

2023

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Recommended Citation

Bratslavsky, Lauren. "Broadcast History Gaps When Archival Material Exists: Inserting Peg Lynch and Ethel and Albert into Sitcom History." *Journal of 20th Century Media History* 1, 1 (2023): 46-72.
<https://mds.marshall.edu/j20thcenturymediahistory/vol1/iss1/4>

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Broadcast History Gaps When Archival Material Exists: Inserting Peg Lynch and *Ethel and Albert* into Sitcom History

Lauren Bratslavsky (Illinois State University)

Lucy and Desi. Burns and Allen. Ozzie and Harriet. Ethel and Albert? The first three television couples tend to be the familiar husband-wife pairs that typify American 1950s sitcoms. These characters and their namesake programs, along with the Andersons in *Father Knows Best* and the Cleavers in *Leave it to Beaver*, are credited as templates for the domestic sitcom genre, where the narrative logic oscillates between morality lessons and outlandish plots to escape domestic life.¹ When we study or reminisce about 1950s television, Ethel and Albert and their namesake program do not readily come to mind. However, the popularity of *Ethel and Albert* (1953-1956) on radio and television, and its critical acclaim, warrants examination as to why and how this program, and really any program with similar levels of notoriety in its time, remains obscure.

Ethel and Albert, played by Peg Lynch and Albert Bunce, were a married couple with no children who were not in show business and were not subject to bizarre twists and physical comedy. They did not live in a big coastal city—the show was set in Sandy Harbor, a non-descript midsize town that could be anywhere. They were presumably middle-age—Lynch was in her forties and Bunce in his fifties. Albert was a businessman (never really defined, although it was hinted that he was in advertising) and Ethel did not work. Secondary characters consisted of their neighbors, civic club friends, and Albert's Aunt Eva (played by Margaret Hamilton). It was a prototypical *situation* comedy about “the small things in life,” or as Lynch, who was also the creator, explained, “husbands and wives don't live plotsbut rather incidents – a burned supper, a broken spring in the living room chair, a blown-out bulb in the bathroom.”² For instance, note the familiar subject matter of the following dialogue, which remains baked into the sitcom's DNA:

Albert: ... is there anything I do that drives you crazy?

Ethel: Well -- (laughs)

Albert: You can tell me -- I don't mind, darling --

Ethel: Well -- (laughs) You do just dump your clothes all over -- you never pick up anything --

Albert: Yeah -- guess I do -- Well, maybe the reason is I never have any place to put anything -- Do you realize that gradually you take over all the closet and drawer space for YOUR things -- ?³

A common theme among reviewers included praising the writing and performance as resembling familiar cadences of life, in contrast to the artifice of other sitcoms commonly remembered from the era. Columnists reported on Lynch's rigorous writing, editing, rehearsing, and performing schedule and marveled about how she found the time for the show *and* correspond with fans *and* maintain her own domestic life.⁴

A quick sketch of *Ethel and Albert's* on-air lifespan conveys how familiar these characters were at the time, thereby prompting queries why it remains largely unknown today. Lynch created the characters in 1938 for local radio. Audiences listened steadily to daily 15-minute stories from 1940 to 1950. They followed the characters to television, first as a segment on NBC's *The Kate Smith Hour* (1950-1952). In 1953, *Ethel and Albert* debuted on NBC as a live half-hour program, moved to CBS in the summer of 1955, and completed its final season on ABC in 1956. Audiences kept listening to stories on CBS radio starting in 1958 as *The Couple Next Door*, with stints on NBC radio in the 1960s, and NPR in the 1970s. The titular characters were so familiar that Bell Telephone used the neighborly Ethel and Albert for informational campaigns about the new area code phone system in 1961.⁵ The memories that survive of *Ethel and Albert* mostly reside with old time radio fans who traded episodes and invited Lynch to fan conventions; the television program barely registers in cultural memory today.⁶

The show and Lynch are favorable candidates for what Brett Mills calls the invisibility of programs in academic scholarship. These are the popular, ordinary, and/or academically shunned programs that failed to capture scholarly attention due to academic trends, taste hierarchies, archival methods of selection and accessibility, and so on.⁷ Although *Ethel and Albert* was not the most popular program of its time, its on-air longevity and favorable, as well as its absence from popular and cultural memories points to the ways we write histories and recall the past. Much of the historiography about U.S. broadcasting, particularly in the transition from radio to television, covers top-level network and agency decision making, tracks the influences of Hollywood and stardom, and engages in formal studies of programs aligned with hierarchies of cultural distinction.⁸ To address the lesser-known programs is to evaluate the function of those programs and experiences that *exemplify* genres and industrial practices. There are elements in *Ethel and Albert* that are so commonplace to the genre and the ephemeral

flows of the broadcast schedule that the program might be dismissed. But that is precisely why Lynch's experiences and text are worth consideration. To evaluate *Ethel and Albert* includes examination of the mechanics of the genre and how a woman's voice filters through production processes. This article interrogates historiographic absences resulting from a confluence of factors that render certain programs invisible. In using Peg Lynch and her creation as a particular case, we may ponder how the availability of the program relates to how we write histories while inserting Lynch and this program alongside the more familiar programs in US broadcast history.

The Bind of Historiography and Familiarity

Histories require more than the "concrete or empirical presence of an object but also [the availability of] its traces."⁹ For much of television's early years of live production, those traces lie in an interrelated mix of memories and recordings. Although the public memory of *Ethel and Albert* includes no syndicated evidence of the program's *live* television run, there are concrete traces of the program in archives, along with written records. Before delving into this program in particular, the following section examines the broader context of television historiography. As a methodological issue, programs are unavoidable primary units of television historiography (and industrial organization), whose selection fulfills the contradictory status of being both representative and exceptional in order to form a canon.¹⁰ Thus, one way in which a so-called canon for television history may be formed is through what Derek Kompare calls the "regime of repetition." This refers to the commercial, technological, and cultural mechanisms, such as syndication, celebrity, and awards, that foster conditions to improve the likelihood that a text will be replayed.¹¹ Programs outside this regime are less likely to be remembered, and by extension, scrutinized by historians.

Along with the availability of the recorded program, scholarly and popular perceptions about a genre as worthy of academic attention also contributes to historiographic absences.¹² The sitcom genealogy is largely constructed out of the exemplary and/or commercially available programs. Incidentally, scholarly attention toward the sitcom in particular, and television more broadly, occurred around the same time as an increase in television channels airing reruns and the development of home recording technologies in the 1970s. Analyses of the genre, such as identifying the sitcom's distinguishing features, depended on memories and "reruns as our museum and archive" in order to observe patterns between the foundational programs of the 1950s

and the new ones.¹³ Relatedly, museums and archives expanded their efforts to collect material about television, but matters of political economic infrastructures and taste constrained the selection of programs.¹⁴ Still, the contents of such public and private archives contain a wide range of unknown and inconspicuous programs. Accessibility, though, remains contingent on awareness about what is available to find, cataloging practices and findability via databases, and, of course, physical travel.¹⁵ Home video recording and DVD releases help mitigate some issues, but these forms of preserving programs still repeat problems of highlighting the popular and the industry-defined exemplarily, at the expense of the more ordinary programs as well as original contexts.¹⁶ As such, gaps in television histories may be attributed to the relations between the availability of television's audiovisual and textual materials and the repetition of familiar programs – familiar because such programs were part of one's television-viewing experiences and/or codified within academic and popular discourses.

