

Spring 2017

New York to Hollywood: Advertising, Narrative Formats, and Changing Televisual Space in the 1950's

Peter McCormack
Bard College, pm0189@bard.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2017



Part of the [United States History Commons](#), and the [Visual Studies Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

McCormack, Peter, "New York to Hollywood: Advertising, Narrative Formats, and Changing Televisual Space in the 1950's" (2017). *Senior Projects Spring 2017*. 148.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2017/148

This Open Access work is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been provided to you by Bard College's Stevenson Library with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this work in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

From New York to Hollywood:
Advertising, Narrative Formats, and Changing Televisual Space in the 1950's

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Peter McCormack

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2017

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents first and foremost. I don't think I've ever taken the time to bore them with the intimate details of this project. But I feel the strength and sincerity of their loving support all the more for this reason. They are forever in my heart as the root of the happiness and wonder that I've found in my time at Bard. Not because of what they made me do, but because of what they let me do. They are amazing parents whose dedication to hard work, and respect for my individuality are the greatest gifts they could ever have given me. Even though I could never return what they have given me, they show only continued love and support.

I am grateful for my advisers, Maria Cecire and Greg Moynahan, who have helped to form this project, giving it a shape where before there was only a love of *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad*. In meeting on a weekly basis, Maria has patiently and persistently forced me toward a state of actually knowing what I'm talking about. From day 1, her patience and persistence have helped me toward clarity, and made possible a substantive academic project, where before there were only meandering seminar papers. I had Maria as a professor for Intro to Media Studies my first semester at Bard. I became obsessed with people like Baudrillard and Foucault. I had no idea what they were talking about (I still don't). And the class discussions she led were the most frightening and inspiring experience. I like to think that Maria inspired my meandering intellectual capacities, and this year it has been her duty to fix it.

I would like to thank Izzy, who I have also tried not to bore with the intimate details, though at times they have slipped out. She is my greatest TV and movie companion, a beautiful artist and critical mind, and a dedicated collaborator who daily instills in me a love of art, life, and the drive to push both to their greatest capacity. Her persistent hard work in realizing her wealth of talents is what propels my wish to be the best at everything, or at least enjoy the act of trying together.

Finally, my friends. Never before coming to Bard had I been surrounded by so many people who treated me with true affection and respect. It is because of them that my time here has been so formative and unforgettable. My love of Bard is synonymous with these people, and I can't wait to follow each other out into the world wherever we may land.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>introduction</i>	1
I. SINGLE-SPONSORSHIP AND THE SPACE OF TELEVISION PRODUCTION	14
II. LEAVING NEW YORK AND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE TELETHEATER	40
III. I LOVE LUCY AND THE NEW ECONOMICS OF SERIAL FORMATS	56
<i>conclusion: THE LEGACY OF “BEING THERE”</i>	80
<i>bibliography</i>	95

Introduction

This project looks to explore changing relationships of commerce and content in the early period of television. These relationships played out both at the industrial level and at the level of programming. What this exploration hopes to reveal is how industrial shifts were manifested in television content itself, as the presentation of television intertwined narrative and commercial space. As the stories told on television changed shape, so did the pitches given by advertisers. This paper looks not so much at what kinds of things were sold or how they were sold, but how advertising inhabited the time and space of television programming in response to changing standards of production. As content and commerce cohabit television their interrelationship on the screen says much about television as a whole. This paper will assert that the development of new narrative formats would dictate the shape of advertising. Though commercial interests possessed a firm authority over content at the dawn of American television, their efforts at establishing a presence within programming sought to frame content rather than manipulate it. Through the 1950's sponsors would lose their influence in production. With the near complete intrusion of independent production companies, mostly working within Hollywood, by the 1960's, advertising would change shape to fit narrative formats and production arrangements that were fundamentally out of their control.

Having only been a television viewer since some time after 1995, this project stems from a particular understanding of the television totality, commercials and content, as made up of many distinct parts: many different commercials, many different characters, and many different voices who enact these commercials. This understanding

of television has allowed for critical distance and a critical perspective on how the two sides of the televisual system were unified in the experimental early phases of programming. The era of live television was defined by the unified performance of commercials and narrative within a theatrical space. The viewer was transported to a discrete location in contrast to the spatial dislocation of contemporary commercial programming. The arc of this paper follows an industrial shift from live theatrical programming to filmed serial programming, a transition that would take place in the early mid-fifties, and would lay the foundation of a television landscape oriented around prerecorded content. With the shift in modes of production, content evolved to be oriented around serial formats. The space of television narrative was extended beyond the confines of a single episode. This system largely defines how we conceive of television shows to this day. The concept of the television “series” is indicative of the influence that narrative content has had in determining television’s future. But preceding this evolution in storytelling, television content was modeled after theatrical drama, with the advertiser stepping into view as an intermission. The serial format constructed a narrative world rather than a theatrical space, relegating advertising to a position of senseless yet normalized interruption.

With the shift from advertising-controlled programming to network-licensed programming the mediation between commerce and content took on a new shape. The sponsor no longer spoke through the voice of the theatrical host. Rather, in stepping down from the position of corporate benefactor, advertising became an increasingly normalized and marginal interruption. From an initial industrial and critical understanding of television as a site of intimacy, early programming can be seen to have constructed a

relationship with audiences based in the intimate space of the theater. But this mode of operation would change. The early standard of live drama, which utilized theatrical forms of presentation in both commerce and content, gave way to filmed formats, of sitcoms, westerns, and mysteries, which established intimacy based on familiar characters and narrative spaces through time.

Through this narrative redefinition, which incorporated independent production, the economics of television were fundamentally changed. With television shows being built around serial narratives, content became lucrative in secondary windows. Syndication would change the way shows were conceived, produced, financed, and advertised. As television content would prove itself lucrative as an investment against future viewership, advertising was no longer the single source of revenue for networks. As such advertisements became secondary, and came to make use of serial narrative worlds and familiar characters to sell their products. In this sense, in live television the sponsor attempted to establish intimacy, whereas in the move to filmed programming advertising utilized the intimacy established between viewers and characters. In the transition to filmed programming content began to dictate the shape of advertising, and the televisual flow as a whole.¹

William Boddy's book *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* has provided much of the foundation for this project.² His work discusses in great detail the

¹ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1992)

² William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990)

relationships between the shifting forces in television production with additional consideration of critical and federal influences. Boddy traces the industrial developments of the mid-1950's with a detailed body of primary accounts, which gives unbiased attention to advertisers, networks, sponsors, independent producers, critics, and the Federal Communication Commission. Boddy has contributed to an appropriately multi-layered understanding of the television industry at this point of transition. His scholarship has provided this project with key insights into the complexity of the industry's formation. Boddy sets the stage for this project, in establishing a historical narrative of the assertion of network control, looking toward the "monopsony" of power in the 1960's, and the dawn of what television studies has termed the "Network-Era." His portrayal of the transition from Golden Age to "Vast Wasteland," provides crucial insights into the development of network control in this period.

The other primary facet of this project is independent production. Christopher Anderson's book *Hollywood TV* looks extensively at independent telefilm producers, as well as the major Hollywood studios themselves, discussing the original conflicts and collaborations of this industrial system with the network-sponsor system that was developing in New York.³ Though this paper does not focus so much on film as medium infiltrating television programming, the efforts at packaging studio properties, of feature films and particularly B-movies, is relevant to understanding early collaborations, and showing the essential "appetite" for content in the early days of television.⁴ Anderson's

³ Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (n.p.: University of Texas Press, 1994)

⁴ Leland L. Nichols, "TV Opens the Screen to New Playwrights," *Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1956): 337.

chapter “Escape From the Studio System” in particular, provides key background on the Hollywood-based byproducts of television’s demand for content. This chapter discusses the niche that small production companies carved out in Hollywood directly oriented around creating television programming rather than feature films. One such example discussed in Anderson’s work is Desilu Productions, which would spawn *I Love Lucy*, and furthermore show the unforeseen benefits of independent production. Anderson’s scholarship on the practices of early telefilm companies is crucial in showing the transition to filmed formats and showing the production standards developed by these trailblazers, leading to a massive Hollywood oriented market of television producers.

This project is also indebted at the theoretical level to Lynn Spigel, whose work in television studies focuses on the domestic space of reception, and the cultural significance of programming in the Postwar period. Spigel’s book *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* discusses the way the new medium reoriented domestic space in terms of its relationship to the public, providing the ability to see far in a suburbanizing postwar culture.⁵ Her account details the debates over programming and advertising, and the perception of television as an intrusive force upon the family home. But from this critical perspective, and awareness of public opinion, she discusses how formats such as the family comedy, predecessor to the sitcom, mediated this intrusion, ultimately presenting an idealistic vision of the public through television’s fictional worlds. Her last chapter develops an understanding of these early sitcoms as theatrical meditations on everyday life. Within this discussion she situates family

⁵ Lynn Spigel, *Make Room For TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992)

comedies in a world that is very close to the world of its reception, leading viewers' perception of characters and performers to merge. Spigel's work has been essential in providing a lens through which to examine the domestic mise-en-scene in the 1950's, and to fully understand the relationships cultivated through domestic audiences and eccentric domestic characters.

Bookending this project, the inception and conclusion take inspiration from the work of Amanda D. Lotz. The 2014 edition of her book *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* has been fundamental in shaping a nuanced understanding of television today, and the long process of its formation. From the outset of this project, Lotz instilled a passion for the subject matter of television in its industrial and narrative forms. Her work, which begins with the Network Era as a background of established practices, traces the history of industrial arrangements of distribution, production, and advertising, with an insistent focus on the content and narrative formats shaped in the process.⁶

This project has also benefitted from archival material sourced from the Billy Rose Theater Division of the New York Public Library.⁷ This resource provided essential background material pertaining to the production of live dramas such as the *United States Steel Hour* and the *Kraft Television Theatre* when they were broadcast on ABC. Looking through a large body of set designs, floor plans, and additional preproduction documents, gave a sense of the physical spaces that these productions existed in, the kinds of spaces represented in these dramas, as well as the logistics of weekly construction and striking

⁶ Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014)

⁷ Television Scenic Designs 1949-1965, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

of sets. This would prove to be essential background information, for working through another archival source. This project very much centers upon the figure of Pat Weaver, and his unique role as adman turned network executive. The University of Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research possesses a large corpus of Pat Weavers correspondences with his network co-workers and some particularly vibrant correspondences with advertising agents.⁸ Sources of visual reference at the New York Public Library assisted in understanding the daily operations of the Networks in this period and helped in deciphering the language of these operations.

This project attempts to make use of television broadcasts from the period to examine the development of advertising presence throughout the development of production standards. But in so doing this project's primary form of textual analysis is directed at an essentially ephemeral medium. The period of television that I am looking at is one far from any of the "time-shifting" abilities that would be afforded to viewers beginning with videocassette recorder (VCR).⁹ Before the rise of syndication there were few opportunities to view television content beyond initial broadcast.¹⁰ Additionally the initial standard of live production in a way heightened the sense of television's ephemerality, as a byproduct of critically-ascribed characteristics of "immediacy" and "spontaneity."¹¹ While this helps us to understand the particularity of the television-

⁸ National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

⁹ Lotz, *The Television Will Be*, 168

¹⁰ Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 4

¹¹ Rudy Bretz, "TV as an Art Form," *Hollywood Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1950): 153; Flora Rheta Schreiber, "Television: A New Idiom," *Hollywood Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1949): 184.

viewing context of the period, it also creates obstacles to historical engagement. While retrieving digitized copies of live teleplays is difficult, the content that does exist is often complete with the in-house advertisements that accompanied shows of the period. Programs produced under single-sponsorship were unified productions, content and commerce originating from one location. With the move to filmed formats the process of preparing for broadcast required editing together the program and the commercials. Additionally with the move to filmed formats the program and the commercials were the property of different entities, who after broadcasting retained the rights to their isolated piece of the program. As such a Youtube search for “*I Love Lucy* with commercials,” will yield a number of compilations of Phillip Morris Commercials and a number of 26-minute-long copyright-infringing reproductions of *I Love Lucy* episodes. Though this characteristic of the shape of historical texts presents challenges, it also reaffirms the argument of this project. Having begun research on live shows and seeing the intermingling of the space of commercials and the space of drama, it appeared that I could not truly compare this format to filmed formats. But although, I could not see the full flow of programming under this transition, the isolated state of content left to us from this period indicates that a shift did indeed occur.

Chapter 1 will look at the model of single-sponsorship in the late forties and early fifties, and the quintessential narrative format that was produced by this commercial arrangement. The format was termed the Anthology teleplay, individual self-contained dramatic narratives. This format in its formative days was inextricably linked to live performance. The live dramatic construction of these teleplays, made for claims to artistic relevance, as well as claims to Television’s unique qualities as a medium. In particular

the terms “Intimacy, immediacy, spontaneity” come out of this critical discussion with variations throughout the critics.¹² But in this period of television, as critics and producers alike sought to define television place as a unique art form, its modes of operation were wrapped up in industrial and artistic predecessors.¹³

Within this understanding of Television’s inherited formats and subsequent industrial formations, Chapter 1 looks at the relationship of commerce and content within a live production context. This discussion looks at the spatial arrangements of live television, to examine the sponsor’s presence within production and how it manifested itself on screen. Single-sponsorship utilized theatrical modes of presentation, and a singular space of production to confine dramatic narratives. As is noted by primary sources and historians, this period of television was marked in its commercial context by the sponsor’s personal presentation. Corporate benefaction, or the “gratitude factor,” were pronounced in the live programming.¹⁴ As this period of television was embedded in radio’s commercial structure, the sponsors who titled the shows spoke through a clear and direct voice, generally not so concerned with sales pitches, as bolstering their public image. This technique was grounded in an understanding of the “intimacy” of television reception, which also manifested itself in the physical theatrical space that live production sought to establish. Television in this period, working through the process of self-definition, was marked by qualities of intimacy.

¹² Bretz, “TV as an Art Form,” 153; Schreiber, “New Idiom,” 184.

¹³ Kenneth Hey, “Marty: Aesthetics vs. Medium in Early Television Drama” in *American History, American Television: Interpreting the Video past*, ed. John E. O’Connor and Erik Barnouw (New York: F. Ungar, 1983), 113.

¹⁴ Sylvester L. Weaver and Thomas Coffey, *The Best Seat in the House* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993), 180.

Chapter 2 looks closely at a figure who moved from the world of advertising to the world of the networks in the transition to television. Pat Weaver, head of NBC from 1949-1956, would be influential in establishing network authority over advertising, who through radio and into the early period of television, possessed almost complete control of production and the program schedule. Although Weaver would not foresee the monumental shifts in production standards, his efforts and his vision for network-sponsor relations would catalyze the move to multiple-sponsorship and the subsequent role of the networks in licensing independently produced content. Weaver pushed for the network to be the owners of television content, so that they would be in the position of selling time to advertisers. Under single-sponsorship advertisers were in the position of buying space from networks and producing their shows, and with monopolistic control over the networks, could vie for the most lucrative time slots.¹⁵

With the move toward multiple-sponsorship, commerce began to lose its firm grip over the space of a program. In participating in the sponsorship of shows, eponymous recognition, and bookmarked identification in programs disappeared. This industrial reconfiguration, which began with Pat Weaver, would soon take shape beyond what network personnel could have imagined. Hollywood production would take over and fundamentally reshape the narrative formats and productive paradigms of television.¹⁶

¹⁵ Pat Weaver to William Esty Company, Inc., memorandum, September 20, 1949, Box 118, Folder 4. National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

¹⁶ see Anderson, *Hollywood TV*.

But with initial efforts at asserting network control over advertising, a logic of buying time supplanted the previous commercial logic of buying space.

This chapter mines the growing tensions between networks and sponsors around the arrangements established in radio. Additionally in exploring these tensions, this chapter looks at the logistical problems faced in live production, and initial steps toward expansion beyond New York. Networks began moving production to Hollywood and Chicago to escape the overcrowded studio spaces in New York.¹⁷ Simultaneously with this expansion the industry's growth began to make single-sponsorship a hefty investment. Pat Weaver took advantage of the rising cost of production to advance his concept of multiple-sponsorship. Though Pat Weaver's time as president of NBC saw the beginning of television's restructuring, the move Hollywood expansion and incorporation of multiple-sponsorship were only catalyst to the system that would emerge. With participation sponsorship, much of the theatrical orientation of advertising persisted. But the initial fracturing of control led to new formats, and new commercial tactics.

