

The Independents

Rethinking the Television Studio System

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By 1960 American television was, by and large, Hollywood television. The three networks had solidified their control over prime-time programming during the previous decade, in the process delegating the bulk of production matters to motion picture makers. By the mid-1950s most of the major movie studios were involved in producing series for the small screen, and when the 1960 prime-time schedule was unveiled, over 80 percent of it was generated in Hollywood.¹ With the network-Hollywood alliance cemented, telefilm production established as an integral part of the American film industry, and the filmed series set as the fundamental form of television, the late 1950s has been seen as a period of stabilization, setting the stage for the stasis—both industrial and creative—of the 1960s. As one historian put it, “The economic and programming trends within the TV industry climaxed at the end of the 1950s, giving American television a relatively stable set of commercial structures and prime-time program forms.”²

Yet the dawn of the 1960s did not mark a point of closure and inertia for commercial television, but rather a transition into another stage of the medium’s development, a stage characterized by continuing transformation and redefinition. Indeed, the new decade arrived on the heels of quiz show scandals, a perceived programming crisis, and mounting criticism from both

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inside and outside the television community. It was virtually inevitable that the industry would enter the new decade in a flurry of conscious and explicit change.³ This atmosphere of crisis and criticism intensified the creative and commercial stakes in an already competitive arena, and played into the industry’s inherent quest for apparent novelty and regulated difference.

Certainly the 1960s witnessed further consolidation of the networks’ control over programming—but against a backdrop of shifting Hollywood power relations, marked by the growing status of independent producers, the rise and fall of various major program suppliers, and ongoing struggles for survival among telefilm majors and independents alike. The central role played by the independents has been largely overlooked in the standard scenario of the telefilm’s development as essentially a continuation of the Hollywood factory system. Tino Balio, for example, writes that “after the majors entered telefilm production the market underwent consolidation as independent producers either went out of business or merged with larger firms.”⁴ In fact, independent producers dominated television production during the 1960s. It was in the interests of the networks and indeed the major studios themselves to subcontract production duties, delegating the nuts and bolts of program creation to independent producers, while retaining the considerable financial benefits of distribution—a logical expectation, since the Hollywood majors had shifted to precisely the same model for features. Such a process of “vertical disintegration,” as one critic has put it, is a function of “both the externalization of risk and the attempt to exploit a maximum variety of creative resources.”⁵ By drawing on a range of independent suppliers, the American television industry could re-invigorate programming while minimizing risk and exploiting the established rewards of distribution. The creative tensions of the telefilm era and the competitive dynamics of Hollywood TV, informed by the enterprising efforts of independent producers, ordained that the terrain of 1960s television would be not a sterile expanse of banality, but rather a diverse field for cultural expression, marked by both imitation and invention, convention and creativity.

The Network-Hollywood Axis

Television’s shift from a predominantly “live from New York” operation to a largely filmic medium, and the associated rise of Hollywood as the center for television production, has been well-documented over the past decade. A rich body of scholarship has demonstrated the symbiosis between Hollywood and television, and clarified the impact that the small screen had on the movie business. In 1959, *Broadcasting* magazine claimed: “To the movie capital, the dreaded destroyer that they thought TV would be has turned out instead to be the good provider.”⁶ The reasons for telefilm’s rise to dominance are many, but the most important can be summed up in one word: residuals. Where live production was generally a one-shot event, forever lost in the ether, the filmed series was a durable product—with a durable profit potential via syndication. This revenue potential was significant for

the networks as well as producers, and proved to be a pivotal factor in the development of the telefilm.