This relationship displays a circular logic, suggesting programs outside of the canon can be written off as insignificant because they pale in comparison to programs and people we have already deemed worthy of recollection and representative of a particular era. The programs that remain most emblematic of American 1950s television are those that were recorded with the intent for future replay, using the new telefilm technique or tape recorded post 1956, *and* saved by studios and program owners for syndication.¹⁷ These are programs that serve metonymic functions, with a familiar pattern of names such as Lucy and Desi, Burns and Allen, Ward and June Cleaver, that typify the decade. They are archetypes for postwar nuclear families and models for the genre's conventions. The result is the construction of a television heritage framework, or the canon. This can be productive in that we have a common frame of reference, allowing for quick characterizations of postwar television as defined by consumerism, domesticity, and idyllic representations of a far more complex social life.¹⁸ However, the canon is restrictive. The survival of certain programs is significant when understood as cultural texts that construct and reinforce a television heritage that serve as the semiotic and ideological grounds for representations of gender, family, class, and other markers of what is associated with so-called postwar normalcy.¹⁹ It is little wonder, as Joanne Meyerwitz writes, how commonly students and even historians equate women's lives in the 1950s with these "mythic images of cultural icons." Thus, she prompts scholars to undertake a "revisionist endeavor," question the "novel and pervasiveness" of domestic stereotypes, and broaden the accounts of women's lives.²⁰

To that end, *Ethel and Albert* is a double-edged entry for revisionist endeavors – to broaden texts we use for arguments about representation and to recuperate the experiences of women. Lynch’s career and *Ethel and Albert* are worth considering because their relative obscurity calls attention to how we write histories in conjunction with technological, industrial, and archival practices that foster the availability of material and memorial traces. The program portrays not only a familiar slice of 1950s televised domesticity, but one that is completely written by a woman. She was left out of such histories due to relative unfamiliarity with the program, but even more so because our histories remain gendered and because her career and program represent the ordinariness that is laboring in an industry where the fruits of one’s creative labor are above all industrial products. The more feminized those industrial products, the more invisible.

Reflecting on decades of broadcast histories written by academics, as well as industry accounts, and memoirs, Michele Hilmes writes that “we are led to believe” in the naturalness of the dichotomy that men produced and actively shaped radio whereas women listened and were sold to.²¹ Such dichotomies extend to television and similar historiographic oppositions that consign women to significance only as stars, rather than as writers or producers, or as pigeon hole them within women’s genres like soap operas. Simone Knox writes that the critical task to interrogate master narratives is prevalent in broadcast historiographies in that the “historical erasure” of women is understood as consequences of “privileging, repeated articulation and thus reification of certain narratives and identities.”²² With increasing access to archives and digitized resources, such as the Media History Digital Library, scholars have mapped more of women’s careers and contributions.²³ Recent scholarship challenges the asymmetrical accounts of the men and corporations who built broadcasting by recovering pivotal role of women in positions of power at networks, stations, and agencies, whose authorial and producer careers also demonstrated tremendous agency to dictate the shape of content.²⁴

Such work to expand these dichotomies continues the more we take notice of instances that undermine the depths of a woman’s career and contributions. For example, *Women and American TV: An Encyclopedia* has the lofty goal of including prominent women because “men of less repute were readily covered but women who made real contributions were left out of so-called comprehensive references.”²⁵ Lynch is present in the encyclopedia’s appendix, with a passing note that she *starred* in a show about “such mundane things as uncooperative household appliances and ruined dinners.”²⁶ The entry

is sparse due a general unfamiliarity with Lynch as the creator and sole writer for a long running radio and television program.

At some point, one of the few women to author and star in her own show was left out. This occurred even though material traces of Lynch and her programs exist in archives, ready for historiographical consideration. The first part of my analysis offers further contextual interrogations as to how the traces of the program that exist do not translate to familiarity and visibility in scholarship. The latter half of the article lays the groundwork as to why her career and program are worth evaluating.

Searching for the Unfamiliar: Locating *Ethel and Albert*

Program familiarity hinges on its accessibility, be that a tangible, physical (or now digital) means to access the program and related evidence of its production or an intangible, indexical knowledge of its existence. The accessibility of some television programs and associated materials places parameters on the kinds of evidence that inform historical study. Television's history necessarily depends on visual records to literally *record* the look, sound, and feel of a program, but additionally historians rely on documents for evidence about production, reception, and analogues when the audio-visual record is absent. The primary sources for US broadcast history are famously scattered, fractured, and lopsided in the kinds of records that are preserved and available through publicly accessible archives.²⁷ The paper-based manuscript material—the scripts, notebooks, contracts, ratings, memos, etc.—are highly desirable resources that are often not saved or made publicly available (or worse, deliberately destroyed).²⁸ Still, it is possible to examine network decisions, read scripts for programs with few visible traces, and piece together histories because of what is available. Television related materials are not only available at canonical US archives, such as the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research or UCLA, but also at institutions not typically known for their television holdings.²⁹

The details of how Lynch's collection came to an institution not known for broadcast history is an apt illustration of how access to – and familiarity with – the collections of an archive are among the methodological mechanisms contributing to historiographic absences. I came across an unfamiliar name and program when searching regional special collections for broadcast-related collections to use for instructional purposes. I had not heard of Peg Lynch or *Ethel and Albert*, despite being a scholar of sitcoms and gender. References to her career and show are sparse in academic and

popular literature. Yet, here were over seventy boxes of scripts, scrapbooks, network memos, ephemera, and playable media representing the span of nearly five decades. Moreover, the existence of Lynch's collection was a curious example of how a collection ends up in a location that neither has the reputation as a repository for broadcast history nor an obvious connection between donor and archive.

The head manuscript librarian at the University of Oregon acquired the collection in 1969 as part of a broader mission to prioritize the acquisition of women writers by the institution. At that time the Tax Act of 1969 was about to go in effect. The law altered the generous tax incentive that artists, writers, and others involved in public life received for donating their collections to public institutions for research.³⁰ The librarian competed with major institutions known for broadcast histories (and popular culture in general) to solicit collections from the famous and not-so-famous. Although Lynch had no ties to the university, she agreed to donate what she still had saved. The initial collection contains over seventy boxes; mostly radio and television scripts (many annotated); some documentation related to sponsorship, ratings, and the writers' guild; several scrapbooks containing press clippings, letters, and photos; many radio tapes; and four kinescope recordings.³¹ In 2014, the most recent shipment from Lynch's home included more scrapbooks, paperwork, and audio reels of radio shows and conversations between Lynch and Walter Hart (director and collaborator on later projects). Remarkably, Lynch had more than seventy kinescopes at her home, which constituted the majority of her sitcom's run on all three networks, and now reside with the rest of her collection.