Chapter 3 looks at early examples of independently produced filmed programming. In discussing the emerging landscape of serial formats, this chapter shows the changing shape of advertising to suit new productive and narrative situations. Under the transmission device of film, content and commercials originated separately and were merely edited together for broadcast. This helped to disassemble advertising's

¹⁷ Memorandum by Television Network Controllers Department, "Report on Hollywood Expansion," September 18, 1951, Box 119, Folder 94. National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

construction of theatrical intimacy, establishing a commercial focus on individual products in domestic space rather than corporate image. This chapter also examines the restructuring of programming at the level of financing and the level of production. Early “television” producers developed production techniques and financial arrangements that began to yield new dominant narrative formats and new industrial arrangements.

Against the background of a burgeoning television market this chapter explores new modes of advertising, which took advantage of the intimacy of returning characters rather than the spatial intimacy of live theater. As serial formats took hold of the television landscape, a new economic system took shape around the repurposing of content. These narratives proved lucrative in repeat broadcasts, even as shows were producing original episodes. Looking both at early reruns and toward the future development of television, this chapter concludes by discussing the rise of syndication as the central economic imperative of television production.¹⁸ Within this system television became distanced from the ephemerality of original broadcasts. And with the increased presence of reruns advertising became even further distanced from production, losing its ability to construct a sense of association with television content.

This project as a whole is focused on the unique condition of television narrative as being emedded in a continuous flow of commercial information.¹⁹ With the rise of syndication, rather than making advertising irrelevant, the serial narrative landscape provided an assuring creative product in which to place commercial messages. Though the transitions that this project traces took advertising out of a position of authority, the

¹⁸ Lotz, *The Television*, 99-102

¹⁹ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), 70; 87.

decisions made to bolster the profitability of content also benefitted the advertiser. Serial narrative created a diagetic intimacy that was profitable in reruns, while simultaneously providing advertisers with predictable markets. Audience loyalty served both the producers of content and the advertisers who used content as a commercial vehicle.

In this sense the history presented herein looks at a distinctly different shape of television than we know it now. In understanding how this transition took shape it is essential to see that content developed a deeper relationship with audiences than advertising structures. In the move from live drama to filmed formats, intimacy was constructed by content itself rather than structures of presentation. From the dawn of television the understanding of programming as a site of intimacy with audiences can be seen in experimental form. In this period advertising stood at the center of the relationship between television and its audience. In the Golden Age, advertisers and sponsors tended to the intimacy of television by making themselves known as the gracious host bringing entertainment into the home. The sponsor actively mediated the relationship between entertainment and audience, while the rise of serial narrative made formal presentation obsolete. Television developed its own unique artistic practice that presented characters who needed no introduction.

CHAPTER I

Single Sponsorship and the Space of Television Production

Television was born out of the convergence of several mediums. While the industry drew much of its corporate structure from radio, it adopted narrative formats from an array of artistic platforms, and an array of stylistic traditions.²⁰ As Lynn Spigel notes, in a competitive market for “stars, writers, camera operators, studio space, and other production facilities,” program development sought familiar and easily reproducible formats.²¹ Lacking a clear idea of what television programming intrinsically was or would be, networks had to encompass other art forms. Like radio before it, television was revolutionary based on its technological capabilities, which were defined by the scope of distribution. This scale lent itself to the term “broadcasting”, originally established by the radio industry. Television capitalized on the broadcast logic of radio, while providing a visual dimension with seemingly limitless programmatic possibilities. But ultimately, the major television networks were direct descendents of the major radio networks, and these networks functioned primarily as gatekeepers to distributional channels. As such television integrated other art forms into the process of production.

Criticism at the dawn of television constantly questioned the identity of the new medium. Many saw television as simply a platform for the transmission of other art

²⁰ Kenneth Hey, “Marty: Aesthetics vs. Medium in Early Television Drama” in *American History, American Television: Interpreting the Video Past*, ed. John E. O'Connor and Erik Barnouw (New York: F. Ungar, 1983), 113.

²¹ Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 137.

forms, which to a certain extent was a valid observation. But simultaneously critics began to contemplate the unique experience of reception. A discourse began to surface that essentially centered around the ontology of the televisual image. Terms such as immediacy, and spontaneity, among others, were used in attempting to codify the apparatus that transmitted live performances through the air and into the home. In 1949 one critic used the terms “intimacy and immediacy;” another critic in 1950 chose “immediacy, spontaneity, and actuality.”²² Lynn Spigel, amalgamating divergent terminology chooses the phrase “intimacy, immediacy, and spontaneity.”²³ For the purposes of this chapter, I will primarily refer to this concept in terms of intimacy and immediacy. These are the two characteristics, which in the constellation of radio, theater, and commerce, came to establish an inextricable link between the new medium of television and the viewer at home. What these theorizations allude to generally is the distance that was compressed by the television. The intimacy of the theater had collided with the immediacy of transmission. This relationship unified the “thrill of seeing-at-a-distance” with the comfort of direct and unobstructed vision.²⁴ As most of these critics and industrial insiders noted, this unique experience of reception would be the key to the development of a distinguished artistic practice. This chapter will examine the intersections of antecedent mediums, and how they came to shape new forms of “intimacy.” Within this constellation of established narrative forms, advertising would

²² Flora Rheta Schreiber, "Television: A New Idiom," *Hollywood Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1949): 184; Rudy Bretz, "TV as an Art Form," *Hollywood Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1950): 153.

²³ Spigel, *Make Room*, 136.

²⁴ Bretz, *TV as an Art Form*, 153.

carve out a space in television productions, which merged the obtrusiveness of commerce with the intimacy of the theater.

Narrative Predecessors and Defining TV Advertising

In the early days of television the primary form of storytelling, which came to prominence was live drama. The anthology teleplay, as it was termed, had two direct antecedents in the commercially bounded presentation style established in dramatic radio series, and the well-established and culturally valued structure of stage theater. In both form and content television absorbed the structural qualities of these older art forms. From radio, television absorbed much of its personnel and industrial standards of practice, as the scope of distributional technology and commercial imperatives of radio presented the same problems and potentials to the industry of television.²⁵ While in television's appropriation of theatrical production many applauded creative approaches, the medium's essential relationship to theater in the days of live drama was painted as corrupting fine art with commerce. Despite the anthology teleplay's relationship to legitimate theater, the television landscape was also heavily populated by the less respectable formats. Variety comedy programs, which displayed vaudeville and burlesque inspired spectacle, though wildly popular, were seen by some as unfit for domestic audiences.²⁶ Additionally "family comedies," the predecessor to the sitcom,

²⁵ Arthur Knight, "Film and TV: A Shotgun Marriage?" *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 10, no. 4 (1956): 374-90. doi:10.2307/1209784.

²⁶ Spigel, 138.

moved over from radio to television, alongside the serial formats of western and detective/mystery programs, and the “soap opera.”²⁷

Programming in early half of the 1950’s lived in a commercial structure defined by a single-sponsorship model inherited from radio. Though this commercial framework for live television identified the medium as low-brow, commercial mediation played a pivotal role in perpetuating television’s unique qualities of intimacy and immediacy. With radio’s commercial structure held intact, the sponsor was thrust into the visual realm, retaining presentational formalities of theater. The individual sponsor played the role of gracious host, establishing continuity in the alternation between commerce and content. The theatrical formalities maintained in the anthology teleplay, such as a narrator’s introduction of the play and the performers, were merged with radio’s commercial structure, adding the program’s sponsor to the list of introductions.

The sponsor established an assertive presence in the space of the teletheater. Their recurring appearance throughout a program identified them as the benefactor of television content, a role that helped to emphasize the intimate space of early television. But this arrangement of commerce and content would not persist beyond the 1950’s. By the middle of the decade the industry had begun restructuring, favoring filmed production in Hollywood over advertising-run live production in New York. With the move away from sponsor control the commercial structure of television took new shape. Sponsors began to buy time in programs, where their commercial message would be seated next to whichever other sponsors had purchased time. This transition to a “magazine format” of

²⁷ Jeffery Sconce, “What If? Charting Television’s New Textual Boundaries,” in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 96-7

advertising disassembled the commercial-theatrical space that had been built by the anthology teleplays. The rise of new commercial structures, and new production standards, lead to the rise of new narrative formats. Yet the legacies of older mediums would persist in the ongoing process of self-definition.

While the theater primarily informed the qualities of writing and production in the 1950's, radio's commercial framework provided inherent narrative problems that merged with the paradigm of live theater for television. Though television provided a space for theater in its visual and aural totality, narrative limitations characteristic of radio persisted. Most clearly, theatrical performances for television were subject to the commercial nature of mass transmission, which confined teleplays to strict time schedules and a scaffolding of narrative interruptions.²⁸ But still the actual reception of transmitted content presented another set of narrative and aesthetic limitations. Though the modes of performance and narrative conception were based in theatrical modes of production, the aesthetic deficiencies of the small screen demanded that dialogue remain central to the expression of narrative.²⁹

While radio and theater provided the basis for television production, the medium's display of moving images brought it further into conversation with feature films. In fact this relationship was the sight of the most industrial conflict. As an alternative medium for moving images television incited a fragmentation of audiences. Among television's influences, cinema possessed the most direct similarity to television. Both motion picture mediums were positioned to reach a mass market. Even though the

²⁸ Leland L. Nichols, "TV Opens the Screen to New Playwrights." *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 10, no. 4 (1956): 341. doi:10.2307/1209780.

²⁹ Hey, *Marty*, 113; Knight, *Film and TV*, 375

two industries would begin to intermingle, in moving TV production to Hollywood, and with major studios licensing packages of second-rate films for broadcast, original content produced for these two mediums was distinct in many ways. Alongside an inherited emphasis on dialogue, the visual style of the teleplay in being confined to the small screen centered upon constrained medium shots, images of talking heads, against a limited array of interior sets. Contemporaneous with television's rise to prominence, Hollywood expanded the dominant aspect ratio. The introduction of Cinemascope contrasted the square (4:3) frame of television with a pronounced landscape-oriented frame (2.35:1). This new standard display opened the screen to expressive horizontal movement, heavily populated and detailed mise-en-scene, and picturesque long shots of the natural environment, and most importantly, vibrant color, where TV remained bound to an aesthetic of black and white talking heads. The visual style of television was constrained and confined. The teleplay was restricted to flimsy theatrical interiors, or at times deliberately spare set constructions, creating a black-box effect in which the actors faces floated in a darkened void. The aesthetic practices of cinema had already not matched the platform of television, and Hollywood went further to distinguish their artistic practice from the readily available drama being wired into American homes.

The cinematography of television was often limited to the use of multiple static cameras, which merely switched from different character perspectives. This photographic form underlined the general emphasis on dialogue over other performative or cinematic considerations such as gesture or motion. In the work of certain producers the visual style was minimized to show only the actors, pursuing a pure focus on facial expression. Albert McCleery was the most famous proponent of this minimal technique, even

creating his own aesthetic genre termed “arena theatre” or “television in the round”.³⁰

Aside from inherent problems of scale posed by the television set, the initial penchant for live broadcasts limited the ability of spatial and temporal manipulation so characteristic of film as a medium and as an industry. The teleplay was confined to the stage on which it was being performed, with no jumping through time or space beyond what could be suggested by physical theatrical effects.

These physical limitations of the television stage gave way to a reimagining of theatrical production. Despite being subject to a host of limitations, the teleplay’s incorporation of other art forms helped establish its unique place in the American consciousness. As Carol Serling claimed, the teletheater merged the “immediacy of theater, the coverage of radio, and the flexibility of film.” The wife of acclaimed playwright of the period Rod Serling, identified the important points of reference that encompassed the teleplay. Beyond the mere act of photographing a play, as radio had often broadcasted live theater and musical performances, the teleplay reorganized the space of the theater, bringing the stage and audience together across unimaginable distances while establishing a profoundly new closeness and intimacy.³¹ Unlike radio broadcasts of theatrical performances which recorded an autonomous event, the teleplay had no audience beside the one at home. These performances were *made for TV*, eliminating the world between the play and the viewer. The apparent contradiction of the space of theater meeting the space of radio was ultimately remedied by what Serling termed the “flexibility of film.”

³⁰ Marsha F. Cassidy, "Matinee Theatre and the Question of Soap Opera," in *What Women Watched: Daytime Television in the 1950's* (n.p.: University of Texas Press, 2005), JSTOR

³¹ Schreiber, *New Idiom*, 184.

Kenneth Hey understands “the flexibility of film” to refer to “the mobile audience.”³² The film camera served to direct the viewer’s eye, and contain the viewer’s field of vision, creating a wholly different spatial experience from that of traditional theater. In looking at innovative producer-directors of the period, he claims, “the flexibility of film allowed the teletheater director to expand the stage to include a realistic sense of movement and changing environment.”³³ As opposed to the technique used in feature-films of shooting in fragments and editing together sequences to construct scenes, television primarily operated by the movement of characters through sets and through the view of static cameras.³⁴ Additionally, while certain directors did attempt to make the camera mobile, this involved the same logic of spatial compression involved in set-to-set cutting. The use of sets required that discrete locations be constructed one next to the other so as to provide for fluid transition between scenes, and to allow characters to reposition in distant locations. Floor plans for various live programs show college, kitchen, and hospital; saloon, church, and general store; bar, bank, and study, all constructed in sequences of protracted right angles.³⁵ The live television drama existed within the space of a single studio. While these impressions of discrete spaces gave a sense of movement to programs, they remained unified by the confined space of the

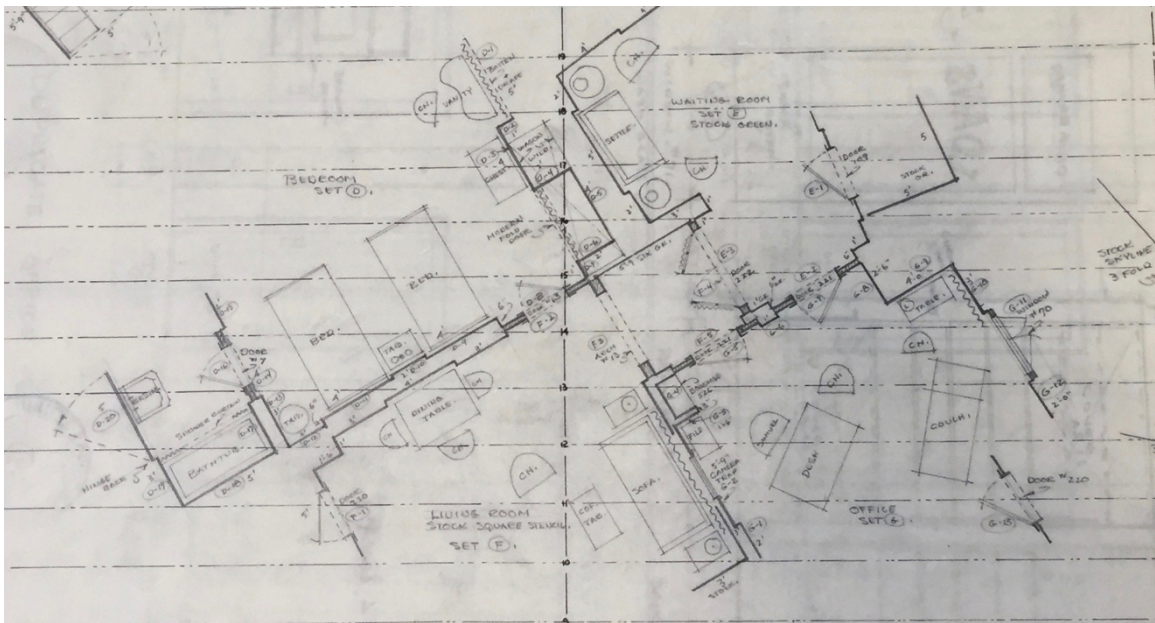
³² Hey, *Marty*, 106.

³³ *Ibid*, 106.

³⁴ Schreiber, *New Idiom*, 185.

³⁵ "Technical Drawings," floor plan, 1955, Box 15-16, Television Scenic Designs, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library, New York, NY. The section titled “technical drawings” provided a body of floor plans and technical overviews that show the basic spatial construction of live programs. The collection covers the years from 1949-1965. The designs for the *United States Steel Hour* covering the period of 1953-1955 were a key area of focus.

immediate performance and representations of the familiar interior spaces that make up daily life. This helped to retain the vestiges of theatricality, constituted by liveness and immediacy, which defined the particular appeal of live television in the 1950's.



