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## A Conversation With a New York Television Writer (Edward Adler)

Edward Adler

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A Conversation  
With a  
New York  
Television Writer





On the evening of March 18, 1977, Edward Adler met with the film students of Columbia College. Adler is one of the few remaining New York writers who has not migrated to Hollywood. He began in the "golden age" of television, authoring scripts for PLAYHOUSE 90, NAKED CITY, THE DEFENDERS, and recently completed a two-hour drama for CBS PLAYHOUSE.

This discussion with Mr. Adler was moderated by Anthony Loeb, Chairman of the Film Department. The text has been edited for clarity and length, and is the fourth in a continuing series of publications by the Columbia College Film Department. REVISITING THE 50's: THE BLACKLIST IN AMERICA was published in February, 1976, and is available upon written request.



**ANTHONY LOEB:** I am delighted to introduce you to Edward Adler, who is a dear friend. Many of you have met Eddie in his capacity as Screenwriter in Residence. His credits are numerous. He began in the “golden age” of television, writing for shows like PLAYHOUSE 90 and NAKED CITY. Recently, Eddie completed a screenplay with Buck Henry that they hope will go at MGM. Adler and I spent a year together adapting a book called SHOOT IT, from the novel by Paul Tyner. This screenplay was, in fact, intended for Al Pacino, before he became a star. The film never was made, at least our version of it. Eddie and I have shared a great deal together. We have been through the fire, as it were, and we still share a mutual respect. I guess that’s saying something.

**EDWARD ADLER:** It speaks volumes, especially in this business. Tony, I am delighted to be here.

**LOEB:** What is a screenwriter?

**ADLER:** He gets nervous a lot. He knuckles under to every godforsaken producer who’s got money to pay him. He does a very courageous thing — he faces a blank page. He treads where everybody fears to go. That’s what he does and that’s the end of my lyricism. Now for the reality. He goes broke six times a year. What are we going to talk about? Do we have a theme for the evening?

**LOEB:** The theme would come out of your experience. Why aren’t you a comedy writer?

**ADLER:** That’s what I write, comedy.

**LOEB:** You’re a serious writer who is funny.

**ADLER:** I don’t think funny. What can I bring you from New York?

**LOEB:** News.

**ADLER:** Daniel Melnick was just appointed world-wide head of Columbia Pictures. I haven’t seen him for years. He was a junior partner at Talent Associates. He was David Susskind’s partner, and went to Hollywood where you fail upwards. Teasing aside, Melnick was the energy behind STRAW DOGS. Without him there would have been no picture.

**LOEB:** He reads your material ultimately, doesn’t he?

**ADLER:** Yes, he reads your material. You can mention my name. If you’ve got any scripts, send them to Columbia Pictures — Dan Melnick, Columbia Pictures, and say, “Eddie Adler recommended that I send this.” And he’ll say, “A hopeless piece of drivel,” and it’ll become a picture. Two stories about Danny Melnick. I was once an editor on a series called N.Y.P.D., which he produced for Talent Associates, which was a half-hour cop show. I was the story editor on it. One night he came down for a story conference. We were at an old studio on Fourth Street, on the lower-east side of New York, which is a pretty seedy place. I had trouble with a script. It was about 11:00 at night and Danny came down. He was the executive producer on this series, and he ordered a chicken dinner.





*Edward Adler*

*Anthony Loeb*

Now who the hell's going to find a chicken dinner at that time of night? But the girl went out and got a chicken dinner. Anyway, the director and the writer are head to head. The writer says, "Well, how can I fix this script?" The director says, "OK, page one. We'll start with the title." They're really going at it, and Danny gets served his chicken dinner and says, "I said white meat! I mean, why are you bringing me chicken wings?" He lifted up the meat and threw it against the wall. The chicken is still there, on the wall, ossified for posterity. Whenever you get hungry for ossified

chicken, go to Fourth Street, right off Third Avenue on a stage upstairs.

Danny Melnick is one of your young, more progressive studio heads. I was out on the coast about three or four weeks ago. We were involved in this big writers negotiation. I'm the head of the negotiating committee for the East Coast Screenwriters Guild. So we were out there for what we call "around the clock negotiations." "Cut to the clock, fellas." Transition. Gotta have transitions. Talk about conflict . . . and character. The trouble with that strike is that it was all character and no conflict.



**LOEB:** Who had character?

**ADLER:** I had character. I go back to the old left-wing labor movement days of the 1930's. I knew we were dealing with a monopoly industry. It was labor versus management. With writers making \$500,000 a year out there, it's hard for them to get a fix on what side of the table they're sitting on. Go uptown, a bigshot comes in, "Hi, Bob, sit over here." The guy makes half a million for one screenplay. If you ask for a demand that may be a little too abrasive, Bob goes, "Cool it!" He doesn't want to shake the boat.

**LOEB:** What kind of writing do you do?

**ADLER:** I was a born novelist. I was contaminated by film. I'm a screenwriter and a television writer. I've been making my living like that for the last twenty-five years. I've written twenty-one unproduced screenplays. Some of them are brilliant. Some of them are utter drivel. Some of them are mediocre. For one reason or another, they haven't been produced. The best screenplay I ever wrote wasn't produced because Warner Brothers went bankrupt and was bought by Kinney. Kinney was subsequently bought by Fairchild Morticians, which is where my screenplay wound up — in a coffin. That's *THE PROXY*.

**LOEB:** It was just after he read *WAITING FOR GODOT*, so this is a *GOD-FATHER* that has peculiar turns in it.

**ADLER:** Actually, it was *THE GOD-FATHER*, before Puzo. You've taken on a new meaning for me. You understood it! Anyway, I wrote a film with Milos For-

man which is now again stirring up some interest at Twentieth. It is called *BULLET PROOF*. Just as Milos was shooting *TAKING OFF*, that Buck Henry starred in, I was writing this film. The money was in the bank, we had everything scouted, we had the production people set up, the picture was cast, and Milos went to bed and took a long nap for four months. He was terrified. I find many directors have this kind of — trauma. It must be a kind of directors syndrome. There wasn't any one moment when we could sit down with him and find out exactly what was frightening him about the project. So we lost the actors, the crews, the money, and the commitment, so that the picture was never made. I wrote, with Tony's immeasurable help, a script for David Susskind called *SHOOT IT*, which George C. Scott was going to direct. We went through any agony of revisions — it was over a year. Around that period, when we finally finished that script, — we had Al Pacino — we found out that Susskind never owned the basic rights to the material. Scott didn't know that Susskind never owned the book. The option ran out, etc.

**LOEB:** Talk about what you've produced.

**ADLER:** Well, I produced two sons.

**LOEB:** What about this thing, *THE ANDROS TARGETS*?

**ADLER:** *ANDROS TARGETS* is the first one-hour, filmed television production being done in New York since *THE DEFENDERS*, I think. The story editor is Jerry Coopersmith, an old friend, who



asked me to do an episode. I also did a GIBBSVILLE several months back. Frank Gilroy wrote the pilot for that one. The William Jersey feature, which I wrote, was just finished. It's called THE LITTLE WARS and takes place during the Revolutionary War. It's a non-heroic story about a combat platoon in Westchester County in New York state. It's like a story of GI Joe during the Revolution.

I work a lot in television. TV is remunerative, but it is a consuming machine. If you're a producer, you get an order, say, for thirteen episodes — and they always give the order the day before the series is supposed to go on the air. So you're always late in starting, and it's deadly. It's an unreal commitment in your life, done by mob hysteria. It has nothing to do with writing and it has nothing to do with picture making, as I prefer to think of it.