In addition to the promise of residuals, the rise of the Hollywood film industry as the dominant source of television product was also a function of increasing network control over prime-time programming. Throughout the 1950s the networks had gradually been consolidating their hegemony over program scheduling and selection, and the telefilm series offered the networks a greater opportunity for program control, since it could be brokered by networks to sponsors, rather than the reverse (the dominant practice for live shows). By ordering programming from outside producers, networks left the cost and complications of production to an industry already equipped with the infrastructure and resources to produce a polished entertainment product.⁷ Both NBC and CBS increased their reliance on filmed series during the late 1950s, cutting back on in-house programming. ABC had already embraced the telefilm, achieving its earliest successes with filmed programming from Disney and especially Warner Bros., which produced a steady diet of westerns and detective series exclusively for that network (e.g., *Cheyenne*, *Maverick*, *77 Sunset Strip*, *Hawaiian Eye*). NBC went on to establish a similar relationship with MCA's Revue studios, leading to the oft-cited tale of one NBC executive's instructions to a Revue studios vice president: "Here are the empty spots, you fill them."⁸ The quiz scandals of 1958 and 1959, coming on the heels of a widely-lamented "crisis" in programming quality, afforded the networks an occasion to further tighten their grip with much rhetoric of "cleaning up" and "taking charge."⁹ By dumping the largely New York-based quiz shows, the networks further increased Hollywood's stake in prime time, helping it reach the 80 percent-plus mark noted above.

Once masters of their own time slots, and sometimes producers of their own shows, advertisers were effectively squeezed out of program production and ownership in favor of "participation sponsorship." There can be little doubt of the networks' calculation in this regard, yet there is also no doubt that the economics of the industry played into their hands. Program costs were ever increasing, especially as hour-long shows became more widespread, and the higher costs helped to strengthen the practice of multiple sponsorship. With the price of an hour-long show at \$100,000 or more by 1960, few sponsors could afford "a week-in, week-out ride on a 60-min. show," as *Variety* put it. Even those that could come to embrace the wisdom of spreading advertising dollars across several shows. While this strategy sacrificed traditional single-sponsor identification, it minimized risk by increasing the odds of being attached to a hit, and promised a potentially greater audience "reach."¹⁰

Whatever its ostensible benefit to advertisers, of course, the move to multiple sponsorship further tightened the networks' grip on programming. A few sponsors retained some control over programming in the early 1960s, but shows owned by advertisers were a disappearing breed, *The Andy Griffith Show* and *The Rifleman* being among the last surviving examples. There

is no question that sponsors still meddled in production matters and asserted some influence over time slots and content well into the decade, even in shows they did not own.¹¹ Nevertheless, this influence was relative, and it was quite clear by this time that the networks held ultimate power in programming—not only in terms of scheduling, but, increasingly, in program production matters as well.

As they solidified their control over the schedules, the networks increasingly demanded ownership interests in the series they aired. Typically, they would underwrite pilot and/or series production in return for shares of both first-run and syndication profits. As early as the fall 1960 season, the networks had ownership positions in 62 percent of their prime-time offerings, and the practice became more and more common as the decade progressed.¹² Here again one could argue—as the networks unflinchingly did during FCC inquiries into program procurement—that network involvement worked to the benefit of producers and sponsors by reducing their financial risk in pilot production, and that the networks' profit participation was justified by their shouldering of the risk in program development.¹³ Of course, their "risk" was relative. If a network-financed pilot was not picked up as a series, the network's investment could be written off; its interests in the rest of the prime-time line-up would offset the expenditures on unsold pilots (and the network's risk was further minimized in those cases in which it chose not to commission a pilot at all).¹⁴ As for the benefits of such arrangements, the pay-offs in domestic and foreign syndication, as well as possible merchandising tie-ins, ultimately proved quite lucrative. Clearly, the network position in all such arrangements was reasonably safe and highly profitable.