Lynch's papers have long been dormant, and only recently used as part of a project to recuperate histories of women in television production.³² Part of the task of critical historiography is to locate those collections residing outside of what is available at the prominent, top-of-mind archival institutions. Indeed, digitized finding aids, networked databases, and cataloging improve one's ability to locate archives.³³ Awareness about a collection like Lynch's papers and kinescopes also enables a more targeted search in those major repositories. A few episodes are available to view at the Paley Center and the UCLA Film and Television archive. Additionally, the behemoth NBC collection at Wisconsin includes two thin folders with memos pertaining to network and sponsor decisions. However, these few episodes and isolated executive documents lack the context of annotated scripts, letters, press clippings, or even additional episodes to potentially view. As such, this is a methodological intervention to expand the sites for sources by calling attention to underutilized collections. Regardless of whether a scholar challenges or

supports the oft-repeated historical narratives, the contents of such collections are important sources for knowledge production.

Locating *Ethel and Albert* in Sitcom Historiography

Ethel and Albert represents the many programs that are now little more than brief encyclopedic entries or minor pieces of supporting evidence in studies of other television topics. Overall, these entries note the premise as “normal life with a quiet sense of humor” and “down-to-earth,” with no reference to Lynch as both star and writer.³⁴ Scholars include *Ethel and Albert* to broadly illustrate the transition from radio to television as well as brief examples of husband-wife duos in a litany of indistinct couples. Lynn Spigel mentions the program’s promotional strategies to explore how networks and sponsors leveraged favorite radio characters’ neighborly qualities to draw audiences to television and conveyed idealized televisual neighborhoods. Tasha Oren uses the characters to contextualize a “TV tradition” where the husband was either a “straight man” or a buffoon and the wife was zany and got the best laughs, which critics at the time viewed as demeaning to male authority figures. Even more briefly, Erin Lee Mock includes Albert in a list of television fathers and husbands who “are painfully apologetic after hitting or berating their wives and children.”³⁵ These oversimplified characterizations come at the expense of garnering more substantial readings from visual and textual evidence, such as dialogue and scene descriptions. Tellingly, the authors provide richer details for the programs more readily available in circulation, thereby bolstering the established and narrow canon of 1950s programming.

The overall scholarly absence of *Ethel and Albert* may be merited if we accept the basic descriptions found in the encyclopedias and brief references described above. However, this absence is indicative of the relationship between the availability and familiarity of certain programs and the chosen subjects of scholars’ analyses. Scholarly attention focused on 1950s television has prioritized analysis of programs in reruns and live drama anthologies, as well as systematic evaluations of the developing industry.³⁶ When scholars looked to sitcoms, their analyses focused on readily available programs. For example, David Marc’s formative arguments about the sitcom’s significance featured a corpus of syndicated programs and referred to the more obscure shows in order to discuss industrial strategies for replicating successes (e.g., *I Married Joan* as a deviation from *I Love Lucy*, both as vehicles for star comedians; or *Our Miss Brooks* as an attempt to capitalize on interest in *Mary Tyler Moore* and the career woman). To use Marc’s own

words, he “submerged” many of the programs not part of his own “flow of dreams” about television’s past and current contents.³⁷

Programs are invisible, or submerged, in academic scholarship in no small part due to lack of familiarity, but also contingent on criteria of worthiness for academic attention. Paul Attallah argued that even though scholars wrote about sitcoms, their arguments constructed the genre as *unworthy* given its status as a formulaic commodity. The sitcom’s content, and the genre itself, was only worth scholars’ attention when discussing those exemplary and exceptional programs that defied characterizations of the sitcom’s banality.³⁸ Programs had to transcend the commodity status despite the commercial engine that is American television. The same 1950s sitcoms are valorized at the expense of others due to both familiarity and how scholars define industrial and narrative qualities of the genre.

The preeminent example is *I Love Lucy*, oft discussed because of Lucille Ball’s successful transition from film to television to media mogul, while establishing influential precedents for the genre by using Hollywood cinematography and editing techniques combined with the live studio audience to create an intimate experience.³⁹ *I Love Lucy* and Desilu Productions set a standard to film the live program in order to establish more creative control over production and secure future commercial success through reruns.⁴⁰ The film and future replay strategies contributed to *I Love Lucy*’s persistence in our cultural memory. Additionally, we readily point to Ball and other comedians as exemplars for how the genre became a defining star vehicle, or in other words, a narrative format designed to capitalize on the comedians’ expressions, thereby enabling cultural transcendence.⁴¹ Another example of programs and people that gain stature in academic and popular memory is Gertrude Berg, the creator, writer, and star of *The Goldbergs*. Berg and the program are rightly identified as an exemplar of how an immensely popular dialect-heavy radio comedy transitioned to television. The show’s several cancellations as network executives and sponsors questioned the suitability of the ethnic, immigrant narratives on air, as well as the off air battles over Berg’s defense of her blacklisted co-star, Phillip Loeb, also merit attention.⁴² Other live sitcoms that remain in some form of circulation, and tend to be woven into critical and popular histories, are those that garnered controversy (e.g., *Amos ‘n’ Andy*) or celebrity (e.g., *Burns and Allen* starring George Burns and Gracie Allen, *The Honeymooners* starring Jackie Gleason, and *Life with Elizabeth* starring Betty White).

Conversely, 1950s filmed *domestic* sitcoms, such as *Father Knows Best*, represent how the format makes for consistent filler on rerun networks, thereby becoming both a reliable commodity and a familiar source for representations of family and domesticity. In

the scarcity of those programs that survived, a set of certain 1950s sitcoms programs and actors resonate as originators of the genre and selected representations of postwar life as filtered through mass media. Lost in the scholarly and popular narratives centered on notoriety and postwar domestic life are programs and people residing in liminal spaces of memory and scrutiny. This oversight contributes to a narrow perception of *Ethel and Albert* as just another husband-wife show in the litany of the live sitcom's rise and decline. Mentions of *Ethel and Albert* in academic literature are evidence of how a program can be reduced and stripped of its textuality (as in, the plots, dialogue, aesthetics, etc.) when traces of the program's existence seem absent.⁴³ Television's history is far from a static and closed text, and turning to archives for 'lost' television programming contributes to constructing richer histories of the sitcom and television.

Inserting Peg Lynch and *Ethel and Albert*

What makes this program and Lynch's career significant? Given the scarcity of accounts of women *producing* radio and television programs, Lynch seems a logical and necessary subject. Exploration of her career and program aligns with interventions into broadcast historiography to recover the experiences of women and bring their accomplishments to the center of historical narratives. For context, of the 173 "staff-written shows" in the second half of 1953, 15 shows included a woman on staff; 13 were authored by a single woman, six of which were primetime shows.⁴⁴ Women wrote for radio and television, but they were more prevalent in soap operas or part of a team of writers, as in the case of Madelyn Davis for *I Love Lucy*.

Lynch was among the few women who held the title of writer and star. As one television reviewer noted, Lynch "not only writes every word of the show, but supervises the entire production. She is not, however, one of those slick, glossy career women with a managing air about her, but a warm and friendly Midwesterner" (a jab at Lucille Ball, no doubt). She was an active agent in her productions and day-to-day operations. Her scripts include notes about actor blocking, camera switching, rehearsed timings, and so on. The network, on behalf of the sponsor, paid Lynch a lump above-the-line sum, from which she was responsible for paying the actors and camera operators, and covering the cost of set construction, studio rental, and even office paper.⁴⁵

Given that material traces of this show and Lynch's career *do* exist, looking to these sources supports the broader argument about how methodological and technological/industrial factors contribute to gaps in broadcast history. The critical evaluations of

broadcasting's past "demands an assessment of the function of a particular programme that must stem from an exploration of the historical context within which the programme was produced, transmitted, and received."⁴⁶ Being able to locate archival records and search databases of reviews and trade press articles figure into the task of examining those programs outside the regime of repetition and broaden the texts we use for arguments about representations. Specifically, I focus on how Lynch's career and show contribute to scholarship about the genre, the industrial logics of live television, and reception of the domestic sitcom.