THE LITTLE WARS is a miracle of coherence. Bill Jersey, the documentary filmmaker, is shooting it. The production money was put up by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and it won over 11,000 submissions, I'm proud to say, from all over the world. As Tony said, I've done all the shows from the so-called "golden age" of television — PHILCO PLAYHOUSE, KRAFT, PLAYHOUSE 90. I've written episodic television. The only thing I haven't done is daytime drama. I have never written soap operas. Anybody have ambitions to write soap operas? None? Good. I'm glad to hear it. When you write a script for a daytime soap, you always put in every

script that you want the actors to count to ten before they read their lines. In other words, you come in and you say, "Hello, Eddie . . . (one, two, three, four, five) . . . "Why Tony, are you back in town?" With the soaps, write in non sequitur and write simplistically. In other words, if you conceive bad characters, they're bad — I mean, they've got to be **bad!** Don't have a bad character say anything that is fairly human or decent, because it perplexes the great unwashed audience out there. Who watches soaps? You have to understand that the staple revenue for network television is daytime programming. There is enormous amounts of money to be made. They produce five half-hour shows on tape every week for half the price of one half-hour of prime-time film.

**QUESTION:** Is that why they don't care if prime time is so bad, because they get all the money from the soap operas?

**ADLER:** Prime time suffers because of a number of complex reasons. They simply don't know how to read their own data anymore in network television. They bend to every conceivable pressure — from government pressure to private interest groups. Last year they said, "Too much sex and violence," so this year it's going to be soft family-type shows. That's how THE WALTONS got on. Next year people will get bored with soft family-type shows and we'll go back to the cop shows. Programming is not done by content, it's done by demographic experts who supposedly have their fists on the pulse of America. That's how programming is designed. But the





recent development, the recent success of *ROOTS*, has absolutely blasted everybody out of their minds in New York, where all these decisions are made, because here we have serious drama. You might say some of the episodes were good and some were not. The important thing is that *ROOTS* has revolutionized conceptual programming. In other words, we will move away from the series-type programming and go towards what they call "the mini-series." They're buying up novels for the mini-series which comprise eight-part, twelve-hour shows, which I think is a good idea.

**LOEB:** Do you have to write a treatment for these things, the mini-series?

**ADLER:** Yes, you have to write what they call a "Bible," or a long story projection. I just finished one for CBS based on

a book of which they're going to shoot three, two-hour pictures. It's a novel called *THE DEAD IN GUANAJUATO*. Six hours. I mean, that represents two and a half — three million dollars worth of production. It will run on three consecutive nights, like Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. It's sort of a *GRAND HOTEL* format set in the United States Embassy in Mexico City, with some interesting stories and some very interesting characters. It's political, with a lot of melodrama, and it's adventurous, espionage going on. There's some hanky-panky stuff going on between the two governments, there's a big oil ripoff in it — elegant trash, that's what it is. "ET" we call it. "Call Adler for the ET's."

What I just delivered to them before I came out here was a detailed step-outline. They are doing twelve hours on Irving Wallace's book, *THE WORD*, which is about the Bible. So in that case, the television writer brought in a "Bible" on the Bible. What's really horrifying about it is this. They bought Irving Wallace's best seller, *THE WORD*, for about \$200,000. They went to Dick Berg who is a producer at Universal, and they said to Berg, "Develop this for a ten- or twelve-hour mini-series." So he said, "Great." He hires Josephs. Josephs sits down to write "the Bible," and in the meantime, somebody at the network, who decided that they ought to get this fantastic book, says, "I think we ought to read it." So they call up a battery of synopsisers who are real, living, human people, and they have the novel synopsisized so that when Josephs' "Bible" comes in, they can un-



derstand what he's talking about. So they get the synopsis. And I know the girl who synopsisized it, and she's wonderful. It's a discipline, synopsisizing a book of that size. It's about nine and a half pounds. Josephs' "Bible" comes in and they hire Shirley to make a synopsis of his "Bible" so they know what goes on in the synopsis of the book. What am I going to tell you? If you want to remain in this business, it's your own fault. Go in with your father. The furniture store's better. But I love it. It's a chronic agony that I wouldn't know what to do without.

**QUESTION:** How can an unknown screenwriter get into the industry and make the necessary contacts?

**ADLER:** What you have to do is write a screenplay. Develop some material in which you have confidence. Get other people to read it, and if they agree with you that it is up to professional standard, it is time to find an agent. Do not send unsolicited material to studios or producers. I say this on a personal level and as an officer of the Writers Guild of America. Do not send unsolicited material unless you send it to agents who have readers, who accept unsolicited material. I'll send to Tony xeroxed copies of a list of agencies that the Writers Guild puts out, on the East and West Coasts — independents and large companies who accept unsolicited material. Wait, hopefully, for some response. It will get read, and if there's anything in it you will be contacted. You'll just have to trust a particular agent to respond to you and to help define where the markets are.

**LOEB:** Even if they don't think the script is saleable, if they think you have talent, they'll call you.

**ADLER:** Yes, on the basis of the script you wrote, they may recommend you. It's not so true with theatrical motion pictures — features — but it's true in television. The need for writers is enormous. The need for scripts is enormous. As you know, that machine is a cosmic vacuum cleaner. It just sucks up material. Television goes twenty-four hours a day now.

**QUESTION:** Why doesn't the price go up if there's so much demand?

**ADLER:** You're a good union man. We need you. The price, you mean, in terms of what the writer gets?

**LOEB:** How much does a writer get — the minimum — on an hour show?

**ADLER:** An hour episodic show now pays a television writer a minimum of \$8,000. KOJACK, for example, would pay \$8,000, minimum.

**LOEB:** That's a minimum. What do writers normally get?

**ADLER:** There's no such thing as "new" writers any more. It used to be where a producer had the prerogative of hiring you "off the wall," as they say, as a first-time writer. He could give you \$4,500 because it was the first script you wrote. We had it built into our minimum basic agreement that if you wrote two or more scripts, \$4,500 was your basic fee plus a \$1,500 bonus, which gave you \$6,000. But our going rates have now become our minimums. We have a very



good contract. When you write for television and the series goes into syndication, into reruns, our residual percentages are based on our minimums, which have now gone up like 31 per cent. For instance, if you wrote a KOJACK now, under our new contract, and got \$8,000, you will get 90 per cent of your original fee for a residual. So you'll get \$7,200 on a rerun. And remember, prime time is defined as September 1 to May 30. The seasons are getting shorter. That ain't bad money. That's \$15,000 which you've already earned on a one-hour script. This guy, Jerry Coopersmith, who I mentioned, the story editor on ANDROS TARGETS, has written thirty-seven HAWAII FIVE-O's. His residual participation in those scripts alone is worth close to three-quarters of a million dollars.

**QUESTION:** How do you tell a good agent from a bad one and when do you join the union?

**ADLER:** You can join the union any time now. We've opened up our books. You can apply before you sell. Say I'm assigning a script for you to write. You could join the union while writing. In other words, before the screenplay is finished, you would join the Guild because of the various protections and coverages it affords. We have one of the best health and pension plans in the country. The studios are contributing 9 per cent of your original fee, on every job you get, into a pension fund. So if Bob Towne makes \$500,000 on a screenplay, \$45,000 goes into his retirement fund.