The networks' reliance on outside program packagers continued during 1960s, and their insistence on profit participations increased, although the network-producer relationships shifted as each of the three "webs" pursued its own strategy of dealing with its suppliers. For the 1964 season *Variety* observed that CBS was casting its "non-patronage plague" on the studios in favor of independent producers, contrasted with ABC's "reliance on the same giant production companies" it had always favored. NBC, on the other hand, was striking a relative balance between independents and "Hollywood factory" deals.¹⁵

Although by this time the distinction between independents and "majors" in some cases was ambiguous or academic, it is important to recognize that independent producers maintained a significant role in telefilm production in the 1960s. While Hollywood's move into the telefilm business is often reductively glossed as a perpetuation of the old mass-production studio system, or an extension of "B" movie production, the production systems and financial arrangements of the telefilm industry beyond the mid-1950s replicated the new realities of the motion picture business. The telefilm was inextricably bound to the Hollywood system, but it reflected the package-oriented structure of the contemporary film industry more than the studio system of old.

From Minor-Leaguers to "TV Majors": The Independents

Independent production had long been a component of the Hollywood system, but the "Paramount decrees," which forced the major studios to abandon the exhibition side of the film business after 1948, led to its solidification. As a result of divestiture, the "factory" system of film production was replaced by a decentralized model wherein each film was created as an autonomous project. As Thomas Schatz has written, "the studios became primarily *distribution companies*, financing independently produced films . . . shot on sound stages and lots rented from the studio by the independent producer."¹⁶ The same held true for the telefilm. By 1960 the telefilm business was dominated by various forms of independent production and the "packaging" of series on a project-by-project basis, with the major studios serving more often as financiers and distributors than as strict producer-owners.

In feature production an independent was traditionally defined as a firm that was neither owned by a distribution company, nor owned a distribution arm.¹⁷ In television production, the term generally was used to designate firms devoted solely to TV production, or sometimes more narrowly defined as companies that owned no studio facility.¹⁸ Independent television production in the 1960s was characterized by two main systems, primarily distinguished by their respective financing and distribution arrangements: the self-contained firm, and the coproduction deal with an established studio (which might involve one or multiple projects). While the term "independent" does bear some qualification in terms of the power relationships that obtained during this period, in the context of the 1960s telefilm it served to distinguish a new breed of independent operator from the old Hollywood majors.

The earliest of telefilm pioneers were independents in the truest sense of the term—small, entrepreneurial, and unaffiliated with the big studios. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, while the major studios were investigating co-optation strategies such as theater TV and subscription TV, enterprising producers from the margins of the movie industry and related entertainment fields moved into telefilm production, establishing a niche in network and syndicated programming with half-hour anthologies or genre-based series. Most of the self-contained independents shot in rented studio space, financed their own projects (sometimes with network assistance), and distributed their own product under their own logos.¹⁹ Many independents established a solid foothold in production before the motion picture majors entered the field in 1955.

While not all of the pioneering independents survived (e.g., Jerry Fairbanks Productions folded, Ziv Television was absorbed by United Artists), many thrived. Desilu, for example, went from shooting the *I Love Lucy* pilot on a rented soundstage in 1951 to purchasing the entire RKO studio facility in 1957, becoming one of the medium's top suppliers by the early 1960s with shows such as *The Untouchables*, *The Lucy Show*, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, and *The Lineup*. Four Star was dubbed a "TV major" by the trades

in 1962, with six shows in prime time (down from a peak of twelve in 1960); its output included *The Rifleman*, *Burke's Law*, *Honey West*, *The Rogues*, and *The Big Valley*.²⁰ Many other early independents also retained a solid presence as telefilm manufacturers well into the 1960s and beyond, in some cases launching distinctive program dynasties, e.g.: Bing Crosby Productions (*Ben Casey*, *Breaking Point*, *Hogan's Heroes*); Danny Thomas/Sheldon Leonard's T and L Productions (*The Danny Thomas Show*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *I Spy*), and Filmways (*Beverly Hillbillies*, *Mr. Ed*, *Petticoat Junction*, *Green Acres*, *The Addams Family*). Smaller companies with smaller inventories also continued to operate in the shadow of the major film studios during the decade, among them Rod Serling's Cayuga Productions (*The Twilight Zone*), Herbert Brodtkin's Plautus Productions (*The Defenders*, *The Nurses*), Jack Chertock Productions (*My Favorite Martian*, *My Living Doll*), Don Fedderson Productions (*My Three Sons*, *Family Affair*), and Jack Webb's Mark VII (*Dragnet '67*, *Adam-12*). The fortunes of such unaffiliated operators shifted during the decade, but they maintained a steady and important role in the industry, holding their own with the majors to account for a significant share of prime-time product.