Tracing Lynch's Origins Alongside the Genre's (Gendered) Radio Origins

Broadly, the histories of broadcasting and the histories of the genre can be reduced to a series of dichotomies that skew women's contributions and reduce complex industrial and narrative formations into convenient categories. It is worth repeating Hilmes' statement about how often histories led us to believe in the "natural" dichotomy of women in passive positions as listeners and consumers as opposed to the men in active roles as producers and architects of selling products.⁴⁷ In a related dichotomy, the preferred lens for broadcast history tends to be network origins and management of programs, as opposed to regional programmatic and commercial influences. Alex Russo's counter history instead explains how "local stations created programs with multiple segments that linked daily activities to local institutions as a way of making districted radio commercially viable," whereby this genre essentially gave more credit to local practices and especially to women as audiences.⁴⁸ Lynch's career begins in this context of regional radio.

Like many others, she began as underpaid labor and took on more roles than she was initially hired to do. In high school, Lynch contributed copy and some stories for the local Minnesota radio station KROC. After college in 1938, Lynch landed a job at KATE, a newly formed radio station in Albert Lea, Minnesota. She was hired to write ad copy before station management had the idea of generating original programming content.⁴⁹ Her characters originated out of necessity to fill time during a daytime women's program, specifically time between ads for local businesses. Her writing style came from her annoyances about "the stuff that passed for conversation on soap opera.... people just didn't talk the way they did on radio dramas."⁵⁰ Lynch's career in local radio is evidence of her degree of autonomy, which is reflected in her ownership over her creative property; she took her characters with her as she switched stations. In 1944, Lynch auditioned her

regional program to the networks. She first turned down NBC when the program director required half of the ownership.⁵¹ ABC offered her a spot on the daytime schedule on its flagship station, WJZ. As a new network, ABC relied on local, co-operative advertising. *Ethel and Albert* figured into the logic of a daytime schedule designed to package ads into the flow of distracted listening. For ten years, Lynch wrote for and performed as a wife character, even though she was not married until 1948 (when she was 32). Listeners, and then television viewers, would conflate Lynch with her character, which she welcomed.⁵²

Lynch created a program that was ordinary and thus overlooked by scholars in the sense that it had several marks against it at its point of development. The show was a feminized commodity, but not an example of the first feminized genres—soap operas—that eventually captured scholars’ attention. Its Midwestern and localized origins also contribute to the show’s relative obscurity. Sitcom genealogy seldom points to daytime radio as part of its roots, which accounts for how gendered origins are largely written out of the sitcom’s formation. The sitcom’s defining features crystallized during radio to include its episodic structure, primetime slots (read: public and masculine space), and comedic virtues stemming from vaudeville-inspired acts, ethnic humor labeled as dialect comedies, and/or husband-wife comedy teams.⁵³ Lynch’s theater degree and her first woman’s program, *Vanity Fair*, indicate a crucial influence impressed upon her radio and television writing – serialized 19th century storytelling as a comedy of instances and manners. Unlike many of the vaudeville successes in radio, Lynch did not bring a previously existing act to radio and she did not employ the common slapstick or dialect-dependent tactics common during the genre’s early formation.⁵⁴ She crafted the characters and situations as a consequence of the medium’s local commercial needs. She wrote in a manner to leverage the commodity form and the narrative pleasures of serialized characters who led far less dramatic lives than those in the melodramas.

Despite writing episodic scenarios, her program was still referred to as a serial while on-air during the day but was later changed to a “comedy-drama” as another signifier of narrative types based on presumptions of who was listening.⁵⁵ Likewise, when the program aired midafternoons, it was called *The Private Lives of Ethel and Albert* to capitalize on the intimacy of eavesdropping into your neighbors’ lives. ABC dropped “private lives” when the program moved to the early evening slot, extending from an audience of housewives to families, but maintaining a sense of neighborly familiarity as an invitation to the more popular (and thus, public) entertainment hours.⁵⁶ As *Ethel and Albert* aired during television’s evening hours, feminized connotations of daytime serials

receded, although promotional materials and industry ratings continued to focus on women as the main demographic.⁵⁷ When the characters moved back to daytime radio in 1958, the industry trades returned to calling it a “daytime soaper,” stripping the show of its *situation comedy* status.⁵⁸

Her experiences confound some of the repeated narratives that one, favor national network radio histories over regional formations, and two, situate the genre’s origin in primetime programming with predominant influences from vaudeville comedy routines. Lynch’s career helps illuminate the gendered qualities of these narratives that can belie women’s work in local radio and women’s voices on the radio in the solidification of programming schedules and audience segmentation, both of which carried over into television.

Repetition Over Liveness: The Life of the Last Live Sitcom

Lynch’s transition to television is indicative of technological and industrial changes, illustrating competing logics in the early formative days. Liveness, argues William Boddy, defines the first decade of commercial television for technological reasons, but also as a matter of distinguishing the medium’s specificity. But networks and sponsors began with the stories and people who excelled in radio, then worked on ways to not only replicate successes by ordering more shows within a certain genre, but also replaying successes with film and tape techniques. Thus, argues Derek Kompare, television’s main engine was that of repetition, as opposed to liveness.⁵⁹

Repetition refers as much to transmedia storytelling and familiarity as repayable films. It is in this sense that ABC, and then NBC, used *Ethel and Albert* as a “*de facto* rerun.”⁶⁰ Her scriptwriting style and minimal need for actors made her work an exceptional candidate for experimental television, with the only major change being that Ethel and Albert no longer had a child.⁶¹ Adapting to the live new medium was not a concern, as she said in a *New York Times* profile: “all this hullabaloo about learning to write for television, as if it were some weird new art, is a lot of nonsense.”⁶²

ABC experimented by staging *Ethel and Albert* in 1946 at GE’s test studio, concurrent with her daily radio serial.⁶³ Officially, Lynch was on television from 1950-1956 (Table 1). From 1950-1954, Lynch’s characters appeared on NBC, first as part of the variety show trend to include comedic sketches and then as networks scrambled for sitcoms to compete with *I Love Lucy*.⁶⁴ Lynch repurposed her scripts from the early years of her radio serial to 10 minute rehearsed sketches on NBC’s *The Kate Smith Hour*, appearing on both

afternoon and evening versions of the variety show. NBC executives saw value in Lynch's segments and forged a deal with her in 1952 before there was a sponsor, an indication of how confident NBC was that it could sell the program to a sponsor on the strength of character familiarity and script adaptability.⁶⁵ Lynch adapted her radio and sketch scripts to 30-minute programs for NBC from April 1953 to December 1954. In the context of early television, the domestic setting was a familiar device. Set-wise, *Ethel and Albert* differed little from other programs: limited to the living room and kitchen, with the occasional visit to Albert's office, and overall conveyed a suburban or small town atmosphere.⁶⁶ NBC hired Walter Hart to direct, due to his experience directing *The Goldbergs*. Hart continued as director when *Ethel and Albert* moved to CBS and then ABC, where Lynch again wrote new scripts, although she sometimes based on the premises of her older radio stories.⁶⁷ *Ethel and Albert* exemplified television as a medium of repetition alongside liveness, much like how *The Goldbergs* and other radio programs brought their familiar logics of characters and situations to the live screen.