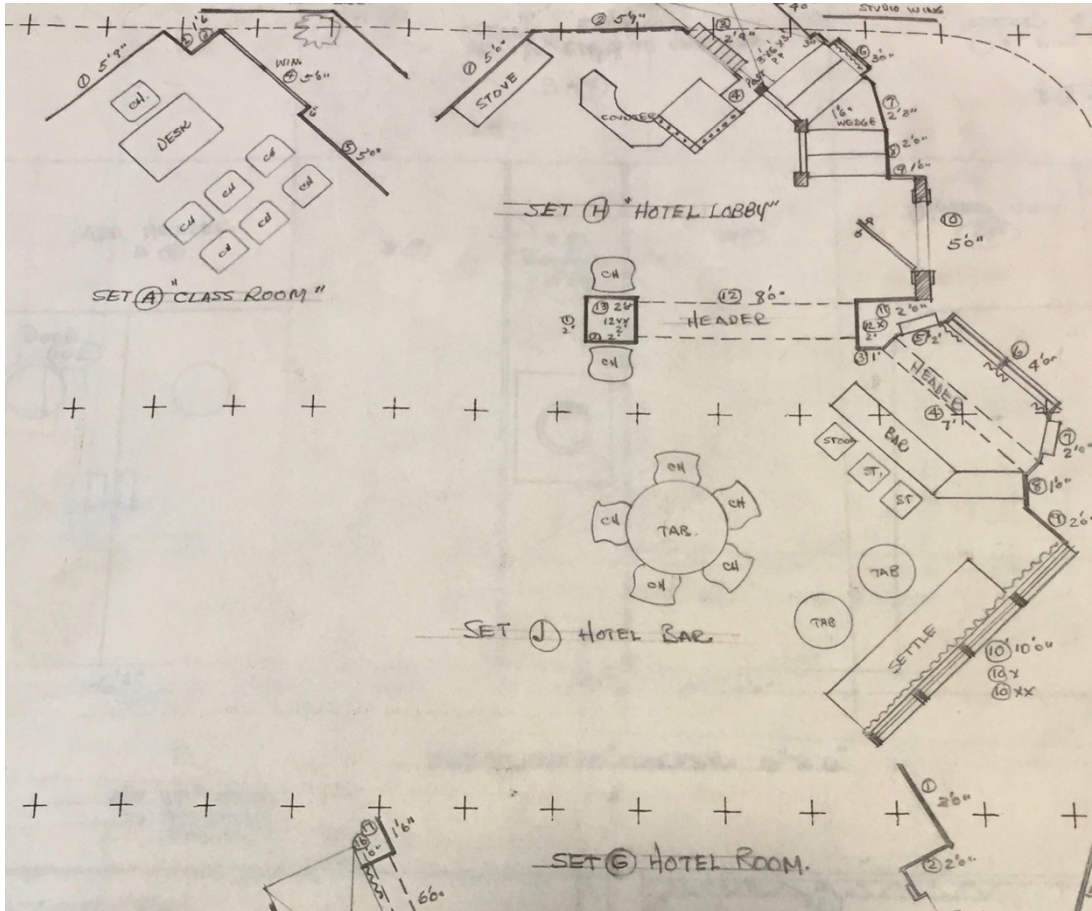
The United States Steel Hour, *End of Paul Dane*, floor plan (n.p.: ABC, May 11, 1954), Box 15, folder 5, Television Scenic Designs 1949-1965, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

The immediacy embodied by the theater and the distance embodied by radio were both compressed by the particular view presented by the camera. By giving visual and spatial dimension to radio, and photographic specificity to theater the camera sutured the complex experience of being present and simultaneously being removed. Rudy Bretz commented in 1950, “the multiple eyes of television can put the viewer in many places at

the same time.”³⁶ This photographic consideration is an obvious condition of the teleplay. As it is a cinematic medium, the viewer’s perspective is in a constant state of realignment following the exchange of dialogue and the movement of a shot reverse-shot structure. But in Bretz’s formulation, television’s close relation to the theatrical situation, of liveness and immediacy, retained the spatial context that is collapsed by the closeness of the camera. This spatial context is constructed on the basis of the viewer possessing a particular perspective based on the location of their seat within the theater. But with the mobile view of the camera the individual viewer was given the composite view of the audience as a whole. The television camera provided a joint function of placing the viewer in the theater, while also obscuring a theatrical mode of reception—limiting the view of the theater space while revealing detail not typically viewable from within the theater.

³⁶ Bretz, *TV as an Art Form*, 160.

Both theater and radio, in their respective relationships of performance to an audience, presented spatial contradictions, which were in turn mediated by the central transmission device of the camera. Radio in its physical removal from its audience, and



The United States Steel Hour, *US Steel #22 "Grand Tour"*, floor plan (ABC, August 17, 1954), Box 15, folder 5, Television Scenic Designs 1949-1965, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

its mediation by recording/transmission technology, presented an abstracted performance.

Yet from a distance it presented voices, which gave the impression of closeness, and a directness that infiltrated the intimate space of the home. The theater, on the other hand, physically contained its performance, eliciting a feeling of intimacy through proximity and immediacy. However, while physically present to the theatrical performance, the viewer is bound by the inherent distance between stage and audience. Radio provided

closeness without physical presence, while theater provided physical distance from within an immediate reality.

The Voice of Single-Sponsorship

In this self-defining period of television's history, which is often labeled its Golden Age, the broadcast nature of radio and the established artistic tradition of theater were simultaneously met by another critical factor. The commercial context of television was embedded in its evolution as a standard of practice, and arguably an essential purpose, appropriated directly from radio. The passage from one broadcast medium to another occurred with little to no restructuring of the commercial imperative of the twentieth-century mass mediums. But with the incorporation of a new spatial dimension, propelled by the camera and theatrical production, commercial messages required a place to exist in this new audio-visual system. In finding a place within these productions, advertisers painted television programming with an assertive commercial message, and came to define the space of television.

The inherited sponsorship structure of radio gave new shape to the dramatic narratives being written and adapted for television. In tracing the structural configurations of early Television, Kenneth Hey discusses the transformation of postwar theater into early forms of television stage drama. A more positive and morally oriented set of stories came to populate the sponsor-funded programs of the first half of the 1950's. From the pronounced fatalism of playwrights such as Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, who reflected a darker side of postwar society, television playwrights developed a unique brand of postwar storytelling. Educated and informed by "legitimate theater" and adjusted to the particular narrative constraints of television, these playwrights integrated

elements of twentieth century American drama into a creative voice, which resonated with messages from Ford, Hallmark, Lucky Strike, and US Steel. The challenge and conforming obstacle for the development of story worlds was precisely this commercial structure, shaped and propelled monolithically by sponsors. In the days of live television drama when programs were oriented under a single sponsor, whose name plainly titled the weekly production, these corporate entities, and their advertising agencies, kept a watchful eye for discordant content. Sponsors' identities bounded teleplays, eponymously, and in the recurrent breaks that advertised a single product or series of products over the course of the program. As such the stories written and placed between messages from corporate entities vying for the public's attention and good favor, had to resonate a certain agreeable tone.³⁷

The relationship between commerce and content in early 1950's teleplays was dialectical, with a one to one relationship between the play and the commercial. Far different than the disembodied commercial breaks, which interrupt contemporary programming, early teleplays existed within a commercial structure that spoke through a direct and unified voice, which permeated the whole of an hour long broadcast. Television advertising would quickly begin shifting away from this single-sponsorship model, favoring the display of low-cost consumer goods over corporate image.³⁸ With the move to the "magazine format" that became prominent in the latter half of the 1950's, the

³⁷ Hey, *Marty*, 112-3

³⁸ William Boddy, "The Studios Move into Prime Time: Hollywood and the Television Industry in the 1950s." *Cinema Journal* 24, no. 4 (1985): 30. doi:10.2307/1224894.

role of sponsors as a creative force began to diminish.³⁹ Concurrent with the move to Hollywood studios, and the growing impracticality of live television, the sponsor was dethroned from its central role as creative overseer. This had been a position that incurred substantial financial risk with production costs steadily rising, and subsequently yielded close monitoring of writing and production.⁴⁰ Though sponsors still maintained the ability to remove support in the interest of upholding their corporate image, they were steadily removed from the position of direct authority over production. This authority, though still intact, had been supplanted by Hollywood studios, who in the transition from live to predominantly filmed programming had taken control of production. As will be detailed in Chapter 2, with the move to independent production, Networks gained greater control over television content and program schedules. This shift in the industrial structure would allow Networks to sell advertising time rather than have advertisers own entire programs. From the assertive presence of sponsors within the theatrical space of the teletheater, the shape of advertising would be molded to new narrative formats, which were not under the direct control of sponsors and the advertising agencies.

If this development could be seen to represent the logic of *buying time*, a more nuanced approach to demographics, and a more rational delegation of creative energies, the single-sponsorship model can be seen as *buying space*. The approach of single-sponsorship was largely to insert corporate identities into the intimate space of the

³⁹ Michele Hilmes, "The Television Apparatus: Direct Address." *Journal of Film and Video* 37, no. 4 (1985): 27-36. Boddy, *The Studios*, 30.

⁴⁰ Erin Lee Mock, "The Horror of "Honey, I'm Home!" The Perils of Postwar Family Love in the Domestic Sitcom." *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 41, no. 2 (2011): 32.

teletheater. Though commercial messages were often shot on film, many programs, particularly in the first half of the 1950's, were constructed to incorporate live commercials. Smaller productions such as the former radio comedy *Ethel and Albert* on ABC maintained live in-studio advertisement as late as 1956.⁴¹ On the other hand, in March 1950, three months into the production of *Robert Montgomery Presents* on NBC, Director of Production Services Fred Shawn informed Head of the Network Pat Weaver of the mounting pressure of fitting the orchestra, commercials, and main performance into any single studio space owned by NBC. Shawn subsequently suggested moving the orchestra and live commercials into an additional NBC studio in a different building.⁴² Though the steps toward minimizing the logistical complexity of merging content and commerce brought the sponsor out of diagetic space, the sponsor's role in titling and introducing the teleplay made this commercial presence a fundamental part of the program architecture.⁴³ These efforts begin to show the care taken to preserve a sense of unification.

What Kenneth Hey describes as the "scoping technique" is the primary narrative device that merged commerce and content. This narrative structure was a direct descendent of radio drama, where an omniscient narrator was required to suture the storyline across commercial breaks, as well as to set the scene without the use of images. The technique remained in place through the transition to live television, presenting the

⁴¹ "Ethel and Albert," floor plan, January 6, 1956, Box 7, Folder 6, Television Scenic Designs, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

⁴² Fred Shawn to Sylvester Weaver, memorandum, "Robert Montgomery Show," March 20, 1950, Box 119, Folder 9. National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

⁴³ Sconce, "What If?," in *Television After*, 95; Knight, *Film and TV*, 379.

narrator's introduction, followed by a message from the sponsor, and finally moving into the play.⁴⁴ The narrator in this sense served to mediate the filmed space of the advertisement and the diegetic theatrical space of the story. While live television, in comedy and variety formats, did at times incorporate live advertisements, the dramatic form of the teleplay provided more of an emotional obstacle than the upbeat entertainment style of these formats. Though commercials for teleplays did not necessarily have to surmount tragedy at every break, the transportation from fictional narrative to direct commercial address was inherently disjointing. The narrator was an essential component of the teletheater, verbally redirecting the viewer's attention over blank screen or sponsor's title card. The role of the narrator took different forms for different programs, but their purpose remained consistent. In the case of several adaptations of novels produced by the *United States Steel Hour*⁴⁵, the narrator existed as a character within the story, while still an unseen announcer provided transitions to commercial messages. This narrative position helped establish directness to the viewer that would also be manifest throughout commercial messages. Even before these isolated narrative experiments, Robert Montgomery serving as narrator and host for the *Johnson's Wax Program/ Lucky Strike Theater* (on an alternating basis) was visually present within diegetic space. Montgomery would be shown against a blank background for the

⁴⁴ Hey, *Marty*, 110.

⁴⁵ *The United States Steel Hour*, "Bang the Drum Slowly," episode 2, CBS, first broadcast September 26, 1956, directed by Daniel Petrie, written by Mark Harris, adapted by Arnold Schulman, accessed April 30, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPc9keZ1cl0>; *The United States Steel Hour*, "No Time For Sergeants," episode 14, CBS, first broadcast March 15, 1955, directed by Alex Segal, written by Mac Hyman, adapted by Ira Levin, accessed April 30, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQhQxjWWB_A&t=1184s.

introduction to the program and sponsor. Then, shortly after entering the play he would appear again, unbeknownst to the actors, to introduce the story. This narrative role required of the “Master of Ceremonies” provided continuity across the discrete spaces of the program in its commercial entirety.⁴⁶ Montgomery’s presence literally transcended the layers of the teleplay, emphasizing intimacy at the level of radio and the level of theater. The essential role of the narrator was to merge the closeness and directness of radio with the theatrical grandiosity of formal introduction.

Shaping Narrative in the Commercial Theater

Despite the inclination for filming advertising pitches, the commercial framework of early television sought to establish continuity between filmed space and theatrical space.

In a 1956 episode of the *United States Steel Hour*⁴⁷, attempts at continuity went so far as

From left to right:
 1. Paul Newman in *Bang the Drum Slowly*; 2. Robert Montgomery in *Maggie, Pack Your Bags*;
 3. Montgomery in *Harvest*;
 4. Andy Griffith in “No Time for Sergeants”



⁴⁶ Letter by National Broadcasting Company and Neptune Productions Inc., "Robert Montgomery," December 23, 1949, Box 118, Folder 23.

⁴⁷ *The US Steel Hour*, "Bang the Drum," episode 2.



The US Steel Hour, "Bang the Drum," episode 2.

to film a commercial message on the set used in the evening's performance. The second commercial message in the presentation of "Bang the Drum Slowly," starring Paul Newman, returns to the living room set seen in the first act. The play follows a protagonist-narrator as he recounts the story of his time playing professional baseball. The character meanders through a darkened stage, directly addressing the viewer, foregrounding the narrative, and intermittently stepping into a scene as the lights come up behind him. The hollow appearance of the sets as they come into view, emphasize theatrical artifice, and mirror the vignettted aesthetic void which denotes the protagonist-narrator's mental space. The hotel room, which is the first set Newman retreats into, contains a desk, an armchair, a bed, and an empty frame hung against the empty dark space that appears to extend back infinitely. The second commercial message inhabits a similar space. After the program narrator introduces the two US Steel spokespeople in voice-over the camera shows familiar architectural forms, windows, frames, doors, floating against a darkened background. An anecdote that likens the visual style of the set to "an impressionistic picture in one of those modern art museums," leads into the heart of the commercial message, which focuses on the material used in the minimalistic construction. The male spokesman reveals that the set looks as it does to show "how beautiful and practical steel is around the house." This instance of a commercial message entering diagetetic space shows an effort to unify the disparate tonal qualities that define

commerce and content in the structure of the teletheater. Though the advertisement takes place in the same space as the narrative, the dramatic tone, dynamic movement and lighting, and tone of voice are neutralized. What begins as a behind-the-scenes look at the evening's performance, and a recontextualization of theatrical space, quickly evolves into a reminder that steel, and those who produce it, are to thank for sound physical constructions from the screen to the home.

Anthology series', under the model of single-sponsorship that preceded a logic of buying time, were challenged with selling corporate image over discrete products. Sponsors were concerned with displaying practical uses and practical products, but the kinds of corporations that were involved in sponsorship at this time possessed brands that were diffused across a multitude of products. With the singular inhabitation of television programs, sponsors held control of the theatrical space of a program, not simply a number of minutes in a program. The immensity of early sponsors prompted the reiteration of brand image through the line of products being sold. With control of three bookending



Commercial from *The US Steel Hour*, "Bang the Drum," episode 2.

spots, the teleplay offered an opportunity to construct a rounded profile and well-established brand image. Though many companies such as General Electric, Admiral, and

Motorola represented a variety of consumer electronics, a product such as steel illuminated the preeminence of brand identity in this period.

Even though companies would display different products and their uses throughout the program, their complete presence inflected individual pitches with a sense of corporate identity. A program such as the *Kraft Television Theatre* could present three different cheese products and upwards of fifteen recipes in an hour long program, and at all points these pitches came back to Kraft.⁴⁸ Additionally the presence of the companies' banners as transitions painted the whole of narrative space with their commercial image. Products such as Cheese Whiz, Philadelphia Cream Cheese, Miracle Whip, were all presented as emblems of the Kraft brand. This method of single-sponsor corporate advertising stands in contrast to a company that would become the largest television advertiser by 1953. Procter and Gamble was emblematic of a shift in advertising away from large manufactured goods, to "low-ticket consumer goods," such as soaps, cleaners, and food products.⁴⁹ Though Procter and Gamble's television billings tripled from 1951 to 1953, and they had started producing several soap operas, their name was not heavily featured in their advertising.⁵⁰ Rather Procter and Gamble stressed the identity of the product, (Mr. Clean, Cheer, Ivory Soap) rather than the identity of the corporation.

In the aforementioned episode of the *United States Steel Hour*, along with displaying steel's present and continuing relationship to everyday life, the first

⁴⁸ *Kraft Television Theatre*, "Alice In Wonderland," episode 36, NBC, first broadcast May 5, 1954, directed by Maury Holland, written by Lewis Carroll, adapted by Jack Roche, accessed April 30, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-ka4honG5s>.

