellectual property, *The Goldbergs*, at a time when ad agencies were thought to hold title to broadcast entertainment by divine right. As a citizen, she stood up to the *Red Channels* blacklist at the risk of her career, refusing to fire her long-time colleague and friend, Phillip Loeb. As if these achievements were not difficult enough, she accomplished them as one of only two female producers in the industry. (The other was Irna Phillips, creator of the daytime soap opera, a “women’s” genre.) During *The Goldbergs’* 25-year prime-time run on radio and television, Gertrude Berg was one of a kind.

Glenn D. “Pete” Smith Jr. covers all these facets of Berg’s career, as well as her life as a wife, mother, and philanthropist, in this first comprehensive biography of the woman who millions of Americans knew as Molly Goldberg, the matriarch of a Jewish immigrant family in the Bronx. As popular in Peoria as on the Grand Concourse, the Goldbergs were, for many listeners and viewers, the only Jews they had ever “met.” Berg understood the power of mass broadcasting to bypass centuries-old barriers with personal messages, and she accepted the responsibilities that came with it. The task was particularly delicate, given its historical context. She constructed and developed a cast of emphatically Jewish characters, including her own persona, during a period that paralleled the labor strife of the Great Depression, the Nazi conquest of Europe, and the

McCarthyite witch-hunts that rocked the film and broadcasting industries.

Berg’s life, as the author points out, was less well-known than Molly’s, and he makes a strong effort recovering the artist. Born in 1899, Tillie Edelstein grew up in Harlem, spending summers and holidays at her family’s Catskill Mountains hotel, where she first developed her desire to become an entertainer. A bright student from a middle-class family, she was clearly college material, but acceded to her family’s wishes at age 19, marrying Lewis Berg, a British-born Jew with an engineering degree. Two weeks after the wedding, the couple moved to St. John the Baptist Parish, Louisiana, where the bridegroom had landed his first job. During the next three years, he mitigated the couple’s social isolation by sharing his education and love of literature and culture with her. Motivated by an ideological commitment to women’s rights, as well as love, Lewis Berg never faltered from his promise to support his wife’s career aspirations.

By the time the Bergs returned to New York City in 1922, Gertrude (an Anglicization of Gittel, her Yiddish name) had determined to become a playwright, and prudently identified the emerging art of radio drama as a way of getting a foot through the stage door. In 1927, Berg’s manuscript for *Effie and Laura*, the story of two five-and-dime clerks, was accepted for production by CBS. The network ordered four episodes, but cancelled it following the premiere, an action the author speculates resulted from the show’s feminist and socialist subtexts,

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elements not favored by Mr. Paley. Undaunted, she created another series, *The Rise of the Goldbergs*, and sold it to NBC, with better results. As star, chief writer and de facto (i.e., uncredited) producer, Berg received \$75 per week to cover production costs, including her salary. In two years, *The Goldbergs* had established itself among the most popular shows on radio, second in the ratings only to another “ethnic” comedy, *Amos 'n Andy*. Berg’s weekly lump-sum payment had risen to \$2000.

Smith, a communications professor at Mississippi State University, is at his best in chronicling Berg’s tortured relationships with networks and sponsors, including her ill-fated attempt to shake free of typecasting by putting *The Goldbergs* to rest at the height of the series’ popularity during the mid-1930s. It was only after the final cancellation of the TV series some twenty years later that she was able to prove her versatility as an actress. After appearing in a number of stage comedies, she starred in the original Broadway production of Leonard Spigelgass’s *A Majority of One*. The role was familiar: a Jewish mother. But the intensity of the play’s subject matter, which includes race prejudice, the loss of a child, and the loneliness of widowhood, revealed Berg’s talents beyond the boundaries of the light comedy, and won her the Tony Award as “Best Actress” of 1959.

The author does his homework in writing this first comprehensive biography of the star, making good use of such primary resources as Berg’s personal papers at the Syracuse University Library and

the NBC corporate record archive at the Wisconsin Historical Society. Interviews with friends and family members provide personal texture. As a result, *Something on My Own* offers readers much more than the sum of the schmaltz-ridden nostalgia found in most popular appreciations of the beloved Molly or the angry repudiations of Berg as an assimilationist dressed in *Yiddishkeit* that are sometimes voiced by cultural historians. We learn that Berg created the Goldberg family as an “antithesis” to the Jewish stereotypes that had dominated American popular culture during the heyday of vaudeville. “The broken dialect and smutty wisecracks of the Jewish comedians...and the gushing sugar-coated sentimentalities of the ‘good-willers’ were...[both]...far away from the Jews I knew. I wanted to show Jews as they really are—as I, a young Jewish girl, knew them,” Berg told an interviewer from *Radio Mirror* magazine.

Smith’s coverage of Berg’s political activities goes beyond the well-chronicled Loeb affair to include her work on behalf of Jewish refugees in Palestine during the 1930s and her work in Franklin Roosevelt’s presidential campaigns. One legacy of Berg’s career not explored in detail is her pioneering role in creating what is now called “a franchise” through the use of product tie-ins. By holding on to copyright, she was able to create and control an array of *Goldbergs* products, including short stories, stage plays, a feature film, a cookbook, and even a newspaper comic strip. But, as Molly once said to her intellectually demanding Uncle

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David, “Don’t be so easy to criticize; a writer after all is a human being. Just read and enjoy.”

David Marc recently completed the text for a pictorial history of Upstate New York’s role in the invention, production and distribution of cinema. His current projects include a comparative study of Leonard Goldenson, William Paley and David Sarnoff for the forthcoming Cambridge Dictionary of Jewish History, Religion and Culture.