**LOEB:** Towne wrote CHINATOWN and SHAMPOO.

**QUESTION:** What are the Guild fees?

**ADLER:** The Guild fee is \$250 to join. And the dues are 1¼ per cent of your gross earnings per annum.

**LOEB:** That's opposed to the Directors Guild, whose last fee was about \$3,000. If you get a commitment to direct a show on television, you have to join the Guild. To me, what is interesting about the Writers Guild is that there is a sense of democracy, of idealism. It is open. The Directors Guild is closed, essentially.

**LOEB:** How do you tell a good agent?

**ADLER:** You can't. No, you can't really generalize like that. There are good agents. I have a good agent.

**LOEB:** Then a first-time writer has no choice, really.

**ADLER:** No, you have to trust him. You have to understand that it's very difficult for agents to really nail a job for you. An agent can recommend you on the basis of what he sees in your work. If you're a new writer, here's the way it works both in features and in television. After the producer buys the rights to a property, a book, say, he will start calling agents all over the country and say, "Who have you got that can do a submarine story?" Producers are prone to typecast writers just as they do actors. In the business, there are writers who are known as action writers, or there are genre writers — comedy writers, soft writers, melodrama writers, etc.



**LOEB:** What are you?

**ADLER:** I'm the "pushcart peddler."

**LOEB:** Susskind said to me, "I know who should write this script, SHOOT IT," and he mentioned Adler, the "pushcart peddler."

**ADLER:** Right. Adler the "pushcart peddler." You see, I was born on the lower-east side. I came from a working class family. So naturally, they presume I'm an expert on the cops, the junkies, that kind of element. If you can write comedy, or the networks think you can, do it, you will be at a premium, and make lots of money. But you really have to think funny. You have to learn the technique of constructing visual jokes. Real comedy primarily comes out of character. They're not one-liners. That's why some of the shows, the "sit-coms" you see, are so awful, because it's just one line on top of another. The shows which really last are character shows: MARY TYLER MOORE, ALL IN THE FAMILY, stuff like that. Those are character shows.

**QUESTION:** Are you working more through your agent or on your own?

**ADLER:** I get calls directly from producers, from studios, from networks. My agent is very good — a woman, Susan Neremberg. She negotiates tremendous deals. She constructs my deals for me. The reason I know she's so good is because all the producers, all the networks, hate her so much. The more an agent is hated by management, the better she is.

**LOEB:** The producer is not supposed

to approach you directly, is he?

**ADLER:** They should go through agents, and with new writers, they like to do that, but not with old-timers. As a matter of fact, I got called last week. They're thinking of doing STUDS LONIGAN. Reginald Rose is going to do four hours and we're talking about me doing the other four hours of this great American classic. But I hear they're getting nervous because somebody read the book and they consider it a working class Irish novel, and they think maybe it's vulgar. So I don't know. That came through the agent. My agent was called directly from Hollywood to see if I would be interested in doing it, and I am very interested in doing it because it's terrific literature and I think the American people should see it.

**QUESTION:** What can a TV writer do about censorship of his work? I know Harlan Ellison, some years ago, criticized TV writers for being gutless, and he said that when the Guild was negotiating for various demands, they put censorship at the very bottom of the list. What can a TV writer do, if anything, about that?

**ADLER:** Harlan Ellison is right and wrong, I think, because the battle is endless and almost hopeless because we're working against a corporate monopoly. Let me tell you what happened in this last strike, which almost destroyed the union. All of this speaks to the issue of writers controlling their own material, theatrical films, especially. First of all, as far as I know, we're the only country in the world where the writer does not own his mate-



rial. If you write a television play in Europe, you would be entitled to the copyrights and all separated and secondary rights to your material. In America you are not. If you write a script — if you write a KOJACK — that script belongs to Universal Pictures. They own it outright. The reason they own it is they have what is known as “leasing rights” to it. If this was not so, their entire tax base would be destroyed. They could no longer exist as a company. And, get this, if you owned the material, you could not, by law, be a member of a union — a trade union. Therefore, if all of us owned our material, we could no longer call ourselves a union, and the power of strike would be taken away from us. This happened to the Dramatists Guild of America. Playwrights own their own material, but they cannot strike. This very issue was adjudicated in court nine years ago. It was ruled that if the Dramatists Guild chose to opt for ownership so that they could exercise artistic control, then they could no longer be perceived as a union for writers.

In a related matter, the Writers Guild has for years said that making a film is a collaborative effort. It is not the work of a single person. For years, in our demands to the producers, we have put forward provisions which stipulate that you cannot say, Mike Nichols’ CATCH 22, or John Frankenheimer’s BLACK SUNDAY, or Roman Polanski’s GENOCIDE, or whatever. That’s called a possessory credit. We tried to get the possessory revoked since it does not fairly reflect the writer’s contribution to a film. Buck Henry

wrote the original screenplay for CATCH 22, but the credits read something like, “An Avco Embassy Presentation of Joe Levine’s Production of Mike Nichols’ CATCH 22.” That’s how absurd it gets. Buck Henry’s name appeared somewhere down the line, diminished by all of these other credits.

While we have been fighting to eliminate the possessory, the Directors Guild has fought for years to gain it, because they claim that you would not sell the picture unless the director’s name was attributed to it. So in this last strike, after trying unsuccessfully to eliminate the possessory credit, we said to the producers, “OK, if you say, Mike Nichols’ CATCH 22, you must immediately, under the title say, Mike Nichols’ CATCH 22, written by Buck Henry.” They wouldn’t accept that and we fought publicly in one of the most nightmarish episodes of inter-union fighting I’ve ever seen in my life. Mel Brooks got up and said, “The writers are trying to legislate fame.” You can’t legislate fame. He made a complete ass of himself. Take a look at a Mel Brooks film. Take a look at any promotion, especially in printed advertising. You see his name in nine places, in four-and-a-half square inches.

**LOEB:** To what degree is it a directors medium?

**ADLER:** It’s a directors medium if the director writes his own screenplay, produces and directs his own film. It is for Bergman.

**LOEB:** The director is the last man.



He's the guy with control. There is something to that.

**ADLER:** Well, here's the issue. If it is a directors medium, then Harlan Ellison's argument about writers having artistic control holds no weight.

**LOEB:** It does in his field, though. The literary field is different. Here, in film, we're writing, so to speak, for "translation" to another medium — from the page to the screen.

**ADLER:** Where is the director when the page is blank?



**LOEB:** Waiting for the page. Waiting to "collaborate," as it were.

**ADLER:** All of you must understand this as it relates to television, particularly.

It is extremely naive to write a television program for lots of money under enormous pressure, in collaboration with the producer or story editor, and expect a purity of authorship where there really is none. Out on the coast for this last negotiation, I met a young writer by the name of Larry Brody who wrote one hundred one-hour scripts this past year. One hundred scripts! He makes enormous amounts of money. He is writing in a commercial medium. There are certain editorial and content guides, prohibitions, that are laid down to you before you walk in. If you are going to bend your aesthetic, so to speak, to write in television, you have to acknowledge that it's purely a commercial medium that may have very little to do with your talent. The medium exists to sell products. Any talk about censorship, really, is a little bit self-serving. On the other hand, to illustrate your point about Ellison, I wrote a Civil War script for PLAYHOUSE 90. It was sponsored by Chrysler. The script came back with every reference to Lincoln deleted. Or, better yet, Loring Mandel wrote a script at the same time JUDGEMENT AT NUREMBURG was being made. Mandel's was done first, on television. He wrote a story based on this family that came out of Auschwitz, and it was sponsored by the Brooklyn Union Gas Company. Now you know what's coming. Gas crematoriums were not to be mentioned because it was putting gas in a bad light. Or here's another one, even better. Westinghouse wanted to do a remake of a film with Ronald Coleman. The film was called THE LIGHT THAT FAILED, about a painter that was going



blind. The producers and the packagers would not change the title, and Westinghouse pulled out of sponsoring the program. The stories are endless. But those are not the real censorship problems you're talking about. Today, I think, you'll find TV is freer, more open to ideas.