⁴⁹ Boddy, *The Studios*, 30.

⁵⁰ Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 157

commercial message in the program assures, in great depth, the safety and responsibility of the steel worker. Even within this three-minute spot scoping takes place, moving from announcer voice to the spokesman, in this case US Steel Supervisor of Safety. Despite the periodic interruptions posed by the commercial framework, the narrator functioned as a personal binding, mirroring the spokesperson-delivered presentations for whichever monolithic entity was sponsoring the play. These extradiagetic insertions, where corporate benefaction met theatrical space, established a level of intimacy based upon the direct and continued monologue from the well-dressed figures representing the sponsor.

In addition to the strategies of single-sponsorship in teleplays, variety comedies provided a similar use of theatrical space in establishing corporate benefaction, but uniquely woven into the rhythm of comedic presentation. The variety program, which inhabited a similar period of relevance as teleplays, also illustrated the early inclination for theatrical modes of presentation. But the variety comedy interacted more directly with the domestic audience. These shows were fundamentally oriented around the comedic host. Comedy stars who had begun their careers in radio were placed at the center of night-club-like presentations, where these personalities facilitated short segments of entertainment, ranging from comedic skits, to dance, to musical performance.⁵¹ As these programs were not narrative-oriented they presented a different set of circumstances for the intrusion of advertising. In many ways this format was the ideal site for spatial advertising as the performance itself was structured by the constant reframing around different segments. The multitude of transitions in the variety comedy provided a fragmented pace that was particularly conducive to the insertion of advertising segments.

⁵¹ Spigel, *Make Room For TV*, 138

In the variety comedy advertising took a back seat to the riotous performativity of the entertainment. The spectacle of these comedic presentations provided a tone and pace that differed greatly from that of the teleplays. Advertisers therefore utilized different tactics of physical intrusion, often using physical banners incorporated into the mise-en-scene.⁵² The tone of content in variety comedies was consistent through the space of the presentation. A consistent dynamic permeated the variety of theatrical performances. Though there was variance between the host's monologue, musical performance, dance numbers, gags, and skits, the presentation was consistently energetic, with enthusiastic musical accompaniment and audience applause suturing the elements of the program.

Within this host-oriented presentational system, advertising pitches were less critical than inhabiting the performative space. One of the most notable examples of the layering of commerce and content in variety comedy is seen in a device utilized both in Jackie Gleason's *Cavalcade of Stars* and Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theatre*. Both these programs, sponsored by The Druggists of America and Texaco respectively, employed an introductory musical number sung by advertising spokespeople.⁵³ This device served to mimic the performative energy of the program, with a barbershop quartet of commercial figures. From the outset of these shows, following the sponsor and title cards, the commercial musical performance set the tone, which the viewers had come to expect. In the opening number for *Texaco Star Theatre*, the stage is set with four men dressed in

⁵² Dallas W. Smythe, "The Consumer's Stake in Radio and Television." *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 6, no. 2 (1951): 119; "Chance of a Lifetime," scenic design, 1952, Box 6, Folder 1, Television Scenic Designs 1949-1965, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library, New York, NY

⁵³ *Texaco Star Theatre*, NBC, first broadcast 1949, accessed May 1, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQ5_K_zTDi0&t=88s.

identical Texaco auto-mechanic uniforms, against a painted backdrop of a Texaco station. These men identified themselves in their opening number as “the Merry Texaco Men.” The performance vacillates seamlessly between comedic skit and advertising jingle. Additionally the lyrics they sing lead through an alternation of commercial and performative spaces. Most clearly, the line that leads them from unison introduction, into an exchange of verses describing their duties, reads:

“Our show is very powerful
 We’ll wow you with an hour full of
 Of howls from a shower full of stars.

We’re the merry Texaco men
 Tonight we may be showmen
 Tomorrow we’ll be servicing your cars!”

The following verses present comedic caricatures of Texaco employees, leading back into a unison introduction of the star of the show, Milton Berle. This presentational device placed the commercial interruption at the level of content, transforming corporate identity into a vital part of the upbeat entertainment. As the Texaco men reach the final stanza, the curtains close over the gas station behind them, reintroducing a familiar theatrical surface. With the conclusion of their jingle a timpani begins to roll. The curtains open back up to show Milton Berle mounting a chariot and dressed in ancient costume for the theme of his opening monologue.

Aside from the commonly remarked upon “intimacy, immediacy, spontaneity,” which critics throughout the 1950’s saw as being retained from stage to screen, Michele

Hilmes in 1985 proposed the essential device of the “television apparatus” to be the “direct address.”⁵⁴ She argues that the “use of the second person pronoun, overt or implied,” in tandem with the “closed” narrative space of programming elicited an effect on the viewer that was “particularly favorable to the conditions of consumer advertising.”⁵⁵ Hilmes sees the alternation between these two spaces creating a psychological “disruption of the classic voyeuristic position of the cinema spectator.”

Alongside the more isolated conditions of television viewing than those of cinema, direct address created an even deeper entrenchment of the intimate and domestic characteristics of television programming. In television’s early days internal discussion showed major forces in the industry to be well aware of the precarious nature of the boundary that the medium crossed. FCC Chairman Wayne Coy, at a 1951 industry meeting listed as one of his seven concerns for the new medium, “the wholesomeness of [the station’s] [sic] entertainers and their sense of responsibility as visitors at the family hearth.”⁵⁶ Flora Rhetta Schreiber voiced a similar awareness. Writing in 1949, she cited “several directors independently” describing a “clean American look.” Schreiber also proposed her own profile for the television performer, describing a “living room quality,” or “the gift of stepping into anyone’s living room as an unobtrusive yet compelling guest.”⁵⁷ While the intrusion of televised entertainment upon the home represented a monumental shift in the uses and understanding of a private and previously sanctified space, the television industry actively mediated the effect of this intrusion.

⁵⁴ Bretz, *TV as an Art Form*, 153; Schreiber, *New Idiom*, 184; Spigel, *Make Room*, 136.

⁵⁵ Hilmes, *The Television Apparatus*, 28-33.

⁵⁶ Smythe, *The Consumer’s Stake*, 121.

⁵⁷ Schreiber, *New Idiom* 191-2.

This form of intimacy constructed through a theatrical mode of sponsorship, would largely dissolve with the development of new narrative formats and production standards. The unique period of live television was fundamentally shaped by the inherited commercial structure of radio. But through the mid-fifties the reign of single-sponsorship would dissipate leading to heightened forms of narrative intimacy. Though theatricality would be retained particularly through the medium of the sitcom the frame of television would soon obscure the distinction between fiction and reality seen in theatrical space of early live formats. This period of television helps to understand the imperatives of intimacy, expressed through a system that was almost entirely structured by advertising interests. With the incorporation of filmed formats, and increasingly marginalized advertising control, narrative content came to be the primary force soliciting an intimate relationship with audiences.

This spatial logic, which aimed to establish a theater with a window to the American home, served to mediate the guest-host relationship manifested by the entrance of television images into the private sphere.⁵⁸ While the characters and spokespeople of television acted as gracious guest, the commercial structure, painted by corporate benefaction, leveled this relationship. Television content, free of charge but for the price of a receiver, was also the gracious gift of the sponsor.⁵⁹ The viewer entered into the space of the sponsor's theater. The spokesperson, and the agents of "direct address" generally, played the part of both gracious guest and benevolent host. This programming model placed the spokesperson at the door between the family home and the public

⁵⁸ Spigel *Make Room*, 99

⁵⁹ Smythe, *The Consumer's Stake*, 111

theater. With the development of continued narrative worlds, the viewer no longer inhabited the sponsor's theater. Rather serial formats engaged viewers with familiar characters. The audience entered the fictional homes of lovable characters, who in their continued relationship, became real figures.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Jess Oppenheimer and Gregg Oppenheimer, *Laughs, Luck . . . and Lucy: How I Came to Create the Most Popular Sitcom of All Time* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 179; 189.

CHAPTER II

Leaving New York, and the Dissolution of the Teletheater

The Golden Age of television, as it was largely constructed around the paradigm of live drama, came to a close with industrial shifts in the realm of sponsorship and production. In the anthology teleplay, and variety comedy programs, sponsorship and production existed in close contact. Commerce and content were both closely controlled by advertising agencies on behalf of the sponsors who owned these live programs. The era of live drama was also the era of single-sponsorship. Sponsors in this period not only owned programs, but were the exclusive owners of any given program. Though certain programs, with increasing frequency after 1952 partook in multiple-ownership of programs, these arrangements were structured by alternating sponsors on a weekly basis.⁶¹ This was the first step in shifting network-sponsor relationships, which would lead to new forms of commercial presence. But with alternation on a weekly basis, the shape of the commercial presence within live programming followed the same guidelines of pure single-sponsorship. Live programs in the first half of the 1950's were bounded by the sponsor's presence. This was generally true at the industrial level; one or two sponsors owned programs. At the level of production and reception, as discussed in

⁶¹ David C. Adams to Sylvester Weaver and David Sarnoff, memorandum, "Television Participation Programs," January 25, 1954, Box 123, Folder 38, National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI. Sylvester L. Weaver and Thomas Coffey, *The Best Seat in the House* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993), 193.

Chapter 1, a commercial framework defined the space of television. The assertive commercial presence on screen was accompanied by assertive industrial practices.

The networks, throughout the early 1950's, would begin to exert program control through the involvement of independent production, sourced from Hollywood. This distillation of the early arrangement of sponsorship and production, would allow networks to be the owners of content, and thereby unseat the authority of sponsors and their advertisers. In seeking an alternative to advertising produced content, television would undergo a shift in the standard mode of production. The age of live television would soon give way to programming that was recorded on film and then broadcast at a later date. With the separation of advertisers and the space of broadcasting television content changed shape. Additionally the more liberated mode of transmission of film allowed for the development of new types of narratives, and subsequently new relationships between commerce and content.

Pat Weaver and Concepts of Multiple Sponsorship

One man has typically appeared at the center of these changes in the shape of the television industry. Sylvester "Pat" Weaver joined NBC as head of television in 1949. He came to television having previously been an executive at the advertising agency Young & Rubicam. He arrived at NBC with a pioneering spirit, focused on guiding the new broadcast medium into a future that was not controlled by advertising. In his time at NBC he pushed for greater network control over programming. He claimed, "Advertising agencies were remarkable institutions. I had no quarrel with them, but I saw their limitations." In his summation: "[An adman] didn't advertise either to do good or to make enemies. He expected to sell without offending people. The net result was the bland

leading the bland.”⁶² This chapter benefits greatly from his outspoken voice, distilled through both his autobiography and through the wealth of documents and correspondences located at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.⁶³ He was a unique figure straddling the world of advertising and the world of the networks. Weaver was in many ways the catalyst to a second age of television. Although, it was the first age of television that truly moved past mere replication of the industrial practices of radio.

His tenure as Vice-President, then President of NBC (1953-1956) was fundamental in shaping the industrial arrangements of early television. In the seven years that he was at NBC his work focused on the commercial structure of television leading to “participation programs” and ultimately a “magazine format” of advertising throughout television. These commercial structures stood in contrast to the single-sponsor model, which was employed from the days of radio on through the very start of television. Weaver unified his vision under the “magazine concept.” This term made reference to the form of editorial control in publishing. His concept sought to reverse the arrangement of control over content in television. The networks would sell time slots on a program, as publishers would space on a page, all the while maintaining creative control so far as the sponsors didn’t simultaneously pull out in disapproval. This diminishing of the sponsor’s buying power would mean the end of their monopolistic influence over programming. Advertisers lamented that a magazine format would ruin the “gratitude factor” of single-

⁶² Weaver, *Best Seat in the House*, 5.

⁶³ National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

sponsorship.⁶⁴ But more importantly than the diminishing effectiveness of their sales pitch, their creative influence would be taken away by co-sponsorship. The first step toward the magazine format was the shift to network-ownership of production. But secondly, key to Weaver's plan, once the network was self-producing shows, was to not allow any one sponsor to buy out the advertising time on a given program. As early as 1949, Weaver foresaw a situation where multiple-sponsorship would become a necessity. With production costs rising, the range of potential television sponsors became more and more limited. Even those who remained viable in this market began to feel "the pinch of sponsoring an entire program."⁶⁵

In the introduction to Pat Weaver's autobiography he states, "When I went to NBC in 1949, the networks were no more than facilities that the big advertising agencies used to broadcast shows they created, owned, and controlled."⁶⁶ Additionally, early in 1950, a memo addressed to Weaver from the representative for the *Kraft Television Theatre* expressed a similar sentiment. In response to a substitute technical director giving a mistimed cue on the program, the representative summarized his account stating, "Our position is simply that we buy facilities from you, and since there was a breakdown in these facilities there should be a considerable reimbursement to the advertiser."⁶⁷ With the move to a magazine format the networks altered their status as simply being a broadcasting facility. Subsequently the television industry as a whole underwent a series

⁶⁴ Weaver, *Best Seat in the House*, 180.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 179.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 4.

⁶⁷ John U. Reber to Sylvester Weaver, Mr, memorandum, March 27, 1950, Box 118, Folder 79. National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

of radical changes. As the sponsor was no longer purchasing the use of broadcasting facilities, and as television content became liberated by film from the space of transmission, the spatial logic of programming faded away. This gave rise to new forms of advertising and new forms of television content.

A mix of narrative forms pervaded the television landscape in this initial period of transition from live to filmed programming. But the essence of this transition can be seen between the anthology drama of early television, and the situation comedy that would persist, practically unchanged, into the contemporary moment. Though the live variety comedy provided a key influence with regard to comedic form, the teleplay and the sitcom demand comparison based in their central position as narrative-based genres. Additionally, as narrative forms they provide the clearest case for the comparison of live and filmed production, and the commercial contexts that surround them.

The spatial logic of programming in live television was constructed upon the reference point of the theater. Audiences were transported via the television to a discrete location from which the narrative and the commercial message originated. Despite the many distinctions acknowledged by critics and producers alike, the effect was to bring the physical theater into the American home.⁶⁸ But with filmed television, producers were liberated from this site-specificity and broadcast synchronicity, which was both the pride and primary obstacle of live production. The space of television no longer had to be confined to interiors, or two-dimensional illusions of exterior space, though it often still did. In addition to the physical liberation of film production, situation comedies defined a

⁶⁸ Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 139

new televisual space, which was not cohabitated by commerce. The “flexibility of film” allowed content and commerce to originate separately, and be edited together for broadcast. This coincided with changing arrangement of the network and sponsor. Where before the advertising agency as producer oversaw every facet of television operations, the fragmentation of the industry resulted in a more discontinuous visual flow. In this way Pat Weaver’s dream of network-ownership of programs can be seen to have influenced the transition away from theatrical presentation.

Live Production Moves West

The paradigm of live production became outmoded due to a number of factors. On one hand the logistics of rehearsal and live performance required that sets be in place for a number of days. With expanding program schedules network studio holdings could not continue to meet these requirements. Efforts at physical expansion in New York required theatrical facilities to be converted for the particular purposes of television. At times this simply meant outfitting theaters with television equipment. In other cases, particularly in preparation for dramatic programs, this meant removing the seats from a theater to fashion a soundstage, as anthology teleplays were staged without a physically present audience. In addition to the lack of enough discrete studio spaces to house a growing number of programs, many productions began to exceed in scale the physical capacity of any single studio available in New York. As noted in Chapter 1, the spatial constraints of New York at least once demanded that NBC’s *Robert Montgomery Presents* originate different elements of the production in separate locations within the city.⁶⁹ While

⁶⁹ Fred Shawn to Sylvester Weaver, memorandum, "Robert Montgomery Show," March 20, 1950, Box 119, Folder 9. National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

networks sought to convert theaters in New York into television studios, they also began establishing operations in cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles, through the preexisting channels of local affiliate stations.

In the early 1950's NBC and CBS began attempting to establish production in Hollywood, taking advantage of a larger workforce, and a larger physical infrastructure of vacant theater and studio properties.⁷⁰ Additionally, the installation of a bi-coastal coaxial cable, which was scheduled to be complete by 1952, made live origination from Los Angeles a possibility.⁷¹ This was only the first step in a larger move to Hollywood, which would be marked by the outsourcing of production from a sponsor-network arrangement in New York. Independent Hollywood production companies and telefilm "packagers" would come to inhabit a sizeable portion of programming schedules and carve out a new industrial arrangement.⁷² With the rise of filmed serial formats, such as situation comedies, crime and western dramas, produced by motion picture companies, television's original productive paradigm was displaced. This new industrial arrangement, which incorporated Hollywood production companies, dethroned sponsors from their position of creative authority. In doing so this independently-sourced content moved networks into a position of program ownership. With networks licensing programs from the independent entities of production companies, sponsors were thrust

⁷⁰ Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 168-9; Memorandum by Television Network Controllers Department, "Report on Hollywood Expansion," September 18, 1951, Box 119, Folder 94. National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

⁷¹ Weaver, *Best Seat in the House*, 205.