As such self-contained independents flourished, others found success through coproduction with established Hollywood powers. Many of the majors opened their doors to independent partnerships in the mid-1950s, mirroring the increasingly dominant practice in feature production, a practice that bloomed in the 1960s. In such cases the studio provided financing, studio and office space, postproduction facilities, and distribution services, while the outside producer supplied the concept, hired the talent, and coordinated the production. Columbia's TV division, Screen Gems, first adopted this practice in 1954, about the same time as the leading TV major, Revue; MGM and United Artists followed around 1960, as did 20th Century-Fox in 1964. Of the Hollywood movie studios active in television production, only Warner Bros. remained closed to independent deals until the mid-1960s. It should be stressed that Screen Gems, MGM, Fox, and Revue continued to produce and distribute wholly owned projects as well, while United Artists confined its television output exclusively to coproductions (as it did with its features). In-house independents during the 1960s included Herbert Leonard, whose *Route 66* and *Naked City* were distributed by Screen Gems; Norman Felton's MGM-based Arena Productions (*Dr. Kildare*, *The Lieutenant*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Eleventh Hour*); Irwin Allen's science fiction factory (*Lost in Space*, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *Land of the Giants*), associated with 20th Century-Fox; Leslie Stevens's Daystar, distributing through United Artists (*The Outer Limits*, *Stoney Burke*); and of course Alfred Hitchcock, whose Shamley Productions (*Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Suspicion*) was headquartered at Revue. The prolific Quinn Martin (QM Productions) was more explicitly "independent," striking three co-production deals with three different studios for 1965: *The Fugitive* with UA-TV, *Twelve O'Clock High* with 20th Century-Fox, and *The F.B.I.* with Warners; likewise, David Susskind's Talent Associates teamed

up with various partners during the 1960s, including UA (*East Side, West Side*), Paramount (*Get Smart*), and CBS (*He and She*).

To further qualify the relative independence of these producers, one could distinguish between those that used talent agencies to handle the selling of their products (e.g., Talent Associates, Arena, Daystar) and those that didn't (e.g., Leonard, Martin). While talent agents had been involved in the packaging of series from television's earliest days, they became key players in the 1960s, as they were hired with increasing frequency as packagers and/or selling agents for self-contained firms and writer-producers. After 1960 it became increasingly common for independent producers to retain talent agencies to broker their network deals, and/or put together entire series projects—another byproduct of divestiture and “the package system.” In the feature film arena, the agency “came to perform the same function as the studio of old,” writes Schatz, as mass production gave way to individual packages, with writers, directors, and actors no longer bound to studio contracts.²¹ Although the agencies did not consolidate their power in features until the mid-1960s, agency packaging of television series was well in place by the beginning of the decade as unaffiliated producers and small independents struggled to maintain a stake in the industry. Moving beyond mere talent representation, agents now brought together producers, writers, and performers in series packages, or in some instances represented existing packages to networks, in return for a ten percent commission on the entire package price (around \$100,000 per episode for a one-hour show in 1960).