**QUESTION:** Why does television allow itself to be pushed around so easily by these people? It's a gigantic industry.

**LOEB:** You're talking NETWORK talk — "We're madder than hell and we won't take it."

**ADLER:** Well, you can imagine what Paddy Chayefsky has been through in his life. Paddy started with all of us in the days of live television. As you know, his first big break-through was MARTY, and his feelings about television run deep, as is reflected in that picture. My argument with the picture is that Paddy didn't go far-out enough. He was too kind. My problem with the film is that he had William Holden as the central character, and he didn't belong there. That character shattered the tone of the satire. It's Paddy's New York-Jewish, liberal instincts coming out in full force. He has provided a polemic for arguments that we all know too well. As a whole, I responded to it, though. Who wouldn't? We mustn't forget Richard Salant, the head of NBC news, who screened the film and stormed out yelling, "It's the sickest goddamned picture I've ever seen."

**QUESTION:** You were talking about Robert Towne's \$500,000 for CHINATOWN, or the people that did LUCKY

LADY, the husband and wife team who demanded incredible sums of money. I was wondering if you think that kind of high bidding — from screenwriters, along with directors and actors, asking for such incredible wages — is kind of creating a monster.

**ADLER:** The producers, who have to pay the money, say it is. They are loathe to continue paying excessive "above the line" salaries. The days of Barbra Streisand, Robert Redford, Steve McQueen, Dustin Hoffman, Jack Nicholson, and maybe now, Robert DeNiro getting a million and a half before they go in, plus expenses for themselves and their entourages, families, friends, and relatives in Russia, is over with.

**QUESTION:** Demanding heavy money before the film's produced, doesn't that mandate a certain kind of movie that must be produced in order to recoup?

**ADLER:** Yes it does. It's a severe restriction. It tends to frighten the producers into making what they perceive is a "secure" picture, the kind of media event like THE DEEP, that can be merchandized. There is more room now than ever for the small independent picture that is not encumbered with massive budgets.

**LOEB:** Like AMERICAN GRAFFITI, which is one of the top five or six top grossing pictures of all time.

**ADLER:** And ROCKY is going through the roof.

**LOEB:** Avildsen made ROCKY for just under a million, I believe. He's a young,



New York director who is adept at low-budget picture making. The most important director today must be Coppola, whose forte was low-budget films before he emerged with *THE GODFATHER*.

**ADLER:** It's very hard to approach the studios with a small picture. They lean toward the "high risk venture" which will have enough glitter to bring people out of their homes. There is a whole bag of complex reasons why people don't go to the movies as often as before. We used to go to the theater as kids. I used to go two or three times a week because there was a neighborhood theater and that's what you did. People stay home now and watch television. The thing that the feature film people are afraid of is that a program like *ROOTS* will really put the kibosh on theater-going. Imagine keeping a hundred and thirty million Americans home for eight consecutive nights. The box office returns were zilch. Nobody went to the theater that week. People were saying, "Well, the weather was cold," and all kinds of things. But no, they stayed home and watched television.

**QUESTION:** It's a major investment for a person. You have to make a real decision. If you think it might not be good, and you go and see it and put four dollars down and it was just OK, you really feel cheated.

**ADLER:** Now you go to the theater on the basis of what you read and so forth. But this never used to be. That's why Hollywood, at one time, before television, produced 700 pictures a year.

**LOEB:** A lot of those were "B" pictures. We remember only the cream of an enormous output of relative trash.

**ADLER:** The television action series today has replaced the "B" picture.

**QUESTION:** Speaking of "B" pictures, wouldn't you rather, then, go to American International or New World if you were just starting?

**ADLER:** New World makes a certain kind of picture. So does American International. If you have their kind of material, yes. Anyway, I'm speaking to you primarily as a writer. Directors and actors are suffering as a result of the relative lack of production, but writers are prospering because development never stops. There's a curious panic reversal and I don't know what the hell it is. The worse business gets, the more money goes into developing projects. And new projects means material has to be written. There is always what they call "front money" in the business — money to pay a writer to write and to develop an idea, to buy a book, adapt it, get a treatment going, and so forth.

**LOEB:** There's always an angle. Find a creative lawyer who's going to get arrested.

**ADLER:** I'm with him. We'll shoot it in Attica or Sing Sing.

**LOEB:** The thing is, if you want to make a picture, you make the damn picture, I'm convinced.

**ADLER:** Absolutely. There's a young writer I know who's a very talented, fre-



netic personality. His name is Roger Swaybill. He's a very good action writer. He's terrific. He was brought up watching television. His head is full of unbelievable action images. He just finished writing a film and managed to raise the money by himself, in New York. Something like three and a half million dollars. He raised that kind of money, got himself a good director, and has a picture that's going to be released by Twentieth. It's something like THREE DAYS OF THE CONDOR — that kind of story, only with more surprises to it. It will be shot totally on location — no interiors, no sets, no stages. Roger raised the money himself. He's going to produce it himself and it's going to make him a fortune. Plumbers have invested in it, electricians have invested in it, cab drivers have invested in it, and that's how he did it. He sells shares in the picture. If you've got a script you really believe in, please proceed. But then you stop writing and you become a hustler.

**LOEB:** Poison everywhere.

**ADLER:** Contamination. Writing is at a high peak of demand. You must continue to write.

**QUESTION:** What percentage of new film work is solicited from the studio or from the network, and what percentage is made from an original idea, an original screenplay?

**ADLER:** In spite of what you hear, it's very hard to sell an original script written on speculation — unless it's something really special. There are several young writers now both on the East Coast and

the West Coast who write originals. In other words, they are known, and they are called by producers for original material.

**LOEB:** ROCKY was an original screenplay and AMERICAN GRAFFITI was an original screenplay, done by relatively young writers.

**ADLER:** I think ROCKY is a good thing because they're starting to look at what they love to call "small pictures" again. So scripts having that kind of a story will get a reading. In television, however, I was told several weeks ago by the head of programming in New York of CBS, Oscar Katz, that last year they got twenty-six thousand submissions. And I think they bought two hundred for development. They get stuff mailed to them from Tibet, for Chrissake. I am including presentations and also unsolicited scripts for pilots.

**QUESTION:** Take a television series. Are most episodes solicited by a producer?

**ADLER:** Yes. Material is solicited by producers from writers by way of the agent. The editors and the producers have certain agents they call on and certain writers they call on. If it's a producer out in Hollywood, he will use mainly West Coast writers who do episodic writing. A new writer can't get a hearing unless he's brought in by another writer who has written successfully for the show, or an agent they know. And it will be done in a step deal. They'll listen to what you have to say, and if you've got an interesting story and they think you can do it, they'll



give you an outline to do first, for which they'll pay \$2,260. That's step one. If they like the outline, they'll pick up the option and you'll be commissioned to do a teleplay.