Table 1: *Ethel and Albert* Network Television Program History⁶⁸

Program Name	Dates on Air	Timeslot (Eastern Standard)	Network	Sponsor	Reach* (if available)
Appearances on <i>The Kate Smith Hour</i>	1950 - 1952	Afternoon: Daily, 4:00-5:00 pm Evenings: Wednesdays, 8:00-9:00 pm	NBC	Bab-O	
<i>Ethel and Albert</i>	April 25, 1953 - December 25, 1954	Saturdays, 7:30-8:00 pm	NBC	Sunbeam	37 live; 22 delayed kinescopes
<i>Ethel and Albert</i>	June 20, 1955 - Sept 26, 1955	Mondays, 9:30-10:00 pm	CBS	General Foods - Instant Maxwell House Coffee	129 live 43 kinescopes
<i>Ethel and Albert</i>	Oct 14, 1955 - July 6, 1956	Fridays, 10:00-10:30 pm	ABC	Ralston-Purina (Chex Cereal)	31 live, 30 kinescopes

*It is possible that more – or fewer – stations aired *Ethel and Albert* over the course of the run on each network.

Ethel and Albert was the last of the live sitcoms.⁶⁹ Evident in its development was how dialogue-centric narratives could succeed on the intimate televisual screen. For example, the producer and commentator Gilbert Seldes referred to *Ethel and Albert* as

one of the “triumphs of the medium,” in part due to Lynch’s dialogue.⁷⁰ Critical appraisal and modest ratings, though, meant that the program’s familiarity eventually succumbed to the economics of live television, the influences of sponsors’ programming power, and the overall trend of Hollywoodization. *Ethel and Albert* was live, with kinescopes made for delayed transmissions, sponsor review, and the occasional rerun, but these 16mm film recordings were not high enough quality for actual replay in syndication.⁷¹ NBC considered syndicating *Ethel and Albert* and adopting 35mm recording in order to mitigate a live studio shortage, but it was not economically viable for the network or desirable for the sponsor.⁷² Sunbeam dropped its sponsorship when production costs rose while ratings remained average, transferring its investments to the new television spectacles. This latest programming trend was better suited to its interest in color television and reaching mass audiences.⁷³

Next, CBS and Maxwell House Coffee needed a summer replacement for the filmed comedy *December Bride*. Critics praised *Ethel and Albert* as “alive” and “superior in every way” to the telefilm it replaced.⁷⁴ The show earned decent ratings, but CBS and the sponsor declined to add it to the fall schedule. Lynch recounts how the star of *December Bride* and the sponsor were displeased with Lynch’s summer success, going so far as to sabotage her live show.⁷⁵ The final television version of *Ethel and Albert* aired on ABC. The sponsor dropped *Ethel and Albert* and the timeslot, redirecting its focus on live music programs instead. Without a sponsor, *Ethel and Albert* ended its television run. Her agent encouraged her to pursue the film-studio approach, but she was not interested in relocating to Hollywood.

Ethel and Albert’s 1956 departure from the air came at a moment of industry transition. Sitcoms peaked and transitioned to the film-studio locations as the sitcom increasingly became an even more alluring way to showcase how to solve problems of parenthood and childhood through the consumer goods offered by program sponsors.⁷⁶ Between modes of production and content, *Ethel and Albert* was no longer relevant. Lynch was popular, but not enough to sustain her television career. There was no market for her kinescopes, especially given how these films reflected the aesthetics and errors of early live production such as camera-switching mistakes, dialogue slip-ups, and an overall banal stage setting.⁷⁷ As a point of comparison, *The Honeymooners* (1955-1956) was simultaneously broadcast live and produced with a 35mm camera setup, as independent producers and networks increasingly devised ways to develop programs for potential reruns.⁷⁸ Lynch had neither Gleason’s level of celebrity (or Lucille Ball, Gertrude Berg, etc.),

nor the investments from network and sponsor to justify the cost of attempting such an arrangement.

Reception and Representation

While reception is difficult to gauge, reviews offer a glimpse at how viewers thought of the show, especially as the sitcom's conventions solidified into the familiar tropes. Reviews and letters illustrate at least three related themes: reflections about the genre, normative views of televisual life, and discursive constructions of gender.

The genre is an important means to articulate both the industrial structures that position programs as familiar products and the genre's formal qualities defined by its narratives, characters, and aesthetics.⁷⁹ *Ethel and Albert* exemplifies the genre's core structure when stripped of its vaudevillian influences and residues of stardom, as expressed in regular commentary about the program, particularly as diverging from what people saw as the rote scenarios of other sitcoms. Lynch's situations were not rooted in the routines of vaudeville, variety shows, physical comedy, or narratives about rubes. Nor were they rooted in the moral lessons of family life, particularly raising a modern family in the suburbs, as is the defining features of the *domestic* comedy. As the genre's conventions solidified into the familiar tropes, it is worth noting the ways people evaluated *Ethel and Albert*. For example, the *New York Times* published a letter directed toward "the people who create comedy situation shows" to reconsider their fondness for portraying people as nitwits and relying on slapstick, imploring them to use the summer off season to "think about 'Ethel and Albert' and remember how wonderfully normal and how gently amusing they can be" as a model for the next season.⁸⁰ Similar sentiments are evident in the following two reviews, one from *Newsweek* and the other from *The Boston Post*.

Ethel and Albert don't run into the coincidences that crop up around the Nelsons on *Ozzie and Harriet*; they seldom lead the life of farce that the Ricardos enjoy on *I Love Lucy*, and they never indulge in the frenzy that characterizes the Stevens on *I Married Joan*. Any of the Arbuckle troubles could, and do, turn up in real homes

Not the least of the virtues of 'Ethel and Albert' is that it firmly eschews the preposterously farcical note which is struck with such distressing frequency on most of the domestic comedy programs that some susceptible viewers

have come to regard a television wife as not quite genuine unless she puts cement in her baking powder biscuits, or is seized with the desire to invest heavily in a peanut brittle mine in South Dakota. One finds in 'Ethel and Albert' more normal behavior.⁸¹