Although they were less visible to the public, the agencies became as powerful in the telefilm business as the Hollywood majors. As the parent company of Revue Productions since 1952, MCA was the largest de facto agency-packager in the business (and remained so until a 1962 consent decree forced the firm to divest its talent arm). And as early as 1957, William Morris and General Artists together represented over fifteen hours on the air. In some cases, talent agencies even brokered coproduction projects for producers in league with established Hollywood powers (e.g., Arena at MGM and Daystar at UA), especially when one or more of their clients were involved as above-the-line personnel.²² The agencies also were recruited by some of television's key independent “majors”: Four Star signed William Morris as selling agent for its entire product line in 1956, and four years later the venerable agency had twenty-five shows booked in prime time (nearly half of them Four Star entries). Similarly, General Artists was hired to represent Desilu's program sales beginning in 1961.²³ Ashley-Steiner, with an established reputation as a “literary” shop, concentrated on putting together prestige packages such as *The Twilight Zone*, *Dr. Kildare*, *Mr. Novak*, and *The Defenders*, going on to become one of television's leading packagers after MCA's 1962 breakup. By 1963 the talent agencies' television divisions were their biggest and most profitable components. The Morris agency estimated that it drew 60 percent of its commissions from its television projects (including talent and packaging), while Ashley-Steiner confirmed that its television division was the firm's largest, and its major source of income.²⁴

By the early 1960s, television was dominated by independent production and “package deals,” accounting for nearly 70 percent of prime-time fiction shows by 1963.²⁵ Admittedly, as small outfits like Desilu and Four Star became top suppliers of prime-time product, and as producers teamed up with old-line majors or powerful agents, the term “independent” became more and more ambiguous, and sometimes meaningless in any “alternative” sense. Likewise, the ostensible autonomy of any producer during the 1960s was further qualified by network financing and ownership interests in many shows, and strong relationships between particular suppliers and networks. Independent producer Lee Rich (Mirisch-Rich), for example, argued that independent firms like Filmways and Talent Associates were in fact “house companies” because of their close relationship with CBS.²⁶

Still, neither a partnership with a major studio nor a network development deal guaranteed longevity in the television production game. Under network deficit-financing arrangements (whereby a producer sold a show below cost in anticipation of residual revenues), even “house companies” were gambling—and the syndication profits they hoped for, of course, were increasingly being divided with the networks. Independent suppliers operated at the whim of the market, and it was a market that had only three buyers. Producer-network relationships were notoriously tenuous and network buying patterns could be unpredictable. A self-contained firm was only as stable as its last hit, and one package sale did not guarantee another. Rod Serling's Cayuga Productions managed to mount only one post-*Twilight Zone* series project during the 1960s. Perhaps as a result of its long-standing refusal to cut the networks in on foreign and domestic syndication, Four Star went from being a “TV major” with twelve network shows in 1960, to a single prime-time slot in 1963, to receivership in 1967. Filmways found itself with no program base when CBS “purged” its rural-slanted programming in 1970, ending the studio's bucolic sitcom reign. (On the other hand, David Susskind of Talent Associates went from damning the networks in the 1950s when his programming was “out,” to praising their vision in the mid-1960s when he had several shows in prime time. Within a year of forecasting oblivion for independent producers, Lee Rich himself had formed Lorimar Productions and went on to great success in the 1970s and 1980s with shows like *The Waltons* and *Dallas*.)²⁷ By the end of the 1960s, all of the powerful movie giants, as well as telefilmers like Desilu and Revue, were involved in coproduction ventures with “in-house” independents.

The Open-Door Policy: The Majors

Although their fortunes fluctuated from year to year, the major studios not only survived but flourished in the 1960s; yet the fact that those familiar Hollywood logos continued to mark a significant share of television fare during the decade was due in large part to the fact that they opened their doors to independents. It had not always been so. During the mid-1950s the studios conceived of television as an adjunct to the feature film busi-

ness, rather than a site for autonomous, differentiated texts. The earliest TV projects from the majors—for example, *MGM Parade*, *Warner Bros. Presents*, *20th Century Fox Hour*—promoted the studios' new big-screen releases and/or offered small-screen remakes of old features. The film factories' blindness to the need for innovation is not surprising, perhaps, when we recognize that the studio era was just winding down, and the majors were just beginning to shed the residual practices of their mass production days.