**LOEB:** You still have cutoffs though, don't you?

**ADLER:** I haven't had a cutoff in five years. Except on this series I was talking about, the mini-series. After doing the outline for a six-hour show, I could get cut off. If, for example, they feel it offends Mexico or the Mexican military, or it's too expensive, they can cut me off at outline. But the way my deal is constructed, they probably will go to screenplay because my guarantee is high. They might as well

get a script out of me after all that work.

**QUESTION:** How do you discipline yourself? Do you write every day?

**ADLER:** Now we're down to basics. I write from 9:00 until about 2:00 every day, seven days a week, except when I'm here in Chicago. I've been known to write an hour's script in two days. I've also written an hour's script in two months. I sometimes produce only one or two pages a day. Sometimes I do twelve pages of script a day. The outline that I just finished is done in narrative. In fact, it's a novel written in dramatic terms. I was doing twelve, thirteen, fourteen pages a day because I like to write narrative.





**LOEB:** He's a beautiful prose writer.

**ADLER:** That's why all of my screenplays haven't been produced. "A marvelous prose writer." For instance, "I think that I shall never see . . ." So I write every day, and when I finish a script my energy is pretty low. I'm a low energy person, a "LEP." When I finish a script, I'm wiped out. Have Tony tell you some stories about us working together. They almost called the ambulance once. They thought there was blood-letting going on.

**LOEB:** He used to come to the office without his glasses. He wouldn't have his glasses and he'd sit down and say, "Tony, I can't work. I don't have my glasses." He lived in the Village and we'd end up walking to get them. I was in good shape after working six months with Adler.

**ADLER:** A funny story about glasses. It's very Freudian that I leave my glasses home when I work in the studio. I'll tell you a funny story about my glasses. There was a series on in New York with Burt Reynolds about ten years ago called *THE HAWK*. Burt was sort of an Indian detective, a Seminole. And he read his lines true to character. At that time, he couldn't say a word with more than three syllables in it. You'd have to write a lot of, "Hey . . . where . . . who . . ." That's the dialogue that Burt did best. But he had a certain charisma, and the series began to build and get a lot of numbers. We were getting big ratings. I have a reputation in the business of being very fast on rewrites. They call me "the fireman" as a matter of fact, as well as the "pushcart peddler." Most series

are shot in the summertime, especially in New York. That's when you get all the daylight and everything, and you can shoot on the streets. You know the New York "look." It's terrific. We had a great financial arrangement. They were paying me great bread and I used to phone in scripts. They'd call me. "Eddie, we're in big trouble. This scene doesn't work." I'd say, "Give me their names, the characters. OK. What's the intent of the scene? What's the situation? OK. Got it." I'd call them back and say, "OK, who takes the fastest dictation?" You understand, they were waiting on the set to shoot these scenes. This is the way television was done in those days. Sometimes it still is, I kid you not. It's all mob hysteria. What you see on the screen — what comes out — is a miracle of coherence. It's engineering, really. We're good at engineering. If we can send guys to the moon, we can put on series like *THE HAWK*.

One day they really had trouble with a script that was being directed by Paul Henreid — a brilliant European, cultured, refined, very sensitive. He was handed a script by a good writer, Don Mankiewicz, the son of the famous Mankiewicz who wrote *CITIZEN KANE*. Don was a terrific writer, but he was into the horses pretty heavy that week and his mind wasn't in it. He handed in sixty pages of typewriting, really not a script. They were in big trouble. Everyone was hired, Henry had come in, and they called me up — "You have to come in to New York." I'm two hundred miles away from New York, on the eastern-most end of Long Island. But I get the train and come into New York,



and I look at the script and say, "An entire rewrite. This is a drastic, one-hour rewrite. Sixty pages by tomorrow morning." And they say, "That's right." So I say, "OK, get me a typewriter, set the office up, get me a lot of coffee," and I sit down and guess what — I haven't got my glasses. It's 11:00 o'clock on a Sunday night and I haven't got my glasses. They're at my summer place two hundred miles away. I want to tell you that when panic strikes network television, everybody runs to a telephone. The executive producer of the series was Jackie Cooper, whose chauffeur was waiting downstairs with a limosine that was two and a half miles long. And they say, "We'll drive you to the country and you'll get your glasses." I said, "I'll never finish in time." Silence. "I can't. We'll never get back in time." Silence. I say, "Wait a minute, this is New York. There's gotta be a place in this town where I can get a pair of glasses." So I remember from my childhood that on Delancey Street there's a place called "Cohen's." "There's no excuse for eye abuse says Mr. Cohen the Manager." That was their slogan. So I say to them, "This guy is a 'pushcart peddler' who makes glasses and he's open twenty-four hours a day. I know the store, if he's still there." So into the limosine, off to Delancey Street, and there's "Cohen's," wide-open. I run in to tell him I need a pair of glasses. He says, "Ten minutes." He measures my head, puts the glasses on, and I'm back in the limosine. We get the hell back up to MCA on Fifth Avenue. I go upstairs and oh, they're so happy. "OK, what's her name," I say. "Who knows who's feeling

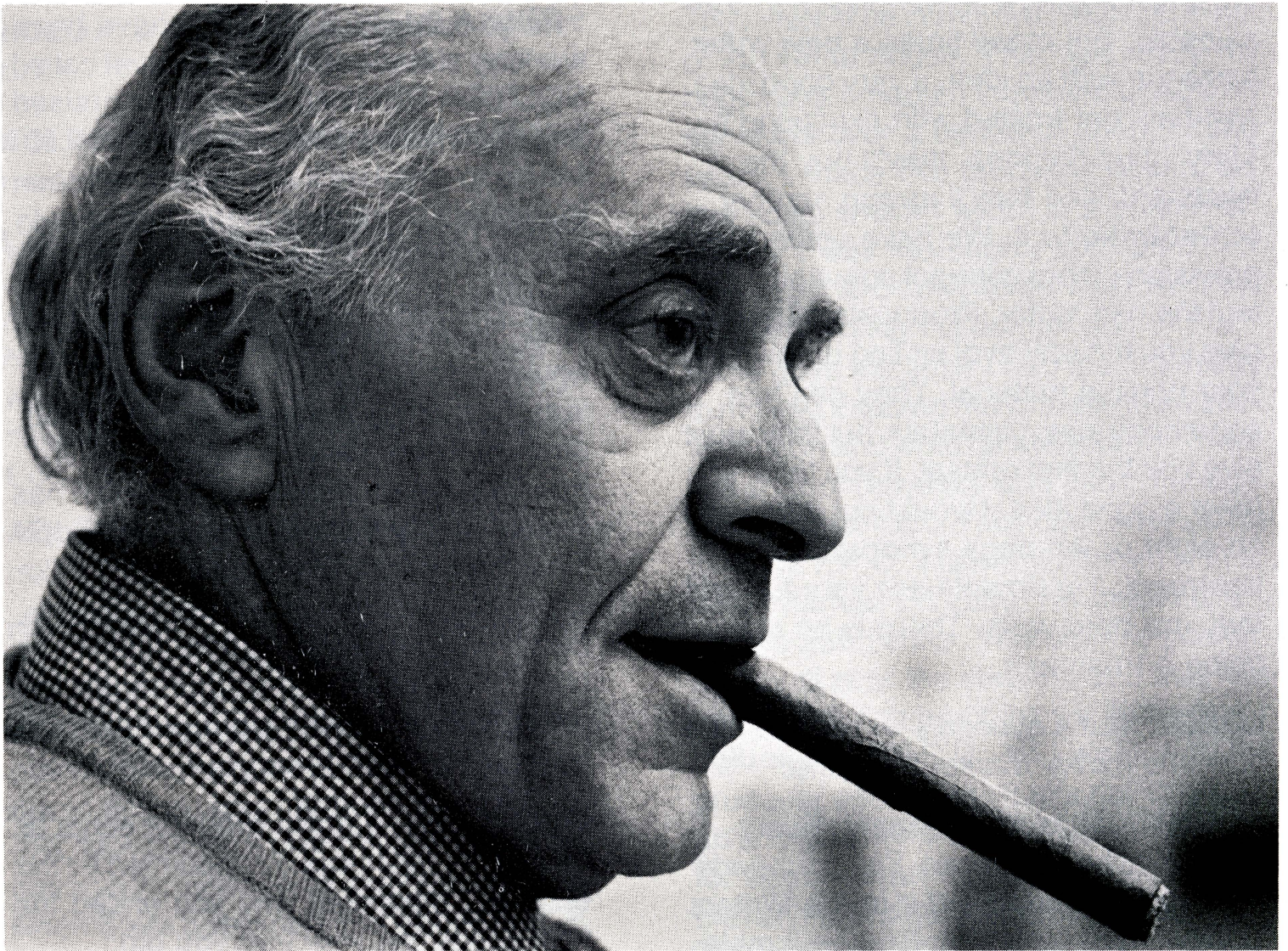
what emotion?"