Such designations of "real homes" and "normal" align with scholarship identifying television's power to visually construct the default settings for postwar society as white and de-politicized. More critically, *Ethel and Albert* ought to be understood as part of the scholarly critique about how network executives, agencies, and sponsors sanitized on-screen representations of ethnic differences and working class stories in favor of suburban middle class lifestyles.⁸² Likewise, the representations of domesticity resonated with most columnists and reviewers, which reifies television as part of the ideological legitimation of domesticity. Conversely, the status as 'normal' is framed by contexts of Midwestern regionalism, which also contributes to the program's invisibility in scholarship. Media, political, and academic discourses, on the one hand, constructed the pastoral Midwest as national default sets of virtues and morality and, on the other hand, ignored such aesthetics, tastes, and mannerisms *because* of the default mass position.⁸³ Because the transition from live to filmed television is often defined by the transformations from urban, ethnic families to suburban middle class, *Ethel and Albert* is rendered invisible in its liveness and categorized as another text in the list of suburban families. Furthermore, in the construction of ordinariness, there lies normative assumptions about a *civic* postwar culture. Lynch's stable of ordinary plots often included participation in their respective civic clubs, or specific plots about income taxes and Albert running for mayor. And unsurprisingly, civic qualities are mapped along gendered lines. As described in the sitcom proposal, Albert is "active in community affairs, is a very vocal Rotarian, and is symbolic of the typical American masculine personality." These traits are "symbolic of the typical American masculine personality."⁸⁴ Ethel "is active in community affairs ... in general her values are the values of any average woman in a familiar American town." Future studies can make use of this program as among the "fossilized snapshots" exhibiting the mid-tier success of middlebrow tastes and other facets such as fashion, speech, and other textures of ordinariness.⁸⁵

The gender dynamics of *Ethel and Albert* resonated with critics partially as an affirmation of the battle of the sexes, but arguably also as a nuanced departure from anchoring femininity in one of two representations. In an era of limited onscreen representations of women, situations with a semblance of realism – frustrations between

husbands and wives, impressing bosses, etc. – were couched in either the over-the-top slapstick or the family unit. There were the Gracie Allen and Lucy Ricardo characters who, through physical and broad comedy, could be read as contesting their husbands' dominance but unsuccessful in attempting to escape the monotonous domestic sphere. The June Cleaver and Margaret Anderson characters are mostly content with domesticity and epitomize the new housewife in suburbia.⁸⁶ In contrast to the wives in the vaudevillian-influenced sitcoms, David Marc argues that Margaret in *Father Knows Best* "never seriously contests her husband's male hegemony, not even for comic purposes."⁸⁷ This prevailing dichotomy matches the either/or discourse about fifties sitcoms – either it was an outrageous situation comedy featuring a comedy duo *or* an even-keeled domestic comedy that was oriented around the family.

Although not a radical departure from the iconic vision of domesticity, recovering *Ethel and Albert's* textuality and reception is a means to insert the *representative* into television historiography rather than a deferential sensibility about the representation of gender as seen through the exceptional and the familiar via the regime of repetition. As Moseley and Wheatley write, "[t]he kind of material that does still exist to view may challenge the ways in which we imagine 1950s women's television, or indeed, how we critically reconstruct femininity in the 1950s."⁸⁸ Ethel falls somewhere between the conventional discursive construction of sitcom women. She was neither the mother figure that epitomized suburban domesticity nor the vaudeville comedienne. Albert does not come off in the way that many scholars describe the sitcom dad/husband, including Albert, as a one-dimensional buffoon or unapologetically berating his wife. Plots did not center on or end with the overt affirmation of what we recall as a 1950s status quo in sitcom-dom, where patriarchy is upheld when men are emasculated for doing domestic tasks and women fail at escaping from the boredom of the home.⁸⁹ For example in one episode, Albert's friend *tries* to emasculate Albert when seeing him in a frilly apron and doing chores. The episode's writing and resolution ends up emasculating Albert's friend by first, exposing male frailty at the slightest possibility of getting sick (he cowers in fear at Ethel's cold), and second, revealing the superficiality of romantic gestures when there is little mutual respect between spouses. Granted, the episode demarcates the acceptable boundaries for men to do housework when the women are ill, but regular viewers were familiar with common Albert-doing-chores plots.⁹⁰

A *Radio TV Mirror* writer explained "*Ethel and Albert* isn't a show with a message" in the sense of other domestic sitcom's moralistic lessons.⁹¹ But there was a message – a more equitable balance of relations between a married couple. Episodes did not end with

a resolution with one spouse as always right and the other wrong. Lynch's program deviated from the contemporary norms because she wrote dialogue from a woman's perspective amid a field of male writers with narrow stereotypes and conceptions when writing for women's voices. Her writing reflects the social biases and constructions of gender endemic of the time, and as such, we may read Lynch's dialogue and performances as self-reflexive accounts of her experiences.⁹² The consequence of not filling in broadcast histories with more of these kinds of programs and stories is that we may remain locked into dichotomies of representations as told through the lens of canonical programs and rote genre conventions.

Filling the Gaps: Making Visible What's Been Invisible

The archival, audio-visual, and paratextual evidence of Lynch's career serves as a corrective to common understanding of how women actively participated in shaping radio and television. When we actively pursue such hidden comprehensive manuscript collections that reside outside of canons, including the primacy of archival institutions known for broadcast history, we find potential in supporting and challenging historiographies. My principal project has been to outline facets in evaluating the gaps in broadcast historiography, particularly when material traces are intact. *Ethel and Albert* is an example of capricious and deliberate factors involved in television's archival presence as well as its absences. Its material survival in an academic archive illustrates the role of the proactive archivist to make a case for why someone's creative and industrial work will matter to someone else in the future. Moreover, its existence in the archive, but relative absence from historiography, implicates how commercial and industrial mechanism increase the visibility of certain programs, which is further aided by the trends and methodologies that inform the subjects of our scholarship. This is a matter of a macro-level view about the cycles in knowledge production when our work so heavily relies on popular culture and cultural industries. Lynch's collection, recovered kinescopes, and my self-made archive of industry and popular press reports serve as a micro-level illustration of how some of those gates in the cycle operate, along with interventions into addressing the gaps left by the cycle.

The existence of a 1950s program's visual records and documentary traces may productively be used to broaden canonical views about 1950s sitcoms, whether that is to corroborate the sitcom's generic and industrial historiography and/or challenge the primacy of the people, tropes, and representations that have been most familiar. I invite

others to evaluate this program, but more crucially, I implore others to consider the underlying premises of this case study to pursue those methodological paths of locating that which is materially available but historiographically absent.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Elizabeth Peterson and Cynthia Meyers for comments on conference presentations and prior drafts. This work would not have been possible without Linda Long at the University of Oregon Special Collections and Peg's daughter, Astrid King.

Endnotes

¹ David Marc, *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

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³ Lynch, Peg. "NBC Script #38," March 6, 195g, 12, Box 44, Peg Lynch Papers.

⁴ Gilbert Seldes, "A Clinical Analysis of TV," *New York Times*, November 28, 1954, sec. SM13; M Cohen, "Ethel and Albert," *TV Radio Mirror*, October 1955; Robert Connors, "She Corresponds with 5000 Persons," *The Columbus Dispatch*, c. 1955, Scrapbook: 48, Peg Lynch Papers.

⁵ For an example, see "Mr. Digit and the Battle of Bubbling Brook," posted by AT&T Archives on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/EdW4FFMZrfU>.

⁶ The lack of recognition is changing in recent years. Lynch's daughter, Astrid King, has been actively working to draw more attention to Lynch. A prominent example of this is Lynch's obituary in *The New York Times*, which was initiated by King (King, 2015, personal communication). Another example is James Lileks, a columnist for the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*. His fandom of Lynch's radio programs turned into a series of correspondence and increased awareness of Lynch's career.

⁷ Brett Mills, *Television Sitcom* (London: BFI, 2005).