⁷² Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (n.p.: University of Texas Press, 1994), 53, JSTOR.

into a position of buying time from the networks. With production largely in the hands of Hollywood studios the quality of television programming changed. Anthology dramas ran their course, and additionally variety comedy programs, which acted like televisual nightclub acts, faded into obscurity as the intimacy and immediacy of theatrical presentation became logistically outmoded.⁷³ In conjunction with new methodologies of telefilm-making, the networks' newfound control of programming schedules marked a shift in the relationship of commerce and content. The logic of buying theatrical space, and adorning it with a corporate image, gave way to a logic of buying time.

The initial spread to the West Coast was a result of the confined state of New York live production. As of 1951 the general direction of production at NBC still conformed to early televisual paradigms. NBC's "Report on Hollywood Expansion," outlines a transition plan to provide "temporary relief" to the overcrowded studio schedules in New York. In anticipation of the coaxial cable the network was looking for studio properties from which they could originate live content. In his summary at the end of the report, Pat Weaver notes, "The first productions from Hollywood on TV will be big comedy shows, needing theatrical presentation."⁷⁴ In this context the use of "theatrical," assumes the ubiquity of live production. Comedy programs in contrast to dramatic programs, though both primarily broadcast live, required by common practice that there be an audience present within the production. As producer Albert McCleery

⁷³ Spigel, *Make Room For TV*, 138. uses the term "nightclub" to describe the raunchy quality of variety comedy in contrast to domestic comedies. Arthur Knight, 378. "All of this ties up space—not merely while the show is on the air, but for days and weeks before."

⁷⁴ Sylvester L. Weaver to Victor T. Norton, Mr, memorandum, "Facilities For the TV Network in Hollywood," January 8, 1951. Box 119, Folder 94. National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

had informed Weaver in a memo from 1950, comedies on television without an audience were, “like having Bob Hope without laughs.”⁷⁵ Indeed television comedy depended heavily on elements of theatrical presentation, and “theatrical aesthetics” more generally, even past the period of live broadcasting.⁷⁶

In moving comedy formats onto film the audience still played an essential role. Filming a live performance in front of a studio audience became common practice throughout this transition from live formats to filmed formats. Weaver continues in his summary by suggesting that “movie-houses” could be quickly and easily redesigned. Though finding spaces for comedic “theatrical” presentations was NBC’s focus during the initial phase of expansion, Weaver also notes potential availabilities for dramatic production in former Hollywood soundstages. Additionally, what NBC Vice-President Victor Norton referred to as “theater-type studios,” could be suited for dramatic presentations in Weaver’s view, “by removing the seats, which are of little use now, the way shows are being done.”⁷⁷ Weaver’s vision for Hollywood expansion prepared for full transplantation of New York standards of production. Though enabled by coaxial connection to proliferate models of live television, this move westward would lay the foundation for a fundamental restructuring of television production.

Physical expansion was a necessity for the networks, given the heavy demand for space in live production. While generally retaining live production paradigms in both

⁷⁵ Albert McCleery to Pat Weaver, memorandum, "Cameo Theatre," September 20, 1950, Box 118, Folder 6. National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

⁷⁶ Spigel, *Make Room*, 144.

⁷⁷ Weaver to Norton, memorandum, "Facilities For the TV Network."

drama and comedy, the networks would seek an alternative to the industrial arrangement of sponsor domination. This initiated the demise of live production. Growing tensions between advertising agencies and the networks would speed up the move to Hollywood, but with progressively less intention of producing live programs. The evolving paradigm of licensing content from Hollywood producers placed the networks more directly in the role of selling time and filling out program schedules. As such the advertisers' role was relegated to preparing filmed pitches for insertion into filmed programs.

Disassembling Single-Sponsorship and Growing Network Control

Though network-sponsor relations came into conflict in this period, fundamentally changing their industrial arrangement, the roots of this tension existed throughout the days of radio. These entities shared a history, which extended back as far as broadcasting's existence. For the most part their relationship remained unchanged in the very first years of television: commercial interests utilizing broadcasting facilities. But William Boddy has noted that in the transition between radio and television the FCC sought to establish the clearly defined roles and responsibilities of sponsorship and the networks respectively. In 1946 the FCC published what became referred to as the "Blue Book." This document bore the official title, *Public Service Responsibility of Broadcast Licensees*. The FCC recognized an essential tension that permeated network-sponsor relations. Less than ten years later this tension would foster the move to Hollywood, and the industrial shifts surrounding production practices. In providing mediation for these two forces at the center of broadcasting, the FCC emphasized that aspects of public service must be upheld, in the effort to avoid letting television become purely an advertising device.

This discussion centered on the problem of control over the programmatic structure. The FCC was actively concerned with how this relationship would develop. The Blue Book expressed consternation about the level of advertising control that had existed in radio. The FCC's interest focused on "the concept of a well-rounded structure," offering a variety of programs types with regard for the audience's enjoyment. In the view of the FCC the network's central responsibility was to uphold this interest in the move to television. The Blue Book continues that this "concept... can obviously not be maintained if the decision is left wholly or preponderantly in the hands of advertisers in search of a market, each concerned with his particular half hour."⁷⁸ There was fear in the FCC of a purely commercial medium. Ultimately television was meant to provide an entertainment service. With this rhetorical discussion of public responsibility, networks retained an amount of control over the programmatic structure, ultimately dictating scheduling despite the "power tactics" of advertisers.

But for Pat Weaver proper network control could not be realized in this context. It was common practice for advertisers in the era of single-sponsorship to threaten moving a program if not provided with the most lucrative time slot.⁷⁹ What he identified as "shady tactics" and "power tactics" in a 1949 correspondence with a Colgate representative, exhibited the harsh realities of the networks' assumed programming control. Though officially networks stood as the operators of the programmatic structure, they were constantly subject to manipulation and power plays, which allowed advertisers

⁷⁸ Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 98.

⁷⁹ Pat Weaver to William Esty Company, Inc., memorandum, September 20, 1949, Box 118, Folder 4. National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

to control this structure. Weaver saw program ownership as essential to creating an industrial arrangement where networks truly worked in the interest of public responsibility. In 1949, the former advertising executive turned network president had defiantly told his new advertising-trained staff, “Look, we ruined radio. Let’s not let it happen to television. Let’s stage our own programs and just sell advertising time to the agencies.”⁸⁰ The arrangement established by the FCC gave ostensible control over the programmatic structure to the networks. The network’s responsibility to “overall program balance in the public interest,” did not actually provide control over the content of programming, simply the placement of programming.⁸¹

Conflict between networks and advertising agencies abounded in the early 1950’s, as Pat Weaver became a central force in asserting network control. Sponsors regularly vied for the most lucrative time slots despite network objections based in concerns over competition within schedule blocks, programming balance, and audience make-up. One such example of this competition of interests between network and sponsor comes from a drafted memo from Weaver to the advertising representative on *the Colgate Theatre*, a 30-minute anthology series sponsored by the makers of *Colgate* dental cream. Though this document is riddled with editing notes and strikethroughs of overzealous personal criticisms, it clearly outlines some of the key tensions between these forces. NBC’s relocation of *Colgate Theater*, to a less than favorable time slot, was met with threats to move the program to CBS. Weaver subsequently responded, “the low cost Colgate Theater is by your own admission unable to compare in quality with the [Philco

⁸⁰ Pat Weaver quoted in Stan Opatowsky, *TV: The Big Picture* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1961), 41.

⁸¹ FCC *Public Service Responsibility*, 1946, quoted in Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 98.

Television Playhouse which follows in the schedule] and is unfortunately of extremely similar construction. To put this show in the keystone spot of our entire Sunday Night line-up jeopardizes our circulation and therefore our advertiser's circulation."⁸² Weaver's self-proclaimed "long background of professional know-how," allowed him to take up arms against the agencies.

In similar strongly worded correspondences he utilized this understanding of the advertisers' trade to affirm the networks' responsibilities, and maintain a certain level of autonomy over their own operations. In a memo to the advertising representative for *the Voice of Firestone* from 1949, Weaver contended, "It is my intention to do everything possible to see that shows on NBC do the selling job for which they are designed by the advertiser—whether that job be selling goods and services, or a company's character, or both."⁸³ Weaver's assertive interactions with advertisers, besides showing a keen eye for manipulative tactics, also show the root of his major achievements in defining a new industrial arrangement. Furthermore he shaped a programming philosophy, based in the authority of networks, which would set the stage for new forms of television narrative.

Sponsors' Removal from Theatrical Space

In his confrontation with the commercial agents of the television industry, Weaver achieved more than simply picking fights with his former professional kin. His efforts pointed at program ownership for the networks as a means to loosening the sponsors' grip on television's production and content. Although Pat Weaver played a fundamental role

⁸² Weaver to William Esty Company, Inc., memorandum.

⁸³ Pat Weaver to C B Ryan, memorandum, October 7, 1949, Box 118, Folder 11. National Broadcasting Company Records, 1921-1976, University of Wisconsin Center For Film and Theater Research, Madison, WI.

in the general outsourcing of production to Hollywood, even he did not welcome the potential flood of filmed material that threatened the critical praise and artistic distinction of live television.⁸⁴ The transition to a ubiquitous landscape of filmed programming, and even critical acceptance of certain types of filmed programming, occurred slowly. But as early as 1951 the occasional filmed program provided a view of the shifting paradigm of television production.

In disassembling sponsor control over production Weaver helped to disassemble the standard of theatrical presentation. The theatrical space that teleplays existed in was inextricably tied to the commercial paradigm through which it was established. The sitcom came of age in a context where production was not wholly under the control of advertisers. In addition to commerce not being present within production, the reversal of the network-sponsor relationship assisted in placing content in the foreground. With advertisers purchasing time from the networks, their presence was bound to the mere extent of their commercial spot. In the teletheater, on the other hand, present on set, with commercial messages sprinkled throughout the program, their presence circumscribed the narrative. Meanwhile with a hand in both the creative and commercial sides of production in this period, advertisers omnipotence in the space of the teletheater begins to reveal an almost imaginary division between commerce and content. In the parlance of many critics throughout this period, the content of television maintained a duty to commercial interests. This duty was often defined as “gathering an audience for advertisers.”⁸⁵ While performing plays on television qualified as entertainment, and therefore gathered an

⁸⁴ Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 75.

⁸⁵ Dallas W. Smythe, "The Consumer's Stake in Radio and Television." *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 6, no. 2 (1951): 110

audience, there were few qualifications pertaining to the quality of that entertainment. Advertising-centered production simply followed guidelines of disqualification, assuming a position where no segment of the audience would be offended.⁸⁶ With the understanding that television content had a duty to gathering an audience for advertisers, the central place this duty was called upon was in scripts. But writers, typically, were far removed from the space of the studio. Scripts were mostly procured on a freelance basis, read and screened by agency readers.⁸⁷ The separation between commerce and content was thinly veiled.

The “gratitude factor” was ostensibly based on funding and organizing television entertainment, but in reality the separation between commerce and content was an illusion.⁸⁸ Though “scoping” structures placed theatrical narratives, actors, and playwrights, within a frame delineated but not intruded by commerce, this obscured the fact that the advertising agency’s control crossed this proposed boundary.⁸⁹ With considerable control over both the selling and non-selling aspects of television, this programmatic structure sought the loyalty of audiences through a convergence of creative and commercial qualities. As filmed formats fragmented the process of production, the rhythm of commercial and creative information became progressively marked by

⁸⁶ Weaver, *Best Seat*, 5; Leland L. Nichols, “TV Opens the Screen to New Playwrights,” *Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1956): 340.

⁸⁷ Tom Stempel, *Storytellers to the Nation: A History of American Television Writing* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1992) 34.

⁸⁸ Weaver (*Best Seat in the House*, 180) uses this term in quotations citing advertising agencies defense of single-sponsorship

⁸⁹ Kenneth Hey, “Marty: Aesthetics vs. Medium in Early Television Drama” in *American History, American Television: Interpreting the Video past*, ed. John E. O'Connor and Erik Barnouw (New York: F. Ungar, 1983) 110.

discontinuity. With the industry's embrace of multiple-sponsorship models, time slots became shorter and shorter. Programs incorporated more commercial perspectives with quicker and more highly concentrated messages.

CHAPTER III

I Love Lucy and the New Economics of Serial Formats

With the move to filmed programming sponsors were supposedly dethroned from their place as the corporate benefactors of television. But the shift to independent production, and the dissolution of single-sponsorship, established new modes of advertising, which proved more lucrative than expected. The space of television, in a film-oriented programming landscape, established new forms of intimacy that far surpassed that “intimacy of theater,” that high-minded critics of the period perhaps over-embellished.⁹⁰ Through the situation comedy networks provided advertisers with the promise of a returning audience. Sitcoms in their episodic nature solicited the viewers’ return on the basis of personalities. Narrative worlds expanded, encompassing characters that had regular relationships with viewers. Given the affective quality of episodic narrative, television as a commercially oriented space took on a different shape. A temporal logic of programming and advertising, which can be seen in rise of multiple-sponsorship and network ownership, became combined with a temporal logic of narrative. With the distancing of production and advertising through film, temporal intimacy succeeded the spatial unity of live television. This ushered in new forms of advertising for the newly isolated space of filmed production and the diageses it cultivated.

⁹⁰ William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 80. “Program Formats and Critical Hierarchies”. Kenneth Hey, “Marty: Aesthetics vs. Medium in Early Television Drama” in *American History, American Television: Interpreting the Video past*, ed. John E. O'Connor and Erik Barnouw (New York: F. Ungar, 1983) 113.

Episodic and serial formats alike provided a clear and simple reason for the viewer to return: the continuance of plot and the continuance of characters.⁹¹ On the other hand, the teletheater, which was unquestionably couched in provincial taste, solicited return based only on the uplifting and enriching experience of the theater, and the promise of another play of similar quality. Critics who praised the anthology drama often focused on the teletheater as a space enabling the vicarious act of theater going.⁹² Whereas live drama was seen to embody the intimacy of the theater, the situation comedy primarily embodied the intimacy of character. Though critics who clung to the artistic veneer of live drama also upheld ideas of “character” in defending against the intrusion of filmed programming.⁹³ As Kenneth Hey discusses, television playwrights generally fell into the theatrical category known as the “right-wing,” which showed narrative concerns of “stage-as-reality and drama-as-character-study.”⁹⁴ The transition to filmed programming was met with claims that an emphasis on plot began to overtake the theatrical interest in character.⁹⁵ A plenitude of filmed dramatic shows would indeed utilize plot as a means of bringing audiences back week after week, while also offering the recognizable protagonist-hero and his or her conflict with a new villain. The sitcom on the other hand displayed almost total consistency of characters, and presented largely

⁹¹ Jeffery Sconce, "What If? Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," 2004, in *Television After TV: Essays On a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 97.

⁹² Flora Rheta Schreiber, "Television: A New Idiom," *Hollywood Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1949): 184. doi:10.2307/1209682; Rudy Bretz, "TV as an Art Form," *Hollywood Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1950): 153. doi:10.2307/1209446.

⁹³ Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 84.

⁹⁴ Hey, *Marty*, 101

⁹⁵ Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 84.

internal domestic conflicts. Both these formats' treatment of familiar characters would far outlive the self-contained dramatic intensity of teleplays. Filmed programming initiated shift in focus from corporate theatrical space to diageitic time interspersed with commercial messages. With the preeminence of narrative, the financial structure of television would be reconfigured, utilizing content as the primary vehicle.

Defining New Forms of Intimacy

Though filmed shows in both drama and comedy can be described as serial formats, sitcoms and telefilms in this period more specifically qualified as episodic narratives. Sitcoms would retain the standard of episodic structure throughout their future, while dramatic formats would veer toward being serial narratives in the true sense. Early filmed formats were episodic in the sense that they generally contained a complete story with complete narrative trajectory contained in the space of a single episode. Serial formats on the other hand, such as the soap opera, were less tied to formally constructed plots with clear beginning and ending, favoring examinations of characters leading to cliff hanger endings, extended into the next iteration of the story.⁹⁶

Filmed programs began to employ time as a means of fostering intimacy. The prerecording of television content fundamentally altered the way narratives interacted with audiences. In so doing this treatment of continued narrative time, and serial narrative construction began to break down the traditional aesthetic qualities of intimacy, immediacy, and spontaneity, which proponents of live television had held dear. By moving away from purely theatrical modes of presentation, filmed television established

⁹⁶ Sconce, "What If? 97.

new forms of interaction with audiences. The temporality of the teletheater was contained in the act of presentation, being a live production. The synchronicity and ephemerality of live performance models placed an emphasis on “being there,” though the “aesthetics of presence” would be of continued importance with the move to film.⁹⁷ Between these two models of television production, the importance of presence would shift from the experience of the event to the experience of continued interaction with characters.