Monday morning at 5:30, I finish the script. I'll never forget this morning because Henried brought me downstairs. The sun was just coming up, and he threw his arms around me and hugged me. "Adler, you saved the day. The ship is going to stay afloat. The series is going on the air." I say, "Thank you, Paul," and I run right into a pole because I had taken my glasses off and I was a thoroughly blind person.

On N.Y.P.D. I had a typewriter near the camera. True. A typewriter near the camera. Whenever there were problems — Fritz Weaver wouldn't read a line, or Bobby Hooks didn't feel comfortable — I would hammer out something. This follows an old tradition, because it's said that Shakespeare wrote many of his greatest scenes in the wings.

Story editors are the producers' henchmen. They're usually writers — most of them are writers, and you simply do not have the time, the physical ability, to call in the writer for rewrites. According to the Writers Guild Minimum Basic Agreement, if I hire you to write a KOJACK, you are obliged by contract to provide me with a one-hour script — a first draft, a second draft, and one polish. Now usually, by the time you finish with that polish, the script still has to be rewritten to accommodate all the production problems, not to mention the director's rewrite, the star's rewrite, whatever. Because when you write an episode for television, and you sit and watch what gets on the screen, and you say, "It bears no resemblance to what I did," it's





not because of any malicious intent. It's simply that they can't shoot what you've written — because of money, budget, production problems, and so forth. The story editor is there to do the fixing, and it is one of the hardest jobs in the world because you mainly deal with writers, and you work a lot of times with your own friends, and it's hard to rewrite your friends' work because you simply don't want to. You know you're going to diminish his effort. My belief, after all these years in the business, is that the writer's first and second drafts are the best you are ever going to get out of him because that's where the original juice lies. I think

beyond two drafts, a writer rewriting his own material is in trouble, if he's writing for television.

**QUESTION:** About three years ago, I remember an acquaintance of mine sold a treatment for a disaster film to a Hollywood studio for about ten or twenty grand. Is there a market for treatments?

**ADLER:** Yes, there is a market for treatments if you market them in the same way you market a finished screenplay. I would strongly advise against sitting down and writing a treatment because often a treatment is so close to a screenplay that you might as well invest



the time in doing a screenplay. It's more saleable. But many times a new writer comes in with an idea, a very good idea, and he's not trusted with executing it. They'll buy the idea, they'll buy the treatment, and they'll assign another screenwriter to it. We have some new provisions in our contract now which protect the new writer. Producers must now give you the option of writing or rewriting your original material. They can hire somebody else, ultimately, but they must give you the first refusal. If you think you have a good idea, I would put it down in an eight or ten-page synopsis, not a treatment. Treatments are very full and they are hard work. There is no use doing a treatment.

**LOEB:** But a synopsis — I don't know how she'll ever market the thing.

**ADLER:** Through an agent. Everything must be registered. You don't send it to Washington. Send it to the Writers Guild — five bucks — and get your material registered.

**QUESTION:** What's the difference between what the Writers Guild registers and what the Copyright Office registers?

**ADLER:** The copyright, of course, is really stronger protection, but if the Writers Guild registers it, it will serve in any litigation as a copyright.

**QUESTION:** You said you enjoyed writing narrative fiction. Are you working on a novel now? Have you ever had a novel published?

**ADLER:** Yes. I had a novel published in 1962 by Alfred Knopf called NOTES

FROM A DARK STREET. I have been working subsequently on a novel called SOLDIER DEMON, which was praised and declined by nineteen publishers, so I refuse to circulate it any more. Nineteen publishers. I counted them. You should see their letters. I guess Bob Bernstein at Random House summed it up when he said, "Business is too grim in the bookstores for such a grim piece of fiction." It's like a producer in Hollywood saying, "Who wants a downer?" I am now working on another book which has gotten very good response from Knopf. They have optioned it, and it looks like we're going to get a contract on it. This book I've been working on for nine years. I have 1186 typed manuscript pages. It's a totally incomprehensible work, so if anyone wants to invest in it, feel free.

**QUESTION:** I really liked the script of SHOOT IT, but I was disappointed by the ending. I wondered why you ended the final scene the way that you did.

**LOEB:** The cop is in the hospital, Eddie. He's got a tinkle bell and he's encased from head to toe in a white plaster cast. Remember? The boy, his nemesis, Lamont, comes in and he starts tinkling the bell for help.

**ADLER:** You didn't like it?

**QUESTION:** I just felt like it left me hanging.

**ADLER:** Well, that's where he was in the ending. It was intended to leave you hanging, metaphorically and literally. There was no other way to solve that ending, was there?



**LOEB:** It was partly suggested by the book.

**ADLER:** We intended a kind of metaphysical punch.

**LOEB:** We wanted Herby, the Pacino character, to be immobile, helpless. We didn't want him killed in the beating. We had several endings. In one, Lamont was going to push him off the roof of the hospital into the East River. That was Eddie's ending.

**ADLER:** That was my ending. You hated it because you can't swim.

**QUESTION:** Did you originally start as a short story writer or as a novelist?

**ADLER:** My head is still in fiction and novels. See, I was kind of lucky. I started out in fiction, and my book, *NOTES FROM A DARK STREET*, got rather extravagant coverage all over the country when it was published. For a first book, a small book of prose, it got two large reviews in the **New York Times** in one week — in the Sunday section and in a daily review. It sold very little because I write what is considered experimental literature. I hate to use that phrase, but I don't know how else to describe it. It is not avant garde, it is no longer experimental, but it is kind of difficult literature, difficult fiction. A man working for Herbert Brodtkin, a major television producer in New York, read the reviews of the book and called me up. I had no thought of writing for television. He called me up because he saw something in my book which attracted him for a certain episode of a series called *THE DEFENDERS*.