The telefilm track record of these three Hollywood majors is revealing. MGM and Fox first tested the TV production waters in 1955, but their earliest efforts were short lived, and the two studios subsequently sold fewer than a half-dozen series combined by the end of the decade.²⁸ Significantly, both of these Hollywood powers opened their doors to coproductions as part of their retooling efforts, supporting both in-house projects and joint ventures. MGM geared up in 1961 under a new television production chief, making several network sales. Its single hit that season, Arena Production's *Dr. Kildare*, helped turn around the television division's fortunes, and by 1963 MGM ranked among TV's top suppliers. As for Fox, most of its remaining prime-time inventory was canceled in 1961; soon after, the entire studio underwent reorganization, and for the next two years the studio's role in television production was that of a rental space. But in 1964 the studio staged a comeback with a program line-up that included *Daniel Boone*, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *Twelve O'Clock High*, and the seminal prime-time soap opera *Peyton Place*.²⁹

Warner Bros., on the other hand, became the definitive example of the dangers of "assembly line" thinking, as it continued its factory system of production, maintaining its roster of contract players, writers, directors, and producers, eschewing outside deals until the late 1960s. Rigidly bound to its conception of television as a formula-genre medium, Warners stuck to its original telefilm path of westerns and private eyes until it was too late. Admittedly, much of the responsibility for the studio's rigid reliance on the same formulas was the conservatism of its network partner, ABC, which demanded almost literal carbon copies of previous hit shows. By 1963, after ABC had begun to broaden its programming menu, Warners had only two series in production (a western and a private eye yarn). The studio made an ill-fated attempt to diversify into the sitcom arena in 1965; its single success, the cavalry-and-Indians sitcom *F-Troop*, was canceled in 1967, the same year the studio was acquired by Seven-Arts, a television distributor. By the end of the decade the only program being distributed under the familiar Warner Bros. banner, *The F.B.I.*, was in fact a coproduction with independent Quinn Martin.³⁰ If nothing else, the Warner's example suggests that the assembly line approach to television production was outmoded, and that its closed system limited the studio's potential for innovation.

The telefilm fortunes of the other major film studios fluctuated during the 1960s, but most maintained a fairly successful output. Columbia-Screen Gems, the first of the Hollywood majors to embrace full-scale television production, maintained a steady spot in the upper ranks of telefilm pro-

ducers throughout the decade. In contrast to Warners, the varied menu of programming offered by Screen Gems through its coproductions (*Father Knows Best*, *Rin-Tin-Tin*, *Naked City*, *The Donna Reed Show*, *Route 66*, *The Flintstones*) and its wholly-owned shows (*Bewitched*, *The Flying Nun*, *The Partridge Family*) suggests that inviting joint ventures offered more variety to a studio's output than maintaining a closed system of in-house production. MGM and Fox, after their initial struggles, solidified their positions among the top telefilm producer-distributors, with MGM going on to produce or coproduce hits like *Medical Center* and *Flipper* (as well as misses like *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* and *A Man Called Shenandoah*), and Fox turning out (solely or in partnership) such projects as *Julia*, *Room 222*, *Judd for the Defense*, and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*. Paramount, barely active as a telefilm supplier during the early 1960s, save as a partner in David Susskind's Talent Associates (and later, Herbert Brodtkin's Plautus Productions) and as a rental studio (notably for NBC's *Bonanza*), did an about-face in 1967, when its new parent conglomerate, Gulf+Western, bought Desilu. Paramount very soon became a significant force, playing host to a mix of wholly-owned projects and joint ventures, including *Star Trek*, *Mission: Impossible* (both inherited from Desilu), *Mannix*, *Get Smart*, and *The Brady Bunch*.³¹ By contrast, when United Artists merged with Transamerica Corp. the same year, it was already out of the telefilm business, having begun to phase out its television production activities after all of its proposed series were rejected by CBS in 1965.³²