⁸ Christopher Anderson, *HollywoodTV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); Douglas Gomery, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); Susan Murray, *Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

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- ¹¹ Derek Kompare, *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- ¹² Frances Bonner, *Ordinary Television: Analyzing Popular TV* (London: SAGE, 2003).
- ¹³ Horace Newcomb, "Toward Television History: The Growth of Styles," *Journal of the University Film Association* 30, no. 2 (1978): 13.
- ¹⁴ Amy Holdsworth, "'Television Resurrections': Television and Memory," *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 3 (2008): 137-144; Lynn Spigel, "Our TV Heritage: Television, the Archive, and the Reasons for Preservation," in *A Companion to Television*, ed. Janet Wasko (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 67-102.
- ¹⁵ Kathleen Collins, "The Trouble with Archie: Locating and Accessing Primary Sources for the Study of the 1970s US Sitcom, *All in the Family*," *Critical Studies in Television*, October 29, 2012.
- ¹⁶ Charlotte Brunson, "Is Television Studies History?," *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 3 (2008): 127-137; Matt Hill, "From the Box in the Corner to the Box Set on the Shelf," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 5, no. 1 (2007): 41-60; William Thomas Murphy and Library of Congress, *Television and Video Preservation 1997: A Report on the Current State of American Television and Video Preservation: Report of the Librarian of Congress*. (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1997).
- ¹⁷ Preservation was rarely the intent behind the kinescope and early tape recordings of live television. It was generally used instead for re-transmission purposes such as a relay function between stations and time zones. However, networks and others deliberately destroyed 16mm films and tapes for space-saving and re-use reasons, especially before commercial reasons became apparent. See Jeff Martin, "The Dawn of Tape: Transmission Device as Preservation Medium," *Moving Image* 5, no. 1 (2005): 45-66.
- ¹⁸ Nina C. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995); David R Coon, *Look Closer: Suburban Narratives and American Values in Film and Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014); David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Random House, 1993).
- ¹⁹ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Kompare, *Rerun Nation*; Spigel, "Our TV Heritage: Television, the Archive, and the Reasons for Preservation."
- ²⁰ Joanne J Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, *Critical Perspectives on the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 2.
- ²¹ Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 131.
- ²² Simone Knox, "The Unwitting Pioneer of Transatlantic Format Adaptation: Beryl Vertue," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 39, no. 2 (2019): 348.
- ²³ Media History Digital Library is a resource of digitized trade and fan magazines: <https://mediahistoryproject.org/>. Another similar resource is WorldRadioHistory.com.

²⁴ Amanda Keeler, "'A Certain Stigma' of Educational Radio: Judith Waller and 'Public Service' Broadcasting," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34, no. 5 (2017): 495-508; Catherine Martin, "Archival Research as a Feminist Practice," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 16, no. 4 (2018): 454-460; Jennifer Hyland Wang, "Producing a Radio Housewife Clara, Lu 'n' Em, Gendered Labor, and the Early Days of Radio," *Feminist Media Histories* 4, no. 1 (2018): 58-83.

²⁵ Denise Lowe, *Women and American Television: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1999), xiii.

²⁶ Lowe, 108. Emphasis added.

²⁷ Craig Allen, "Television Broadcast Records," in *Methods of Historical Analysis in Electronic Media*, ed. Donald G Godfrey (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 207-232; Donald Godfrey, "Researching Electronic Media History," in *Methods of Historical Analysis in Electronic Media*, ed. Donald Godfrey (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 3-24.

²⁸ Fay Schreibman, "A Succinct History of American Television Archives," *Film & History* 21, no. 2 & 3 (1991): 89-95.

²⁹ By canonical institutions, I mean those with deliberate collecting areas in broadcast history in particular, and popular culture / contemporary history more broadly. These institutions include the Library of Congress, University of Wisconsin, University of Georgia's Peabody Collection, Syracuse University, University of Wyoming, University of Maryland, UCLA Film and Television Archives, The Paley Center, and a few other places.

³⁰ "General Explanation of the Tax Reform Act of 1969: H.R. 13270, 91st Congress, Public Law 91-172 : United States. Congress. Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation," Pub. L. No. 91-172 (1970). Available at: <https://archive.org/details/generalexplanati1670unit>.

³¹ Finding aid for the Peg Lynch Papers: <https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv37635>.

³² Anne Berke, "'You Just Type': Women Television Writers in 1950s America" (Yale University, 2016). https://www.academia.edu/7207606/Abstract_You_Just_Type_The_Woman_Comedy_Writer_in_1950s_Television_SCMS_2014_

³³ Collins, "The Trouble with Archie."

³⁴ Barbara Moore, Marvin R Bensman, and Jim Van Dyke, *Prime-Time Television: A Concise History* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006), 58; Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946-Present* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 1945.

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³⁶ William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Anderson, *HollywoodTV*; Gary R Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

³⁷ David Marc, *Demographic Vistas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 20; Marc, *Comic Visions*.

³⁸ Attallah, "Television Discourse and Situation Comedy."

³⁹ Anderson, *HollywoodTV*; Lori Landay, "I Love Lucy: Television and Gender in Postwar Domestic Ideology," in *The Sitcom Reader: America Re-Viewed, Still Skewed*, ed. Mary M Dalton and Laura R Linder, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 31-42.

⁴⁰ Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television*.

⁴¹ Horace Newcomb, *TV: The Most Popular Art* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1974); Michael Z Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimizing Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁴² Vincent Brook, "The Americanization of Molly: How Mid-Fifties TV Homogenized *The Goldbergs* (And Got 'Berg-larized' in the Process)," *Cinema Journal* 38, no. 4 (1999): 45-67; George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

⁴³ Spigel included *Ethel and Albert* not because of knowledge of the program, but because her methodological approach involved magazines and archival research deep within NBC's programming strategies in order to circumvent the problem of non-existent or inaccessible programs.

⁴⁴ "Staff-Written Shows - July 1, 1953 through December 31, 1953," *Ross Reports on Television*, April 23, 1954. Available at: https://www.americanradiohistory.com/TV_Index.htm (accessed 15 May 2021).

⁴⁵ Examples of these kinds of scripts can be found in Boxes 38-54 in Lynch's collection. Lynch talked about her producer-type roles in the oral interview. Details about finances come from her 1953 and 1954 tax returns, which are unprocessed collection materials.

⁴⁶ Catherine Johnson, "Negotiating Value and Quality in Television Historiography," in *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television History*, ed. Helen Wheatley (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 60.

⁴⁷ Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

⁴⁸ Alexander Russo, *Points on the Dial: Golden Age Radio beyond the Networks* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 159.

⁴⁹ Diana Gibbings, "Re: Peg Lynch, Writer and Actress," *New York Times*, June 2, 1946.

⁵⁰ "'Ethel and Albert' End Cycle with Move Back to ABC-TV," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, December 3, 1955. Future researchers may take an interest in further situating Lynch's style in the context of how scholars, such as Michele Hilmes in *Radio Voices* chapters 5 and 6, writes about the feminized daytime hours.

⁵¹ This is another story from her oral history; while there is contemporaneous evidence about how she auditioned for ABC via trade press articles and published interviews, as of this moment, her pitch to NBC and refusal of NBC's offer remain in anecdotal accounts.

⁵² Peg Lynch, "Bickering Won't Hurt Your Marriage," *Radio and Television Mirror*, July 1950.