They were also doing *THE NURSES* out of the same house. That was really my beginning. I made a thousand dollars on my novel over a period of about fifteen years. I made five thousand dollars on this script which I wrote in a couple of weeks. I was thoroughly corrupted — I was eager to be corrupted. But I've never stopped writing fiction. I'm one of the lucky guys because I had the chemistry in me that enabled me to make the transformation and write for the screen. There are a lot of novelists who can't manage the dramatic form. They can't seem to do it. On N.Y.P.D., I came in contact with a writer named Ed Lacy. He must have written 250 books. You see his pocket books all over the country, and they are very good. I thought he would be a natural for N.Y.P.D., so I went in to the producer and I said, "Let's call this guy up and give him a shot." I worked with Ed for about seven months, but he simply couldn't manage the form, the obliqueness of film. It's a completely different medium. He couldn't visualize the scenes. He had wonderful ideas for stories. He understood people. He understood the psychology of relationships. But he couldn't do it.

**QUESTION:** Have you ever directed your own material, or wanted to, or had the chance to?

**ADLER:** Once in rehearsal on N.Y.P.D., I set up a scene, talked to the actors. Fritz Weaver was in the scene. I'll never forget it. I finally said the magic words, "Quiet on the set, action," and we went ahead. We had a good time, but it frightened me. The machinery was



overwhelming. The logistics and the paraphernalia are too much for me.

**LOEB:** The screenwriter is a special personality. I don't know if you're beginning to perceive this, but the writer is more laid-back. He's more "internal" than the director usually.

**ADLER:** When you consider the pressure on the director, even in television. Do you know what it costs to shoot a one-hour film on television now? A KOJACK is bottom-lined at \$242,000 for a one-hour television episode, which is not one hour, but really forty-seven minutes. Imagine the director going out there. I mean, you have to be in a state of rigid paralysis, with everybody's job hanging on the line, and all that money.

**QUESTION:** Is it true that the actors never see the script before they go on the set?

**ADLER:** No, it's not true. Especially now, in situation comedies, they shoot them with three cameras. MARY TYLER MOORE was three-camera **film**. BARNEY MILLER is three-camera **tape**. They get three days of rehearsal and three days of shooting. They get three days for a half-hour. In a one-hour, episodic film, there is usually a reading, a small conference with the director, but there are no rehearsals. I cannot tell you how I feel for actors and actresses. They're the most vulnerable, put-upon people in the world. They have to get up and find instant shape in the material. It's a mysterious process. If you see anything good on an episode on television, it's a miracle. I mean it.

**QUESTION:** Do you watch M\*A\*S\*H?

**ADLER:** Yeah, I watch it. Gelbart is terrific. In fact, I just got a letter from Gelbart. He's my counterpart on the negotiating committee on the West Coast, and we exchange letters on how badly we've done. He's a terrific guy, Gelbart — the funniest man in the world, who is absolutely dour. He's got SLY FOX with George C. Scott now on Broadway, and it's one of the funniest plays you'll ever see. M\*A\*S\*H is a good show because they have Gelbart. The network gave them money and they went for talent, they went for people. It did very badly the first year in the numbers, but it built its audience. It could run forever, I imagine. But they are going to lose Alan Alda because he is just going to get tired of doing it.

**LOEB:** Film really is a collaborative medium, isn't it.

**ADLER:** Yes. You have to try to understand what the writing process is — the evolution of a script for a KOJACK or a BARETTA. Say you're a good writer and I know you can turn out a good script for me in ten days. I say, "I have an idea," or ask you to come in with an idea. You go home, write it down, formalizing the idea in a three-page story. I take it and say, "Gee, that's good, but the network's not going to buy this element." I may rewrite it as the editor or the producer. Then I bring it to the network for approval. It comes back. I call you up and say, "Go. You're into outline." You deliver your outline. You come back to me with your outline. I look at your outline. I



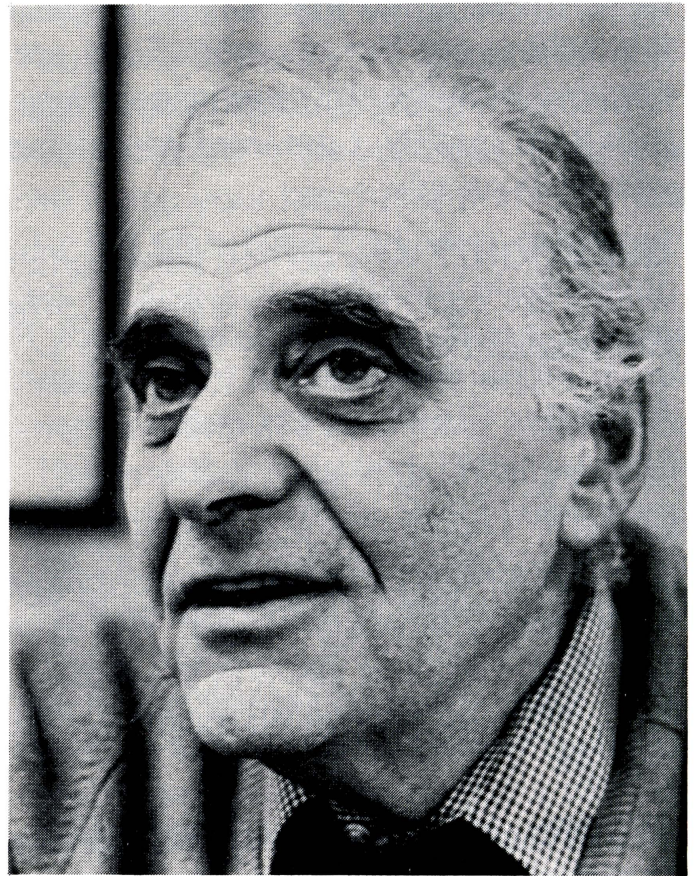
give you notes, the producer gives you notes, and the outline is sent back to you for a first revision. I get the revised outline back and bring it to the network. Before we show the network, we have already given you notes on the revision based on our experience with the network. Now, with our notes, and the network notes, I send you into script. Your first-draft script goes through the **same** process. Your second-draft script goes through the same committee arrangement, and so does the polish. Do you get my point? The writer has come a long way in terms of the original conception.

**QUESTION:** When you first started writing, or even now, were there certain patterns in stories that you found yourself reiterating? Are there certain themes that you felt compelled to write about?

**ADLER:** That's a good question. I suppose I write working class proletarian literature. This mini-series that I just finished the outline for is profoundly political, so I can do it. I feel comfortable with it. But I might add that "the pushcart peddler" has been stereotyped. His talent might be broader than his reputation.

**QUESTION:** When you were starting out, what types of things did you do to help your writing, besides just the act of writing? How did you learn to do characterizations? What types of jobs did you take?

**ADLER:** I took every job that was offered. Writers have a terrible insecurity. In the beginning, I was never able to say no to an assignment because I had a family, two very young kids. While I was



doing fiction, I had driven a cab for an awfully long time to supplement my income. When television came along, I took every assignment that was offered — which might have been a mistake, because there were a lot of hits and a lot of failures.

Finally, I cannot tell you anything except to sit down and write. I'm serious about this. You cannot sit down and look at another program or another picture and say, "I'm going to do one of those." You have to start to do it. You have to learn almost blindly. You can be given guidelines, you can be given help with the mechanics, but if you have any spark or any talent, and if you've got a visual sense at all, it's going to arrive. You're going to arrive at a plateau of skill with which you can make a living. I seriously



believe that. I think most of the people in this school are film oriented. They are capable of authentic responses. They pick it up quickly. I am very impressed with your people.