Within live programming two forms of theatrical presentation were generally utilized. Variety comedy shows, and special events embodied a theatrical format, which would provide inspiration for early filmed comedies. These programming styles were theatrical not in the artistic sense but in their spatial arrangement. Whereas teleplays were staged in studios without a present audience, “theatrical” comedy productions involved an unseen audience whose presence was indicated both by the intermittent laughter and the performers’ direct address toward the screen. Though direct address would not be retained in sitcoms, the spontaneity of live laughter provided a point of reference to its live antecedent. In some senses the sitcom can even be seen as one facet of the variety comedy extended into its own narrative life. Sitcoms resembled the skits that were often performed as segments within the space of live comedy productions. Famously, *The Honeymooners* was taken out of a live variety context and developed into an autonomous life as a situation comedy. The series was based around a character from Jackie Gleason’s repertoire, which he frequently portrayed on his program *Cavalcade of Stars*.⁹⁸ The move

⁹⁷ Lynn Spigel, *Make Room For TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 142.

⁹⁸ Virginia Wright Wexman, "Returning From the Moon: Jackie Gleason, the Carnavalesque, and Television Comedy," *Journal of Film and Video* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 21, JSTOR.

into situation comedy, shows the essential similarities between live and filmed formats, as well as the shift in focus from theatrical presentation to pure narrative. With the *Honeymooners*, television moved from a theatrical format further into a comedic diagenesis. The figure of Jackie Gleason as comedic host disappeared, leaving behind only his lovable character, Brooklyn bus driver Ralph Kramden.

Both live variety performances and sitcom performances were structured around the proscenium arch, and as such created an implicit theatrical audience. This spatial arrangement stood in contrast to the concept in the teletheater of the “mobile audience.”⁹⁹ What Hey terms the “mobile audience” refers to the implementation of stage productions without rigid theatrical arrangements of space. Carol Serling also noted this aspect of teleplays, crediting the “flexibility of film.”¹⁰⁰ Referring more to film as a medium, this phrase meant specifically the mobility of the viewer as controlled by the camera. With the move to filmed production, programs preserved to some extent a classic theatrical division. Surprisingly the early pinnacle of success for filmed formats, the sitcom, did not take advantage of the “flexibility of film” in the ways that the teletheater had. Rather, situation comedies blended the spatial arrangements of the anthology drama and the variety comedy, as Spigel notes the “merging [of] these two theatrical traditions.” Although the sitcom was produced on film, in its original form it relied heavily on a theatrical mode of representation. Shows such as *I Love Lucy* in maintaining the sense of physical presence so integral to variety comedy, utilized theatrical aesthetics through a new and more extensive form of narrative structure.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Hey, *Marty*, 106

¹⁰⁰ *ibid* 106

¹⁰¹ Spigel, *Make Room For TV*, 142.

Creating New Productive Standards

I Love Lucy first aired on CBS in 1951. In addition to being one of the first and one of the most recognized television sitcoms, its production established many of the technical and industrial practices, which would foster new program formats. The transition to filmed formats, particularly the sitcom, was still tied to theatrical modes of production. Though there was television content that was produced out of sequence and edited into continuity, as movies were produced, sitcoms did not fall into this preexisting mode of production. Innovations credited to both Desi Arnaz and Jerry Fairbanks carved out a different style of film production, for the particular scheduling contexts and aesthetic conditions of television.

In 1951 when *I Love Lucy* was picked up by the Phillip Morris cigarette company and CBS there was not yet the coaxial cable that would allow for bicoastal live transmission. Against the wishes of the network and sponsor Lucille Ball and Desi Arnez wanted to stage the show live in Hollywood, as Ball was intent on maintaining a blossoming film career.¹⁰² At that time however live production from Hollywood would mean that eastern audiences would view a kinescope recording, which was of a significantly poorer quality, at a later date. This left the creators with the option of doing a filmed show in Hollywood or doing a live show in New York, with the opinion of the sponsor obviously favoring New York. The cost of doing the show in Hollywood was estimated by CBS to be double that of live production in New York, and the sponsor was

¹⁰² Jess Oppenheimer and Gregg Oppenheimer, *Laughs, Luck . . . and Lucy: How I Came to Create the Most Popular Sitcom of All Time* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 134.

not willing to pay anymore than had been agreed upon.¹⁰³ Already with fifty percent stock in the show, Desilu Productions, Lucy and Desi's nascent company, agreed to cover the additional cost of production in Hollywood.¹⁰⁴ With this extra investment from the creators, they asked for full ownership of the show's negatives.

The summer before *I Love Lucy* was to go on the air, Desi Arnaz rented a vacant movie studio, which they transformed for theatrical presentation, still intent on doing a live-type show. In contrast to *Amos and Andy*, which was the barometer for filmed comedy production, *Lucy* filmed the show with a physically present studio audience. *Amos and Andy* on the other hand was filmed then screened for an audience. From this screening the producers would source canned laughter to be edited in for broadcast, and for retaining the element of liveness deemed necessary for comedies of the period.¹⁰⁵ In performing the show live the timing of performance and response would remain totally authentic. But in contrast to live productions Desilu rented their studio space on a full-time basis allowing for no striking of sets or lighting, and an uncompromised rehearsal schedule.¹⁰⁶ While this liberated the performance from the logistical logjam in New York, it led to the standardization of a production system around the somewhat formulaic stories and situations. In addition to the temporal normalcy established by standing sets, and the same domestic space being shown week after week, other productive considerations were standardized. The most notable aspect of production was the multi-

¹⁰³ *ibid*, 142

¹⁰⁴ Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (n.p.: University of Texas Press, 1994), 67.

¹⁰⁵ Oppenheimer, *Laughs, Luck*, 143.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, 147

camera technique, which was developed for live production, and utilized by other low-budget telefilm producers.

The multi-camera technique, which to this day permeates the landscape of television comedy, marked the beginning of mediation between live and filmed aesthetics of presentation. Multi-camera production was a process, which merged the performance and staging techniques of live production with the spatial liberation provided by the transmission device of film. The technique was established by producers of live television, so that the image on screen was constructed through switching from different perspectives in real time. But in suiting this method to filmed production, it had the effect of eliminating unnecessary camera and lighting repositioning. Jerry Fairbanks first began using a multi-camera technique to produce dramas outside of the network-advertiser establishment in New York. His early work in Hollywood television drama boasted an unprecedented production speed. In 1946 Jerry Fairbanks left Paramount Pictures, where he had produced “short subjects,” the newsreel or documentary material that played in cinemas before the feature film. Fairbanks is noted as one of the pioneers of independent telefilm production, in all of its hyper-efficient and factory-made qualities. He is the first known inventor of the “multi-camera” format for filmed production, though others would claim it as their own discovery. Fairbanks implemented this production method in the series *Public Prosecutor*, which aired on the Dumont Network beginning in 1951, though it was originally produced for NBC in 1948. Fairbanks’ method utilized both a theatrical setup and cinematic editing. *Public Prosecutor* did not so much utilize theatrical aesthetics, as it did a theatrical setup, which did not require repositioning of the camera. This technique simply placed three cameras around the performance, so that both sides of

a dialogue could be shot in simultaneity.¹⁰⁷ While Fairbanks' work was completely new to the programming landscape, many aspects of production strategy such as the three-camera setup had live television as an antecedent. But by utilizing aspects of a theatrical productive format, telefilm programs such as *Public Prosecutor* sacrificed the intimacy of television for logistical and productive efficiency.

Early film programming's primary departure from live television was in the treatment of time and space. Though both sides were both still bound to minimal interior set constructions, the filmed program could switch freely between settings. In *Public Prosecutor* minimal narrative constructions were sped along by the protagonist narrator. But unlike with the conditions of the live television, this narrator could move effortlessly from place to place. Fairbanks' program showed the protagonist addressing directly the audience at home from his office.¹⁰⁸ From this narrative parlor, it would dissolve into a shot of the detective out in the field. This simple evasion of the time-space restrictions found in live production, very much regressed into the critical definition of television as "radio with pictures."¹⁰⁹ While this instance of filmed drama was not a high-water mark showing the innovative possibilities for serial narrative in television, these changes in production were emblematic of a general shift in narrative concerns.

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio*, 54-55.

¹⁰⁸ *Public Prosecutor*, "Case of The Comic Strip Murder," Dumont Network, first broadcast 1951, produced by Jerry Fairbanks Inc., <https://archive.org/details/PublicProsecutor-CaseOfTheComic-stripMurder1948>.

¹⁰⁹ Arthur Knight, "Film and TV: A Shotgun Marriage?" *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 10, no. 4 (1956): 374; Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio*, 55.

Episodic Narrative and the Intimacy of Continuity

Early filmed programs took the form of episodic narrative, begin to establish the importance of seriality in television programming generally. In their maintenance of a cast of continuing characters these formats did indeed place an emphasis on story and plot. Although the idea of character, which critics sought to mark off as the territory of anthology drama, was obviously central to serial formats. From live to filmed programs the construction of character constituted different things. In live drama character was based on emotional and theatrical depth. The emphasis on plot, which proponents of live drama ascribed, was invariably linked to character, but of a familiar rather than literary basis. The interwoven nature of the returning character and plot-driven narrative provided filmed programming with the appeal of variations on the familiar. By the 1958-1959 season western shows had taken the top four spots in the Nielsen Ratings, while additionally holding on to seven spots total of the top ten. These programs show the extent to which episodic narrative took hold of the television viewer. But the attractiveness of returning characters and the continuance of their narrative lives became apparent even earlier as sitcoms began holding spots in the top 10 ratings, with *I Love Lucy* placing first in the 1952-1954, and 1956 seasons.¹¹⁰

In the establishment of episodic narrative as a widely accepted format, television's relationship to its domestic audience changed shape. Sitcoms especially provided new levels of consistency through time, so that week to week viewers knew what they could expect from a program. Though viewers were provided with the consistency

¹¹⁰ Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows 1946-Present*, 9th ed. (n.p.: Balantine Books, 2007), 1679-82.

of sponsor and title in teleplays, this did not provide the same affective promise. Additionally anthology drama could be seen to provide consistency in metaphorical terms. Bearing titles such as the *Kraft Television Theatre* or the *Philco-Goodyear Playhouse*, teleplays in both commerce and content conjured an image of a physical theater. This was precisely the teletheater's claim to consistency and to intimacy. These programs provided a space for real drama. But while the sitcom did not stake claim to a space of artistic entertainment, the format provided consistency both temporally and spatially. Episodic narrative allowed for increased audience investment in television content, as "the ability to slot a recognizable and familiar product into the weekly schedule helped attract and maintain steady viewership."¹¹¹ Both the characters who returned week after week, and their familiar domestic spaces in which they lived, begged the viewer to return.

Television programming placed an increasing focus on the space of the narrative over the space of theatrical representation. As such the line between narrative and reality in situation comedies became blurred, and in the eyes of audiences character and performer merged into each other.¹¹² The inseparability of character and performer was a result of the continuance of characters and their private worlds within the realm of domestic entertainment. With situation comedies television had found the ideal subject, creating a farcical meditation on domestic concerns. In discussing the writing process on *I Love Lucy*, producer-writer Jess Oppenheimer stated, "...we were looking for a situation where Lucy's and Ricky's problems and differences of opinion were the same

¹¹¹ Sconce, "What If? Charting," in *Television After*, 97.

¹¹² Spigel, *Make Room For TV*, 158; Susan Murray, *Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 154.

ones that most our audiences had encountered. We called it ‘holding up the mirror.’”¹¹³ Working within this methodology, the writers for this show simply exposed common disagreements and conflicts to the comic abilities of Lucille Ball, and her comic volley with the straight-laced Arnaz. The effect of the show, and those like it, was to neutralize the dramatic consequences of these conflicts. Lucy and Ricky were held in permanent conflict, as iterations of their personalities unearthed the same types of disagreements throughout the life of the series. Yet from within this state of conflict, the sitcom managed to create an image of itself and its characters that was wholly positive. As Erin Lee Mock examines of the effect of remembering the whole, she claims in reflecting upon sitcoms as “stories of happy homes without real problems, [viewers] are reading the spaces between the episodes, not the stories inside the bookends of normalcy, assigning to these spaces the continuity of a peaceful and loving household that is awaiting an ‘episode’ of interruption.”¹¹⁴ The narrative-temporal condition is what has helped define the circularity of sitcoms. The constant return to normalcy in these new narratives situated the television more deeply in the domestic context, which was inherent to the medium. The viewer was no longer taken out to the theater by television. Rather, the viewer was given a farcical and theatrical reflection of the very space from which he or she was viewing.

¹¹³ Oppenheimer, *Laughs, Luck*, 180

¹¹⁴ Erin Lee Mock, "The Horror of "Honey, I'm Home!" The Perils of Postwar Family Love in the Domestic Sitcom." *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 41, no. 2 (2011): 39.

Advertising Moves into Domestic Space

As the teletheater was closely defined by commercial presence and corporate image advertising, the decline of single-sponsor arrangements put advertising into a different role. Although *I Love Lucy* was sponsored singularly by Phillip Morris Cigarettes throughout the better part of the show's six-year run, the commercial presence in *Lucy* and sitcoms like it was distinct from that of live programs. With these shows being on film, production was removed from the space of transmission. As such commerce and content were not orchestrated as one live production, but originated separately and were edited together for broadcast. This physical separation changed television advertising, as the spatial intimacy of theater was no longer the emphasis of programming. The emphasis was lovable characters and their diegetic world. Advertising was no longer situated in a theater, but a fictional home.

Phillip Morris commercials on *Lucy* used a scoping technique to move between sections of the presentation much like in live programs. Though sitcoms mostly broke with the direct address of a host as the introduction to segments of the show, advertising on sitcoms often used the shows' characters in a sales pitch for the sponsor. With the already latent confusion over the character's lives and its close resemblance to the lives of the performers, this tactic became a clear site of representative confusion.¹¹⁵ Spigel claims that the root of this confusion was based in growing "extratextual knowledge" of the performers, in magazines and print ads, as episodic formats began to create forms of television stardom. Though Hollywood stardom embraced the character-types of famous actors, the sitcom star was ingratiated in their singular role. In the case of Lucille Ball and

¹¹⁵ Spigel, *Make Room For TV*, 158.

Desi Arnaz, these roles were closely tied to their civilian identities, as Desi and Ricky were both musicians and bandleaders, and Lucy and Lucille both, to different extents, aspired to be in show business. Though Lucy's dreams were hyperbolized, and made into the central comedic device of the series' narrative, the relationship between the characters was closely enough related to the relationship between the performers that the viewer's imagination easily merged the two.¹¹⁶

In curtain call style advertisements for Phillip Morris, after the closing of the narrative, the intermingling of roles was made unintentionally ambiguous. This coda typically showed Ricky and Lucy at the end of a long day enjoying a Phillip Morris cigarette leading into a discussion with the audience about the superior quality, and smoothness on the throat of Phillip Morris.¹¹⁷ Though they referred to each other by their

Curtain call
advertisement
for Phillip
Morris
cigarettes



character names, the performance was markedly subdued, and contained no studio laughter. These ads typically involved a comedic element, such as Lucy going into a safe

¹¹⁶ Spigel, *Make Room*, 158

¹¹⁷ "I Love Lucy cigarette commercials," video file, Youtube.com, posted by Lucia Love Mooney-Martin, February 14, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1ALtcAO69M>.

hidden behind a framed picture to get another carton of cigarettes, but these gags did not read as continuous with the comedic energy of the show itself. As Jess Oppenheimer noted about these pitches, Lucille was uncomfortable facing the audience as herself.¹¹⁸



Advertisements for L&M cigarettes at the end of the western series *Gunsmoke*.

The interstitial world created by these character associations did not blend seamlessly with the diagnosis, but presented a sense of normalcy to exit the show.

The curtain call advertisement was not particular to *I Love Lucy*, in fact many stars of filmed shows appeared regularly to pitch a sponsor's product, creating a conclusive interaction between narrative and commercial space. Two such examples are found on the dramatic programs *Dragnet* (NBC, 1951-1959) and *Gunsmoke* (CBS, 1955-1975). The iconic protagonists Sergeant Friday and Matt Dillon appear as the actors Jack Webb and James Arness in various behind-the-scenes settings to



¹¹⁸ Oppenheimer, *Laughs, Luck*, 205.

pitch Chesterfield and L&M cigarettes respectively.¹¹⁹ These two dramatic shows, painted their leading actors as creative professionals enjoying a cigarette on set at the end of a day. The curtain calls sought to normalize the sponsor's presence within the diagetic and extradiagetic space of filmed programs. By showing the performer at his exit from the story, these ads showed the return to daily life. As the actor leaves the narrative space, right before disappearing from view, the dramatic hero engages in the civilian pleasure of smoking. In this sense by accompanying the conclusion of the fiction, these ads suture the narrative world with the public world.