⁵³ Darrell Y Hamamoto, *Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democratic Ideology* (New York: Praeger, 1989); Marc, *Comic Visions*.

⁵⁴ David Marc, "Origins of the Genre: In Search of the Radio Sitcom," in *The Sitcom Reader: America Re-Viewed, Still Skewed*, ed. Mary M Dalton and Laura R Linder, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 1-12.

⁵⁵ "P&G Eyes Serial," *Broadcasting*, 1944; "Now You See Them: ABC to Fill out Video Bill by Converting Standard Shows," *Tune In*, July 1946.

⁵⁶ For example, an ad from ABC Sales Department explained that the "family ears are open wider for 'Ethel and Albert,' as justification for why it will stay at the 6:15 pm, transitional, timeslot.

⁵⁷ NBC, "Sunbeam's Got It!" (Presentation booklet, 1953), Box 38, Folder 1, Peg Lynch Papers; "Web Situation Comedies," *Billboard*, February 4, 1956.

⁵⁸ "Peg Lynch-Alan Bunce Go 2-a-Day on CBS Radio," *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)*, January 8, 1958.

⁵⁹ Boddy, *Fifties Television*; Kompare, *Rerun Nation*.

⁶⁰ Kompare, *Rerun Nation*, 54.

⁶¹ The treatment for the half-hour *Ethel and Albert* included Susie, their daughter from the radio program. See "Proposal and Script for Half-hour Ethel and Albert programming" Box 38, Folder 1, Peg Lynch Papers.

⁶² Gibbings, "Re: Peg Lynch, Writer and Actress."

⁶³ "Now You See Them: ABC to Fill out Video Bill by Converting Standard Shows."

⁶⁴ "Television-Radio: NBC Offers Aid to 'Lucy' Competition," *The Billboard (Archive: 1894-1960); Cincinnati*, May 9, 1953.

⁶⁵ Incidentally, awareness about *Ethel and Albert* is a means to utilize the NBC collection at Wisconsin, where there are several memos further contextualizing industrial decisions.

⁶⁶ For descriptions of sitcoms, see Newcomb, *TV*.

⁶⁷ Lynch talked about adapting and revising older radio scripts for television in her oral history; the practice is also evident when comparing radio scripts to the television scripts that feature similar premises.

⁶⁸ Table 1 Sources for program reach: "Sunbeam's Got It!" Presentation booklet, 1953. Box 38. Folder 1. Peg Lynch Papers; "This Week -- Network Debuts & Highlights." *Ross Reports on Television 7*, no. 25 (June 20, 1955): 63; "This Week" *Ross Reports on Television 7*, no. 41 (Oct 10, 1955): 127.

⁶⁹ Alex McNeil, *Total Television* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1996).

⁷⁰ Seldes, "A Clinical Analysis of TV."

⁷¹ Thomas Loeb, "Memo from Tom Loeb to Thomas McAvity," March 18, 1954, Folder 46, Box 380; NBC Records, 1921-1976, Wisconsin Historical Society; "This Week -- Network Debuts & Highlights," *Ross Reports on Television 7*, no. 25 (June 20, 1955): 63.

⁷² Jack Rayel, "Memo from Jack Rayel to Edward Hitz," July 6, 1953, July 6, 1953. Folder 55, Box 368; NBC Records, 1921-1976, Wisconsin Historical Society.

⁷³ "Sunbeam Rehearses 16 Hours for 5-Min. Plug," *The Billboard (Archive: 1894-1960)*, September 18, 1954.

⁷⁴ Trau, "Ethel and Albert," *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)*, June 22, 1955.

⁷⁵ Lynch explains that that the network or agency allegedly sent strangers to interrupt her live show on at least two occasions. A former account executive at Benton & Bowles later told Lynch about the sabotage incidents and that he quit the business as a result. This story is in her oral history at the University of Oregon Special Collections and University Archives as well as part of a published interview with her in Michael Sacks, *Poking a Dead Frog: Conversations with Today's Top Comedy Writers* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

⁷⁶ Leibman, *Living Room Lectures*; George Lipsitz, *Time Passages*.

⁷⁷ For example, camera errors and dialogue slip ups are visible in "Women's Club Buys a New Club House," July 4, 1955, CBS. This was one of the kinescopes digitized by the library for Berke's dissertation research.

⁷⁸ Kompare, *Rerun Nation*.

⁷⁹ Feuer, Jane, "Genre Study and Television.," in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, in R. C. Allen (Ed.) (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1992), 138-60.

⁸⁰ Paul Byrne, "TV-Radio Mailbag: Comments on Situation Comedy Programs," *New York Times*, July 26, 1953, sec. X9.

⁸¹ "Two Folks at Home," *Newsweek*, 1953, Scrapbook, Peg Lynch Papers; E O'Conner, "About Television," *Boston Post*, January 16, 1954, Scrapbook, Peg Lynch Papers.

⁸² Vincent Brook, "The Americanization of Molly: How Mid-Fifties TV Homogenized 'The Goldbergs' (And Got 'Berg-larized' in the Process)," *Cinema Journal* 38, no. 4 (1999): 45-67; Hamamoto, *Nervous Laughter*; Lipsitz, *Time Passages*.

⁸³ Victoria E Johnson, *Heartland TV: Prime Time Television and the Struggle for U.S. Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

⁸⁴ "Proposal and Script for Half-hour Ethel and Albert programming" (c. 1953) Folder, 1 Box 38; Peg Lynch Papers." Additionally, one can read Lynch's proposal, scripts, and programs alongside in the context of Anna McCarthy's study of 1950s dramas, public affairs, and corporate-sponsored programs in that television was a form of governance to define parameters of civic life. See Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York: New Press, 2010).

⁸⁵ Máire Messenger Davies, "Heirlooms in the Living Room: Retrieving Television's Hidden Histories and the Problem of Changing Formats" *Critical Studies in Television*, October 29, 2012, 38.

⁸⁶ Landay, "I Love Lucy." Steve T. Sheehan, "To the Moon! Working-Class Masculinity in *The Honeymooners*," in *The Sitcom Reader: America Re-Viewed, Still Skewed*, ed. Mary M Dalton and Laura R Linder, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 43–54; Mary Desjardins "Lucy And Desi: Sexuality, Ethnicity, And TV's First Family.," in *Television, History, And American Culture: Feminist Critical Essays*, In Mary Beth Havalovich and Lauren Rabinovitz (eds.) (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 56–74; Patricia Mellencamp, "Situation Comedy, Feminism, and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy," in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*, ed. Joanne Morreale (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 41–55; Mary Beth Haralovich, "Sitcoms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker," in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*, J. Morreale (Ed.) (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 69–86.

⁸⁷ Marc, *Comic Visions*, 55.

⁸⁸ Rachel Moseley and Helen Wheatley, "Is Archiving a Feminist Issue? Historical Research and the Past, Present, and Future of Television Studies," *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 3 (2008): 155.

⁸⁹ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

⁹⁰ "Should_a Woman Try To Change Her Husband?," Kinescope, *Ethel and Albert* (ABC, October 2, 1954), Peg Lynch Papers.

⁹¹ Cohen, "Ethel and Albert," 81.

⁹² Berke, "'You Just Type': Women Television Writers in 1950s America."