The one constant among the majors during the decade was the presence of MCA's Revue studios (known as Universal TV as of 1964) at or near the top of the hierarchy of powerful telefilm producers. An observation made by *Television* magazine in 1963 held throughout the decade: "In Hollywood the major film studio always has been known as the big one. Revue studios is the big one in Hollywood these days and it's getting bigger all the time."³³ The studio, which had pioneered hour-long shows in the 1950s, and the 90-minute format in the early 1960s (*Wagon Train*, *Arrest and Trial*, and *The Virginian*), also generated hit sitcoms (*McHale's Navy*, *The Munsters*), while remaining the industry's leading supplier of drama series throughout the decade with such programs as *The Name of the Game*, *It Takes a Thief*, *Ironside*, *Marcus Welby, M.D.*, and *The Bold Ones*. Universal initiated an even greater lock on prime-time hours in 1966 when it developed made-for-TV movies for NBC.³⁴

Despite being "the big one," Universal's television division was far removed from the Hollywood factory system of old. It, like MGM, Fox, and Screen Gems, retained a vital role in the industry by embracing rather than eschewing coproduction, benefiting the studios with an infusion of ideas—as well as overhead—not possible under the factory system preserved by Warners. As Christopher Anderson has suggested, the other studios thrived because they diversified their programming, distribution methods, and financing and production arrangements, while Warners, with "an astonishingly narrow definition of the television business," continued to rely on

one type of product, one customer (ABC), and one system of financing and production.³⁵ Acting as partner-distributors for a variety of independent producers, the old guard Hollywood studios as well as TV majors like Desilu and Four Star were able to reap the benefits of a more diverse product line in a highly competitive market.

Independents and Innovation

While imitation is a staple strategy in popular culture production—nowhere more obvious than in television—product differentiation is also essential to market strength and profitability, in television as in any industry. Media scholar Joseph Turow, drawing on organizational and “production of culture” sociology, has suggested that “a firm is much more likely to produce innovative products when it or its environment experiences tension-inducing changes”—in competition, technology, distributors’ demands, and government policy.³⁶ No industry is fraught with more such tensions than the television industry, and no period in the medium’s history is more apt an example of such an environment than the late 1950s and early 1960s. As *Variety* reported in late 1959, networks and producers were busily seeking alternatives that would free them from “the quiz-violence-western hook.”³⁷ In the prevailing climate of the television industry as the 1960s began, the calls for innovation could not be ignored. This atmosphere of change and differentiation established a tenor that would characterize the evolution of programming throughout the decade. Reaction to the Warner/ABC-inspired western-crime formats sparked a shift from the action-adventure to “people drama,” in the words of one trade reporter, as producers and networks embraced character study, social realism, and topical issues (*Naked City*, *Route 66*, *Bus Stop*, *The Defenders*, *Dr. Kildare*, *Slattery’s People*, and *East Side, West Side*). Many producers were “presenting anthologies in the guise of more orthodox series” in an attempt to “circumvent” continuing-character conventions, according to *Television* magazine—a form dubbed the “semi-anthology” by *Variety*. The early 1960s even saw a “modest renaissance” in New York production, sparked by an easing of bureaucratic and union restrictions, improvements in studio facilities, and most of all, the success of *Naked City* and *The Defenders*.³⁸ The medium’s more frivolous fare also changed, as the wholesome, well-scrubbed sitcom families of the late 1950s were replaced by a host of bizarre, supernatural, or surreal clans (*The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Addams Family*, *Bewitched*), and the heroic marshalls and trailhands gave way to suave spies (*The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *I Spy*) and caped crusaders (*Batman*, *The Green Hornet*). Granted, most of these innovations were incremental, and aside from controversial or “downbeat” social dramas like *The Defenders* and *East Side, West Side*, most were safely commercial. But they were innovative nonetheless.

Admittedly, the concrete strategies for upgrading and diversification of television fare were constrained by the conservatism inherent in the medium. While the industry condemned imitation, it also feared radical innovation.