With the prominence of curtain call advertising, filmed formats can be seen as having established the central role of the diagesis in dictating how commerce functioned in television. The sponsor latched on to the aura of fictional figures, as vehicles of narrative intimacy. In utilizing the performer behind the narrative hero, advertisements signaled the return to daily life as a return to consumption. Susan Murray discusses the staging of salesmanship in diagetic commercials, with reference to the characters smoking Phillip Morris on *I Love Lucy*, and additionally *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show*, in which they discussed the different uses of Carnation condensed milk in the program's kitchen set. She notes that, "Although jarring for the contemporary viewer, these commercial spots were intended to naturalize the sponsor's product in the

¹¹⁹ "Four L&M Cigarette Commercials by James Arness as Matt Dillon," video file, YouTube.com, posted by Matthew Dillon, August 4, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3helMhWulvk>; "Chesterfield & Fatima Cigarettes End of 1951 Dragnets," video file, YouTube.com, posted by Desertdawn226, December 26, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWQOGAtjO20>.

star/character's domestic mise-en-scene."¹²⁰ With this naturalization of products Murray describes a function of mediating between fiction and reality; real products came to signify the realism of fictional spaces. This function of products in diagetic space brings to mind an equivalent device found in anthology drama, as discussed in Chapter 1. The commercial spot on *the United States Steel Hour*, in which agency spokespeople make use of reflecting upon, and inhabiting the set used in the previous act of the teleplay.¹²¹ Across drama and comedy, filmed production and live, the sponsor can be seen generally to have made use of diagetic space, and the audience's engagement with the fiction of television, to sell products. Although, the different narrative contexts that these formats provided, presented advertisers with much different affective conditions. In the case of US Steel, the advertisement proposed a stepping back from the fictional narrative into the firm reality of products and of steel specifically. But provided with figures, which audiences viewed as a *mélange* of diagetic and non-diagetic identity, products such as Lucky Strike and Carnation condensed milk proposed stepping into an ambiguous middle-ground of fiction and reality, unified by the symbols of mass production that could be seen on screen and in your local grocery store.

Murray continues by invoking Lynn Spigel's claim that, "Not only did this framing structure work as a graphic reminder that the story had been brought to our homes through the courtesy of the sponsor, it also served to make the advertiser's pitch appear to be in a world closer to the viewer's real life since the commercial message was

¹²⁰ Murray, *Hitch Your*, 155.

¹²¹ *The United States Steel Hour*, "Bang the Drum Slowly," episode 2, CBS, first broadcast September 26, 1956, directed by Daniel Petrie, written by Mark Harris, adapted by Arnold Schulman, accessed April 30, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPc9keZ1cl0>.

conveyed by stars who came out of their roles in the story to directly address the viewer at home.”¹²² In “naturalizing” sponsor’s products, these advertisements also functioned to normalize the presence of products generally. Although Spigel maintains the existence of a “gratitude factor,” which advertising agents aimed to uphold in the transition to multiple-sponsorship models, the fiction pervaded by episodic narratives could be seen to give way to embrace of commerce more generally.¹²³ The shift in advertising that Chapter 2 has tried to describe in terms of changing industrial relationships, is at this point in history on the precipice of realizing new economic conditions. The filmed programs described in this chapter, though inherently concerned with wider markets based on the easy re-distribution afforded to film, did not foresee the extent to which secondary markets could monetize content. Following the initial move into filmed formats, the television industry would come to realize the lasting value of television content. Film as a mode of recording provided a quality and durability that kinescope recordings did not. Additionally film as a mode of production ushered in the concept of the television “series” as the preeminent narrative form. Shows such as *I Love Lucy* created character-worlds that were not easily forgotten, in contrast to the flood of adaptations and stock productions that were recorded by kinescope.

The Rise of Syndication and a New Economic Imperative

Desilu Productions and its eponymous creators had risked everything to create *I Love Lucy*. Having to cover the additional cost of situating production in Hollywood, Desilu

¹²² *ibid*, 155-6; Spigel, *Make Room For TV*, 168.

¹²³ Sylvester L. Weaver and Thomas Coffey, *The Best Seat in the House* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993), 180.

retained the rights to the episodes.¹²⁴ Arnaz had envisioned being able to make back their investment by selling the shows in international markets.¹²⁵ But little did they expect that the lasting value of the series would show itself prominently in repeated domestic broadcasts alone. In 1955, after being the highest rated show 3 of its 4 years in existence, CBS bought out Desilu's stake in the series and began airing reruns on a separate night while the show continued to produce new episodes. In the fall of that year reruns ranked in the top ten, out-ranking original broadcasts of *the Honeymooners*.¹²⁶ This secondary window immediately proved the value of filmed programming in outliving live shows, showing the inherent value of episodic narrative in cultivating a vast body of stories with familiar characters and little to no barriers to entry. Having proven a lasting value beyond the initial broadcast, episodic narratives reshaped the economic arrangements of television production. With the move to independent production that had occurred as an assertion of network control over advertising, a new mode of financing production materialized. A system of deficit-financing came into existence, as syndication in secondary markets exposed the residual value of television content. The system that took shape operated by studios undertaking the cost of production, and licensing content to networks at a significantly lower cost. Realizing the profitability of secondary windows, the studio retained ownership of content, which could later be sold in syndication,

¹²⁴ Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio*, 67.

¹²⁵ Oppenheimer, *Laughs, Luck*, 143.

¹²⁶ *ibid*, 213-216

presenting pure profit for the remaining life of their programs. The studios were essentially put in the position of making investments on the durability of content.¹²⁷

This crystallization of the network-studio financial relationship, initiated by the shift in production from live formats in New York to filmed formats in Hollywood, further displaced advertising from the production of content. The incorporation of syndication into the television industry at this point in history creates problems for understanding how content is received, as it becomes diffused by another level of viewing contexts. Under deficit-financing, the historical view of this project becomes subject to the regeneration of content through time, and the difficulty of describing programs as temporally-specific historical texts. But this diffusion of content into a variety of viewing contexts, simultaneously says much about the unique state of television discussed up until this point. In this project we have examined the diminishing control of advertisers in the shaping of television content, and subsequently how they have reshaped their presence as financial benefactors to fit new modes of production. With this final shift in industrial practice, content and commerce enter into a fundamentally different relationship.

Following the initial distancing of advertising and production with the move to Hollywood, syndication opened up an economic system that was focused on repackaging content. In repackaging content, which is temporally removed from its actual inception and production, advertising was removed even further from a place of authority. Advertising's authority in television was linked to the production of content, and its role

¹²⁷ Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014), 97

in presenting itself as benefactor in original broadcasts. Despite the distancing of production and advertising in early filmed programming, companies such as Desilu were still under contract. Their obligations to the network and the sponsor led to the kinds of synergistic strategies such as curtain call advertisements. But this type of control over content, and its commercial context disappeared with the reuse of shows.

With the move to reproduction of content as a fundamental economic function, the role of advertising was dethroned from its position as gatekeeper to entertainment. With the regeneration of content programs simply existed, subject to secondary programming decisions; under syndication it was free to repeat and proliferate, and advertisers who bought time on a rerun were put into the role of placing similarly isolated material adjacent to it. Syndication, subverted the sponsor's direct association with content. The sponsor was no longer the exclusive proprietor of content, as networks began licensing re-runs from studios, and selling advertising time, wholly disconnected from the process and space of production. With the realization of the value of repurposed content, a new financial imperative evolved, in which advertising did not singularly fund the creation of programming.

The lasting value of television content is what fully ushered in a temporal logic of programming. This manifested the full and final extinguishing of qualities of liveness, immediacy, and intimacy, which advertisers had utilized to establish an assertive and personal presence within broadcasting. Content became king, and content was an expensive investment, inspiring makers to realize every last bit of residual value. With the fundamental restructuring of the economics of television, advertising played an essential but less integral role. Advertising revenues supported the network who licensed

content from studios on an exclusive basis at a reduced price. The studios would then reap the profits of the open secondary markets of local and international stations. By selling in a secondary market that did not require the exclusivity of original broadcast, studios could sell to a whole host of buyers. Additionally several developments expanded the interest in repurposed content. Audiences grew, as more and more people became television owners. As such programming schedules demanded more and more content. With expansion of distribution, the introduction of cable television, and the “multi-channel transition” as it is termed, the size of the secondary market provided even more opportunities for repurposed content.¹²⁸

In diffusing the economic forces of television commerce was thrust into a complementary role. Content and commerce became individual moveable parts, in a more refined system of targeting specific markets, anticipating narrative durability, and monetizing production. A 1959 rerun of *Dragnet* begins to show the fundamental dissolution of former advertising strategies, with this temporal expansion of broadcasting. After the program’s opening sequence, and the story’s introduction, the show cuts to a well-dressed woman’s face.¹²⁹ A voice-over announcer then introduces her as an opera star and explains that she only smokes Camel cigarettes. This advertisement consists of one uninterrupted shot, which lasts for 30 seconds. The ad is essentially a billboard. From there it moves to a one-minute ad for Dentu-Cream, then returning for the first act of

¹²⁸ Lotz, *The Television*, 139

¹²⁹ "Dragnet - Episode 18 The Big Seventeen w/commercials (1952)," video file, YouTube.com, posted by Joh Phe, November 19, 2015, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsqhYBxg4wU>.



advertisement for Camel Cigarettes on a 1959 rerun of *Dragnet*

Dragnet. This recording of the program with commercials shows a distinctly different pace and focus than original broadcasts. As early as 1959 commercial interruption began to resemble the overwhelming discontinuous barrage of quick commercial spots with little to no direct relation to content itself. This already appears as something more closely resembling *the commercials* rather than the antiquated and overly formal presentation of *a word from our sponsor*, or *this commercial message*.

The rise of syndication exposed a new format for which advertising would, again, have to redefine their strategies. This new format, a byproduct of the rise of filmed episodic narrative, was the rerun: in its creation the same format that had come to prominence in Hollywood in the mid-fifties. But in its generation the rerun presented itself as something new, for new modes of advertising. In advertising on reruns we can

see the discontinuity between commerce and content as a result of the commercial normalization, which began in sitcoms. By making advertisements for consumer goods a natural interruption voiced through the diagesis of sitcoms, filmed formats set the stage for a television landscape permeated by discontinuity.

*CONCLUSION**The Legacy of “Being There”*

Though this project has resided in discussion of advertising and sponsorship and its relationship to narrative space, contemporary analogy confronts a more difficult industrial context in which to delineate the role of commerce and content. A binary opposition between the two, which was visibly manifest at the starting point of this project, quickly became insufficient in describing the operations of this industry. Single-sponsorship’s unified productions quickly disappeared leading to a system that is essentially recognizable today. In many ways the point of conclusion of this project is also the very beginning of considerable expansion of commercial models in the television industry. The redefinition of advertising’s role, and the specialization of production, served the creation of more nuanced economic imperatives. The television landscape we see today is economically defined by revenue rather than simply advertising. The dawn of syndication marked the transition to a system in which content acted as monetized product rather than mere advertising vehicle. This is still how content functions today, but with advertising further marginalized by the disappearance of a controlled programming structure.

The Post-Network Era (roughly 1990-present) has been defined by the shift away from traditional “linear” forms of viewing. As “on-demand,” DVD, and personal recording options came into existence the framework of a nonlinear television system

came into view.¹³⁰ With the continued rise of subscription-services, a process that began with Home Box Office (HBO) in 1975, but has expanded with online-streaming providers such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon, we can see the construction of a near complete non-linear viewing environment. As various subscription and streaming services have begun to consume the television market, the central dichotomy presented in this project seems to have little to no relevance for contemporary study of television. As the object of television itself becomes an antiquated piece of furniture, supplanted by the centralized content providers of computer and mobile screens, television seems to have merged into a different medium entirely. The question we are left with is how do the spatial relationships of advertising and narrative persist from this definitive period of transition? Ultimately continued rearrangements of the television industry have left serial formats in place. As this format has provided extensive narrative worlds to viewers, the fundamental intimacy of television has been preserved even as non-linear contexts come to control access.

History Repeating Itself: Distributors Becoming Producers

One way of drawing this project into the future is to look at the industrial arrangements presently being redefined. In the way we have seen Hollywood studios carve out a space in television production, subsequently repositioning distributors and advertisers, we can see subscription services today increasingly moving from the singular role of providing content to the role of content producers. Distribution has been taken over by the nonlinear platform of online streaming, and, in establishing a position as licensees of content, has

¹³⁰ Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014), 8-12

moved freely into producing their own content. This expansion of online subscription-based distribution for many has signaled “the end of TV,” as its physical characteristics, linear flow, and commercial structure seem to have disappeared entirely. But surely what we call television is more than just the characteristics of its original viewing context. In terms of narrative format, television is still embedded in seriality. And though subscription-services-turned-television-producers have increasingly experimented with releasing an entire season or series at once, the serial nature of television narratives is left intact. These experiments let the viewer proceed through a series at their own pace, enabling the most intense degrees of binge-watching, but ultimately the serial format is still the chosen vehicle, and the chosen structure for packaging the massive bodies of narrative content that we have become thoroughly accustomed to consuming.

In many ways the shift that subscription television has initiated resembles the shift that occurred as a result of independent production, and a continuous trend that threatens advertising, forcing the industry to develop new methods. In the period this project examines, there was the perceived loss of the “gratitude factor.”¹³¹ With the introduction of the videocassette recorder (VCR), and the continued development of “time-shifting” capabilities leading to the digital video recorder (DVR), advertisers mourned the viewers’ ability to fast-forward through the commercial messages.¹³² Now headed toward total subscription-based television, where will the advertiser hawk their wares? Most likely they will have no trouble finding a place on the window behind, or the tab next door,

¹³¹ Sylvester L. Weaver and Thomas Coffey, *The Best Seat in the House* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993), 180.

¹³² Lotz, *The Television Will Be*, 168

where the viewer may take a much needed break from watching an entire season of *Orange is the New Black*.

The “Prime-Time Novel”¹³³

What remains unchanged is the predominance of serial narrative, and the fundamental role of syndication. The repetitive and circular interaction with “television,” as a result of these two interlocked forces, reproduce each other just as they reproduce our emotional attachment with extended narrative worlds. As syndication ushered in the preeminence of content as a dictating force of television’s development, the age of digital television clearly makes this situation more apparent. Similarly to the initial rise of syndication, we can see this rearrangement in distribution and consolidation of production under the authority of distributors. As such advertising again has taken residence in a more peripheral space within the television industry. But much like the original development of a discontinuous televisual flow, television viewers today are confronted with a similarly overwhelming rhythm of endless information.¹³⁴ This contemporary “flow” is not particular to “television,” but the narrative content we still loosely describe as television has taken a place in a preexisting interface of information where advertising plays an integral role in its existence.

What then is the future of television narrative? And what can we predict as advertising appears constantly marginalized by the rearrangement of production and

¹³³ Charles McGrath quoted in Jeffery Sconce, "What If? Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," 2004, in *Television After TV: Essays On a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 99

¹³⁴ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), 70; 87.

distribution, yet manages to not simply disappear as an industry. Though this project has dealt with the changing shape of advertising, the focus has always been the content that exists as a result of it. The transitions that this project has traced make it progressively easier to think of narrative as separate from advertising, yet television's association with intimacy has always been the legacy of this commercial structure. Though serial formats diminished the sponsor's personal presence, this narrative style proved to be a profitable systemized vehicle to organizing audiences. But with the ability to view content and commerce as isolated entities, it also becomes more and more difficult to define commerce through the binary identities that were visibly manifest in the period of single-sponsorship.