TELEVISION REVIEW

STUDENT EMMY WINNERS

Saluting the new generation of broadcast journalists

By Greg Vitiello

Five years ago, the Foundation of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences established the National Student Television Awards for Excellence as part of its commitment to educating the next generation of broadcast journalists. Based on the seven programs that won the 2006-2007 “Student Emmy Awards,” the Academy need not worry. For the winners share a skilled grasp of their medium and an acute understanding of its vocabulary.

My favorite of the seven is the documentary winner, “Mythbusters – The Myth You’ve Heard a Thousand

Times,” by Team BCVI from Boyne City High School, Boyne City, Mich. Spoofing the Discovery Channel’s “Mythbusters,” the Boyne City team demonstrates several “scientific proofs” that water is really wet – from bombarding one team member with water balloons to firing steam at another. “I feel moisture,” says the boy who has been soaked with water balloons. And the tests go on, as the team members next aim an ice shooter at a ballistic gel. Finally, they return to their drawing board, where they plot out a full submergence test, proclaiming “anything in the name of science.” The test involves dropping a dummy from a high crane into a body of water. Andy, a team member, then jumps from the crane into the water. As music blares triumphantly, Andy declares, “I definitely think it’s wet. Wet and cold.” The characters in the award-winning film capture the posturing of the Discovery Channel’s “scientific” teams and display a brio all their own. Together, they produce a smart, funny spoof of this television genre. Appropriately, their film has been seen on the Discovery Channel’s parody special.

Only one of the other six winning films aims for levity, though with less success than “Mythbusters.” Produced by a team from Highland Park High School in Highland Park, Ill., “What’s On Your Screen” provides classmates with bite-sized reviews of top TV shows. Its host, Cyrus Toulabi offers his droll, sometimes too arch commentaries on the characters in *Heroes*, *OC*, *24* and other regular shows, while split-screen effects and stylized graphics display an

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Allison Rogers (left) and Sharareh Drury of the Germantown (Tennessee) High School at the National Student Television Awards.

impressive technical command of the medium.

The winner for best sports program also takes a light approach to its subject, examining the results when a girl competes with male football players, wrestlers and ice hockey players. The girl, Emily Brumenschenke, is outmatched (and not particularly athletic) but game. As she repeatedly says, "It's a lot harder than it looks," we are touched by her vulnerability. Unfortunately, there's nothing new or revelatory about "Girl Among Boys – a Three Part Series" by Amherst Steele High School of Amherst, Ohio. A female friend of mine was a member of the boys' track team at her high school more than 40 years ago. And Billie Jean

King dispelled the notion that men always win at sports when she beat Bobby Riggs in a much ballyhooed tennis match.

The other four winning programs all deal with weightier subjects. I was particularly impressed by "The Last Stain," a sobering, tough-minded feature about two "small-time stickup" kids who chance upon a windfall that places their lives in danger. The award winner for technical achievement, this film by the Chicago Vocational Career Academy in Chicago, Ill., is well-acted and professionally shot, often using silhouettes to capture its subject's ominous mood. Will the boys turn in the money they've chanced upon before seasoned criminals take the

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money from them forcibly? We wait suspensefully – and fatalistically – for the outcome. Not surprisingly, the film received top marks in every category – content, creativity, storytelling and execution -- from the professionals who judged it. “This film was just outstanding,” said Av Westin, executive director of the Academy foundation and an Emmy Award-winning news producer. “They did a remarkable job in the storytelling.”

Another urban tragedy inspired the writing award for the Germantown High School in Germantown, Tenn. Titled “September 11th, 2001: The Story of NABE and AUBER,” the program is a compilation of survivors’ accounts from economists who attended a conference at the World Trade Center Marriott Hotel and escaped the terrorist attack. The film intercuts news footage of the attacks and their aftermath with the economists’ interviews.

The effects of an environmental tragedy provided the material for the winner in the news category. Produced by Blue Valley Schools Broadcast Technology in Overland Park, Kans., “Olga: Growing up in America” is the touching story of a child whose parents left Belarus after the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear plant. Olga, a seventh-grader in Overland Park, was born with partial limbs but has learned to ice skate and otherwise lead a normal life as an American child. The short, sensitive film is given greater impact by having a child as narrator.

Olga’s upbeat determination to lead an active life contrasts with the subjects of a series of three public service announcements on teenage depression.

Produced by Lake Gibson High School in Lakeland, Fla., “Depression Awareness” won the Academy’s Hubbard Family community service/public service award. In the first spot, teenagers hold signs that spell out their dilemma (“If I don’t drink alcohol, I won’t have friends” is one). The outcome is clear: ostracism, loneliness, a reinforcement to their depression. The spot ends with the camera focused on a boy sitting alone in a classroom. The next spot begins with a boy on a rooftop, obviously contemplating suicide, then flashes back to scenes of pill-taking and violence. Will he jump to his death? The final spot presents a worrisome statistic: there is a one-in-15 chance that the teenager standing beside you suffers from clinical depression. Then, the film makers ask, “The question is, are you beside them?”

These seven films, winners in a field of some 600 entries, range widely in their concerns and their technical sophistication. They share a sensitive grasp of the television medium. I hope some of them will prosper in it.

And I hope you too will judge their talent and enjoy their vision. You can view all of their videos online at www.nationalstudent.tv/2006-2007_student_videos.asp.

Greg Vitiello, whose article on “Frost/Nixon” appears on page 22 of this issue of Television Quarterly, wrote the script for NET’s “Through My Eyes,” an Emmy-nominated program about young filmmakers.

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