**QUESTION:** Why do you think certain writers fail, cannot make the switch to the film medium?

**ADLER:** Structure, structure, structure.

**LOEB:** They can't understand the dramatic kind of progression as opposed to the literary, which is internal. You have an internal escape valve in the literary form. You can always go inside — "He thought . . ."

**ADLER:** Yes, it has to do with a very crucial element in film. I guess the word is behavior. A novelist can internalize in prose. He can **tell** you what a character is going through, and how a character changes, and how he's transformed. In film, the only way you can do that is by showing him in that transformation, which is the inner activity externalized. Behavior is what film is all about.

**LOEB:** And it's ironic to me that as we look back on films we like, we don't remember what was said, exactly. You remember more of the shape, the feeling. SHANE is an example.

**ADLER:** There are exceptions. The thing is that there can be behavior in speech, also, which is tantamount to active behavior on film. Bergman, in PERSONA, in THE SILENCE, has characters confronting each other. There's more action going on inwardly than there

is in EARTHQUAKE. We're talking about genuine conflict in people. There is emotional activity happening through speech, but that's a level of filmmaking that you don't often get in America.

**LOEB:** There can be a block to that, too, that is very important. There is somebody who translates the film out of its original language and puts up a very simplified, compressed idea for us, and I often think how incredible it is — we're not getting Bergman. We are getting somebody's perception of his meaning translated into our idiom. Just the fact of reading it in a compressed form. It may be responsive to our rhythm, but it is not necessarily Bergman's. Would you believe Bergman through a glass, darkly?

**QUESTION:** How many screenwriters are there?

**ADLER:** In the Guild? The Guild is divided up into several different divisions, you know. There's a screenwriters division, a television writers division. Documentary and news writers are represented, and there are also the people who do soap operas. They're all in separate categories, and each writer in every particular discipline has a different contract he's working under. Daytime soap operas are covered under one kind of contract for serial writers. And then the news and staff writers, desk assistants, are under another agreement. We have now included in the Writers Guild East, to our credit, the graphic artists of all the studios and the three networks. I don't know what they have to do with writing. But they came to us for help. We had a jurisdictional vote, and decided to in-



clude them. So if you can't write, draw pictures. If you can't draw pictures, get a harmonica.

**LOEB:** In wrapping up, in the giant concluding caption, what would you say to these people?

**ADLER:** Oh, I didn't answer that question about the number of writers. The total membership of the Guild — working writers in America today — is about 7,000. But there are a lot of inactive people. There is a percentage of members who sort of work on and off. I would say the working corps of the Guild, the hard corps, is probably like three thousand.

**LOEB:** Three thousand.

**ADLER:** Yeah, but only seven are good.

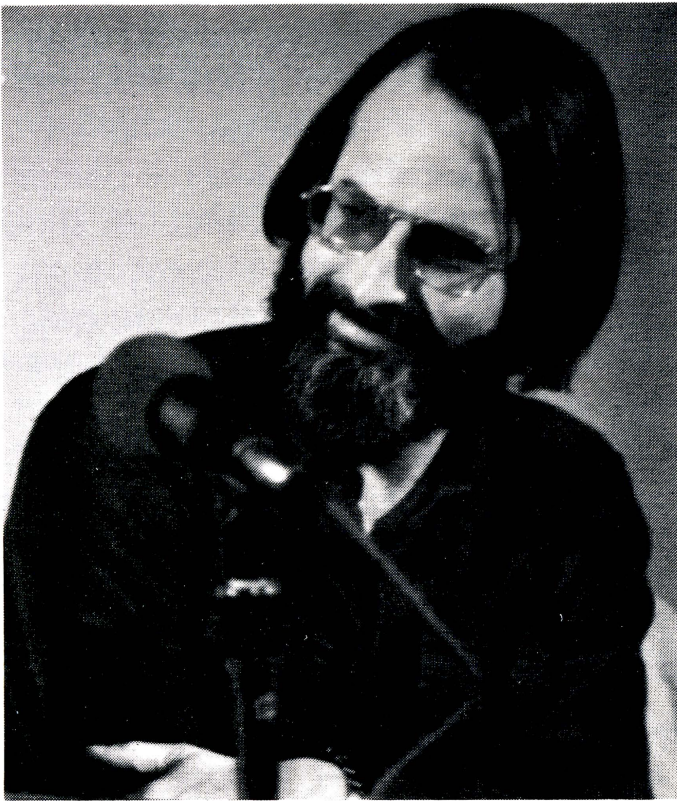
**LOEB:** How can you top that, Adler?

**ADLER:** Listen, there are some terrible writers who are making an unbelievable living in film and TV, and there are some brilliant writers who can't get arrested. And it's true. It happens time and time and time again. I was up at Paramount about two weeks ago, speaking to some guy who is thinking of buying some book and asking me to do it. Right in DeLaurentiis' office this guy hands me a screenplay to read that was sent to him by an agent. The point of the story is that he has been trying to get financing for this particular screenplay for about eighteen months. It's literature, it's so good, but he hasn't succeeded yet in raising the bread. Ultimately, he probably will though, if he keeps trying. Material can

always be sold, but you have to write. You have to trust your judgement and you have to listen to people who you trust, who are in the business — people like Tony, your teachers, and hot shots like me from New York who come out and try to give you a little bit of whatever. If you pay your dues, it shows. There's been a lot of frivolous talk and a lot of joking around. It's like Arthur Miller said, "The woods are burning." Well, you can't get so deadly serious about everything. The thing that impresses me about this place as opposed, for instance, to NYU where I have taught up until this semester, is that people here are really dedicated to film. At NYU, I never quite got that sense. Now, they've got a marvelous film school there, or at least it has a good reputation, and they've turned out some good people. Martin Scorsese and Michael Pressman, a young director who just did a picture, went through NYU. But I don't get that sense of seriousness and devotion and love for film that I get in this place. It really is rewarding. I never would have come back for the second semester. I never would have come back if I had not gotten some real spark — an active feedback. You can write and you can make a good living. I don't know how interested you are. You may all be interested in producing or directing, but I think you've got to give screenwriting a serious try. Not that it should begin there, but I think if you write, you'll be better at anything else you do in this medium.

I'm going to tell you something. You're going to compile an enormous log of work and you're going to get better all the time, even though while you're doing it, it





doesn't seem as though you are. You arrive at your skills almost unconsciously. Yeats said, "Every good poem works toward intuition." You know what he meant by that. You sit and you grind it out and you give it the most serious thought in the world, because there's nothing better, nothing finer, than to create something, to take a piece of inert matter

which is an abstract idea in your own head, and as Faulkner said, "Club life into it." So, keep writing. You'll make it if you're dedicated enough. A lot of guys, for one circumstance or another, don't persevere. But from personal experience, I would say that if you write half an hour a day, every day of the week, you're going to produce volumes of work, some of which is going to be very good, a small bit of which is going to be excellent. Thomas Mann, a novelist, has written shelves of material. There were some days when he went down and sat in his study and produced eleven words. But he wrote every day of his life.

Set aside some time before breakfast. Don't light the cigarette up, do it in long-hand. Write with a quill dipped in venom on the on the back of a shovel if you have to. Keep writing and you're going to arrive.

**LOEB:** Let's give him a hand.

**ADLER:** It was my pleasure. Don't listen to a word I said.

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