This project, in terms of television content, has traced the transition from live to filmed production formats. With this changing standard television came to define for the next fifty years how narratives were constructed and how they would operate in the market for content. The television "series" came to prominence, providing for the easy and habitual return to networks and timeslots.¹³⁵ At the dawn of television, characteristics of intimacy and immediacy underlined the essential quality of ephemerality that came with live production.¹³⁶ Though the transmission device of film began to chip away at this ephemeral quality, the programming structure still swept by, providing audiences with little control over the conditions of repeat viewings. Episodic narrative brought with it the sense that these narrative worlds continued their existence beyond the conclusion of the week's episode. The extensive narrative worlds developed by episodic and serial

¹³⁵ Ibid, 54.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 4; Amy Holdsworth, "'Television Resurrections': Television and Memory," *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 137.

formats, were permanent, despite the period of absence between narrative iterations. The intimacy of television characters extended beyond the screen. But ones glimpses into these worlds were still controlled by the programmatic structure of television. In this sense the ephemerality of television persisted, but in a new form. Rather than presenting once in a lifetime experiences, the constant flow of television, the intimate glimpses into narrative worlds, and the revisiting of a series as it continued into the following week, all combined to create a narrative landscape conducive to amnesia.¹³⁷

Raymond Williams, who has been marked as one of the fixtures of television studies, wrote in 1974 of his experience viewing American television. He famously coined the term “flow” in the context of the televisual system. Though many scholars have noted the uncertain definition of his concept, it has permeated critical discourse on television to this day, due to its natural resonance with the rhythm of television. Williams from a very early period, noted the strange construction and sequence of American television, and sought to understand the medium as more than its mere units of entertainment. His argument, elucidated through close analysis of programming schedules, and examples of stark sequential contrasts, essentially proposed that there was no intellectual basis through which to interpret the kind of sequence that television created. Williams’ perspective helps to show the period a decade removed from this project’s focus, as descending into discontinuity. But his scholarship from 1974 can also be drawn forward. As the landscape of television commercials has progressively formed an intensifying barrage of short sequential units, most sectors of contemporary audiences are familiar with the concept of the commercial break. But this perspective also confronts

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 137.

the coming age of an entirely non-linear viewing environment, as generations to come will have little to no concept of the television set nor the television channel, the typical spatial indicators that have existed from the outset.

A Brief History of the Soap Opera

In the soap opera we can see the origins of a serial dramatic structure that reigns today. This format is a descendent of the episodic comedies and dramas, which were coming to prominence at the close of the fifties, as these shows set the stage for continued narrative structures. For this reason I have often referred to such shows as “serial” in a formal rather than generic sense. But with the avoidance of episodic closure, the serial narrative creates a more intrusive cycle of repetition. Whereas episodic narratives provided a familiar experience with clear boundaries, the serial narrative simply progresses through time unconcerned with the sense of closure that divides television from reality.¹³⁸ Though Raymond Williams’ concept of flow referred to the intermingling of diageitic and non-diageitic content, in the soap opera we can see a rhythm or temporality that fits perfectly within a system of unending information. Television programming is at once ever-present and elusive. Serial television has historically presented vast bodies of narrative content. Yet in its resemblance to real life, poses the same problems of memory as we face in real life. Soap operas are discussed as uniquely capable of creating narratives that span up to 50 years.¹³⁹ For a viewer to inhabit that narrative is to create a quantity of personal

¹³⁸Jeremy G. Butler, "Notes on the Soap Opera Apparatus: Televisual Style and 'As the World Turns,'" *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1986): 53-4, JSTOR.
53-4.

¹³⁹ Abigail De Kosnik, "One Life to Live: Soap Opera Storytelling," 2013, in *How To Watch Television*, ed. Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2013), 355-6

relationships and personal events, which become real. They become lived events rather than viewed dramatic events.



In the 1980's soap operas began to inhabit prime-time line-ups. The format reached a level of success that was not confined to its typical female daytime audiences. As production values increased, and the format became increasingly populated by the very wealthy, they became fit for prime-time entertainment. Shows such as *Dynasty* (ABC, 1981-1989) and *Dallas* (CBS 1978-1991) set a standard for high-soap opera, which focused on wealthy businessmen and deceit. But the most notable moment in this period of serial narrative came when the first season of *Dallas* ended on a cliff-hanger in which lead patriarch J.R. Ewing was shot. Viewers had to wait until the next season for the revelation of his fate. This famously incited the buzzing question: "Who shot J.R.?" This

narrative device became a media event, showing the soap opera's infiltration of the lives of its audiences. Most notably the effectiveness of this device was rooted in the prime-time context that the soap opera had been fitted to. Before their ascendance, soap operas generally aired every day of the business week. But in moving to prime time they were placed in the typical network schedule, airing once a week, with a break in the series over the summer. Though prime-time drama today is generically removed from the term soap opera, their narrative worlds elicit a similar effect, placing a larger emphasis on the periods of absence. Rather than the daily continuation of narrative in the soap opera's original form, the prime time serial drama creates an insatiable desire for the return of the narrative.

As television programming has turned increasingly to serial narrative critical discussion often makes reference to the main purveyor of the format. This is the longest-living and most-mocked TV genre known as the soap opera. Shows such as *Mad Men* (AMC 2007-2015) invited this comparison, both in abiding by serial conventions of narrative, but also by making narrative conflict out of adultery, high-stakes business dealings, all assembled through a grid of idealized postwar interiors. Though *Mad Men* has a particularly clear association with the genre, this often serves to obscure the fact that most television drama since the turn of the century has abided by serial narrative structures. A show like *Mad Men* in particular, with the mundane nature of its dramatic conflict resembles the soap opera more closely, as episodes meditate on interpersonal relationships rather than advancing a firm singular narrative.¹⁴⁰ But practically all

¹⁴⁰ David Lavery, "From Made Men to Mad Men: What Matthew Weiner Learned From David Chase," in *The Essential Sopranos Reader*, ed. David Lavery, Douglas L. Howard, and Paul Levinson (n.p.: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 18.

television drama since *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007) has balanced on contemporary aesthetic and narrative divisions of public and private life. These tensions are heightened by the largely fragmented set-to-set movement, which has guided television narrative. The contemporary serial drama does not quite resemble the visual style or productive circumstances of the soap opera, as much as its narrative conventions, in being expanded through a framework of intervals reflect a temporal intimacy. Both in shows released by traditional television channels, such as *Mad Men* or *The Sopranos*, and shows that are released through streaming services, operate through an affective relationship of time spent together. With the ever expanding libraries of content that streaming services provide, these relationships serve as the economic imperative of television production. Even shows released before the transition to distributor-produced content, now exist in syndication on one platform or another. The contemporary dramatic series lives on in this user-controlled environment, waiting for another viewer to enter into its world, or for another viewer to reenter a world constructed through mutually lived time.

Thoughts on Finality

In my own experience I can remember several television events with strange clarity. I remember driving back from my brother's college graduation in the middle of Indiana. Arriving home in time for the series finale of *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010). I descended into my cold humid basement, leaving behind the sweltering spring day full of ceremony to fade away into the darkened evening of Sunday prime-time. It was May and the first and most forgettable year of my life in high school was coming to a close. The show of which I had consumed six seasons in the span of six weeks via Hulu was airing its final episode. A two and half hour long extravaganza in which roughly four thousand minutes of

mystery, presented in an episodic affront to expectations of resolutions, came to some final form. The show had gone nowhere and everywhere. It had quite literally been withheld from progressing forward toward a reasonable conclusion, by its insistence on going back in time, exploring the former lives of this band of castaways. But also, most controversially, at a point in the fourth season the island where the story unfolds physically traveled sideways in time. Despite the irresolute quality of the show, and the fact that I forced myself into the life of this show, compressing the five years in which people partook in this massive story of stories into one, I felt deeply saddened. I realized how much of the past six months had been consumed by this narrative. I imagined the viewers who had been watching the show from the beginning, who had on this night lost the friends who they had been with once a week for the past six years. Being fourteen at the time, and realizing that these years amounted to nearly half my life, it disturbed me.

With the characteristic elision of conclusions in *Lost*, I found myself more emotionally consumed by the death of the show than the physical death of the characters. I knew these characters were leaving my life, I knew exactly how long I had left to be with them. All it took to be reminded of this was to press the guide button on the remote. I had from seven to nine o'clock that Sunday night to be with these characters, with brief commercial interruptions to begin ingratiating myself back into some other kind of reality. It didn't matter whether they lived or died, found the kind of religious salvation that was increasingly a prominent subtext, or not. They fought, they cried, they made amends, and around ten to nine the characters all somehow ended up in a church. Television characters do not live in our memory like film heroes. They create lasting relationships, a series of personality traits tested against a vast body of experiences,

which ultimately prove their core character traits. They create a portal from reality to their mundane fictional worlds. Living life in simultaneity with these worlds creates the potential for real experiences of loss.¹⁴¹

In Steve Carrell's last episode on *The Office* (NBC, 2005-2013) titled "Goodbye, Michael," Regional Manager and protagonist Michael Scott finally leaves the Dunder Mifflin Paper Company for good. The forty-minute episode centers upon his impending departure, as he goes through the office saying his goodbyes, and checking the names of his employees off a list. Midway through the episode it is revealed, through the show's characteristic use of mockumentary monologue, that he actually intends to leave a day earlier than expected. This dramatic device, which is left largely unexplained, serves as the vehicle by which his process of saying goodbye is tragically expedited. And in the staff's ignorance we are shown the performance of daily routine combined with the omniscient awareness of finality. In an effort to savor his last day, he holds a meeting with a staff. When Michael quickly exhausts the practical excuses as to why they are there, he scrambles, performing his typical time-wasting antics. This subsequently alerts his co-worker Jim to the fact that he is leaving sooner than expected.

Michael and Jim meet privately in Michael's office. Jim hiding what he has perceived asks Michael out to lunch for his last day. He quickly reveals the information he has realized. But in saying the goodbye, which lets Michael cross his name off of his master list, their dialogue maintains the assumption that Michael is leaving the next day. Jim says that he can't wait to get lunch and tell him what a great boss he has been. Both

¹⁴¹ De Kosnik, "One Life," in *How To Watch*, 362

character's eyes well up with tears, behind the assumed reality, as they try to perform the continued normalcy of their daily interactions. On the surface it is business as usual, the continuance of their relationship, their professional world, their narrative world, and the continuance of our world.

The only person Michael is yet to say goodbye to, as he sees his cab pull up, is Pam, Jim's wife. Unaware of his early departure she is seen going into a movie theatre. Michael reaches the security checkpoint of the airport, and finally prepares to say goodbye to us, the viewer. This goodbye is ostensibly directed to the camera-crew, whose perspective we have followed for seven years. Our disbelief has been entirely suspended, as time has thoroughly acquainted us to this perspective. In a final self-reflexive move, Michael says: "let me know if this ever goes on the air someday." This point of conclusion, serves as a reminder that this world we have lived in was pure extended fantasy, as this camera crew has followed this cast of characters for seven years filming a documentary, that is yet to be directed toward productive ends. As Michael finally unleashes himself from the wireless microphone, that we now realize he must have carried through every interaction with us as the viewer, his voice disappears as he says his last words. As the camera crew watches him from the security checkpoint, Pam enters from the side of the frame, running after him, shoes in hand. The camera remains still as we watch their silent embrace just past our reach. We are viewing past the boundary of fiction into that real interstitial space of the airport. Michael Scott leaving the show, and Pam Beasley saying goodbye. Jenna Fischer, who played Pam, recalled in an interview, "the director just said, 'Jenna, it's not going to be mic-ed. Just walk up to him and say

goodbye to Steve. Just tell Steve how much you're going to miss him."¹⁴² With no dialogue heard these co-workers from both fiction and reality, exchanged words that were not confined by the diagesis of *The Office*.



The Office, "Goodbye, Michael," episode 21, NBC, first broadcast April 28, 2011, written by Greg Daniels, <http://Netflix.com>.

These are the moments, which help define our saddened departure from the space of television. To return to the object of focus, syndication in a digital television landscape, for a set price, provides for the free and full replaying of your life through television. In this sense television today provides what it always has, the ability to be transported. Though today, as serial narrative has taken hold, it is no longer enough to be transported to a discrete place, television must transport you to the narrative depths of another universe. Television provides what it has always provided: the experience of being there.

¹⁴² Kate Stanhope, "The Office Closes Its Doors: The Cast Spills on Spin-Offs, Steve Carell's Exit and Season 8," TVguide.com, last modified May 14, 2013, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.tvguide.com/news/office-oral-history-steve-carell-exit-1065648/>.

With the move to filmed formats in the 1950's this experience began to stretch the constraints of live ephemerality. With the rise of syndication this experience provided more and more opportunities to be there again. Finally provided with total control of television libraries we are free to relive the experience of being there, in fiction, in reality, in simultaneity, mediated through the amorphous screen that we know as Television.

Bibliography

- Adorno, T. W. "How to Look at Television." *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 8, no. 3 (1954): 213-35. JSTOR
- Allen, Robert C. "The Guiding Light: Soap Opera as Economic Product and Cultural Document" in *American History, American Television: Interpreting the Video Past*, edited by O'Connor, John E., and Erik Barnouw. New York: F. Ungar, 1983. 306-27.
- Anderson, Christopher. *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties*. N.p.: University of Texas Press, 1994. JSTOR.
- Barnouw, Erik. *The Image Empire: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*. Vol. 3. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Boddy, William. *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990.
- Brooks, Tim, and Earle Marsh. *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows 1946-Present*. 9th ed. N.p.: Balantine Books, 2007.
- Bretz, Rudy. "TV as an Art Form." *Hollywood Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1950): 153-63. JSTOR.
- Brunsdon, Charlotte. "Is Television Studies History?" *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 3 (2007): 127-37. JSTOR.
- Butler, Jeremy G. "Mad Men: Visual Style." In *How To Watch Television*, edited by Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell, 38-46. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013. JSTOR.

- . "Notes on the Soap Opera Apparatus: Televisual Style and 'As the World Turns.'" *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1986): 53-70. JSTOR.
- De Kosnik, Abigail. "One Life to Live: Soap Opera Storytelling." 2013. In *How To Watch Television*, edited by Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2013. JSTOR.
- Edgerton, Gary R. *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.
- Gitlin, Todd. "Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment." *Social Problems* 26, no. 3 (1979): 251-66. JSTOR.
- Goggin, Richard J. "Production Notes on the Television Version." *Hollywood Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1949): 129-35. JSTOR.
- Hey, Kenneth. "Marty: Aesthetics vs. Medium in Early Television Drama" in *American History, American Television: Interpreting the Video Past*, edited by John E. O'Connor and Erik Barnouw. New York: F. Ungar, 1983. 95-133.
- Hilmes, Michele. "The Television Apparatus: Direct Address." *Journal of Film and Video* 37, no. 4 (1985): 27-36. JSTOR.
- Holdsworth, Amy. "'Television Resurrections': Television and Memory." *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 137-44. JSTOR.
- Katzman, Natan. "Television Soap Operas: What's Been Going on Anyway?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1972): 200-12. JSTOR.
- Knight, Arthur. "Film and TV: A Shotgun Marriage?" *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 10, no. 4 (1956): 374-90. JSTOR.

- Lavery, David. "From Made Men to Mad Men: What Matthew Weiner Learned From David Chase." In *The Essential Sopranos Reader*, edited by David Lavery, Douglas L. Howard, and Paul Levinson, 17-22. N.p.: University Press of Kentucky, 2011. JSTOR.
- Lotz, Amanda D. *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014.
- Lynch, James E. "The Case History of a Live TV Drama." *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 11, no. 1 (1956): 83-93. JSTOR.
- Mock, Erin Lee. "The Horror of "Honey, I'm Home!": The Perils of Postwar Family Love in the Domestic Sitcom." *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 41, no. 2 (2011): JSTOR.
- Murray, Susan. *Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005.
- Newcomb, Horace. *TV: The Most Popular Art*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press / Doubleday, 1974.
- Nichols, Leland L. "TV Opens the Screen to New Playwrights." *Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1956). JSTOR.
- Opotowsky, Stan. *TV: The Big Picture*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1961.
- Oppenheimer, Jess, and Gregg Oppenheimer. *Laughs, Luck . . . and Lucy: How I Came to Create the Most Popular Sitcom of All Time*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999.

- Schreiber, Flora Rheta. "Television: A New Idiom." *Hollywood Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1949): 182-92. JSTOR.
- Sconce, Jeffery. "What If? Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries." 2004. In *Television After TV: Essays On a Medium in Transition*, edited by Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, 93-111. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Smythe, Dallas W. "The Consumer's Stake in Radio and Television." *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 6, no. 2 (1951): 109-28. JSTOR
- Sonstroem, David. "What Else Is Wrong with Television." *The North American Review* 251, no. 5 (September 1966): 26-27. JSTOR
- Spigel, Lynn. *Make Room For TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Stanhope, Kate. "The Office Closes Its Doors: The Cast Spills on Spin-Offs, Steve Carell's Exit and Season 8." TVguide.com. Last modified May 14, 2013. Accessed May 1, 2017. <http://www.tvguide.com/news/office-oral-history-steve-carell-exit-1065648/>.
- Stempel, Tom. *Storytellers to the Nation: A History of American Television Writing*. New York, NY: Continuum, 1992.
- Taylor, Ella. *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989.
- Wexman, Virginia Wright. "Returning From the Moon: Jackie Gleason, the Carnavalesque, and Television Comedy." *Journal of Film and Video* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 20-32. JSTOR.

Williams, Raymond. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. Hanover, NH:
Wesleyan University Press, 1992.