Producers tended to place most of the blame for the imitation problem at the feet of networks and sponsors, who (the suppliers argued) tended to reject the new and different and stick with the tried and true. Yet at the same time producers understood sponsors’ reticence to stray too far from established successes, given the large sums at stake.³⁹ The producers, on the other hand, had more to gain by gambling with innovation, to set themselves apart from the crowd of concepts and pilots being pitched each season.

It is evident that the entry of independent producers on the telefilm scene contributed a measure of innovation and diversity when compared to the rigidly controlled factory mode of production like that at Warners. Even early independent products like *I Love Lucy* and *Dragnet*, while hardly radical—both were, in fact, radio spinoffs—were nonetheless stylistically and formally groundbreaking for their time. Whether driven by creativity or desperation, independents—both in feature films and telefilms—were willing to take chances that the convention-minded and tradition-bound studios often were not.

This view was affirmed within the industry. Dick Dorso of United Artists, which was devoted exclusively to independent projects, cited diversity of product as a key benefit of the coproduction system. “The independent producers make it possible to attain a full dramatic spectrum of production, from comedy to documentaries to hour-long dramas,” Dorso claimed. In addition, he argued, the independent coproduction arrangement appealed to “talented producers” because deals were made on the basis of specific projects, generally of their own conception, unlike the studio contract system “where producers are assigned to projects they may or may not have enthusiasm for.”⁴⁰ With the studios acting primarily as distributors, the independent producers retained a degree of creative autonomy from the front office—sometimes total, often contractually guaranteed—promising at minimum the freedom from a conservative “house format” (à la Warners), and at best, the freedom to take chances.

CBS-TV president James Aubrey, who favored independent packages during his tenure (1959–1965), framed the independent producers’ inducements for quality and creativity in more practical financial terms. “Independent producers are not more capable than major studios,” he argued. “But individuals who are involved with the creation of a show tend to remain with that show. And if they have an ownership deal, they have an incentive to devote more time and energy to its success than if they were on the staff of a major studio.” In Aubrey’s view, “the factory process cannot work in creative areas.”⁴¹

While we should be cautious in attaching to “independent” producers any mythic implications of rebellion or artistic commitment, it is important to interpret the independent label, as it was used in the 1960s, as a marker of distance and autonomy from the feature film majors. If nothing else the term signals a recognition of significant changes among the studios and the “outside” producers, and an acceptance of the new configuration of the industry in postwar Hollywood.⁴² Further, there can be little doubt that

much of the change and innovation that marked the industry during the 1960s was due in great part to the competitive efforts of independents.

Hollywood has always been adept at exploiting "conventional innovation." As David Bordwell has written, "Hollywood itself has stressed differentiation as a correlative to standardization."⁴³ In the context of 1960s television, innovative practices and strategies must be viewed primarily as attempts at product differentiation aimed at achieving competitive advantage in the program-selling marketplace. The independent producer had to differentiate to survive, had to distinguish his product from the competition. Granting that independent production is an avowedly commercial enterprise, concerned with producing popular texts for a large audience, the evidence suggests that the independents were testing the limits of convention and expanding the horizons of popular television entertainment, albeit within fairly circumscribed formal limits. At minimum, independent production can be said to have broadened the creative possibilities within the given narrative and ideological constraints of the industry at the time. Indeed, the "programming crisis" of the late 1950s was due in some measure to the entrenched ideologies and practices of the old studio system (e.g., Warner's western/action cycles), while the drive for differentiation was in large part a function of the "New Hollywood."

Fade-Out

As the 1960s drew to a close, majors and independents alike were competing in a business driven by the Nielsen ratings and programmers' whims. The market for series had actually been shrinking throughout the 1960s due to the increase in longer-form programs and the growing population of feature films and made-for-TV movies on network schedules. Five network "nights at the movies" by 1966 meant ten less hours of prime time for television producers to fill, and although some observers declared that the studios' feature packages were competing with their own series products, the profits from an extant feature film library obviously held many advantages by comparison to the uncertainty involved in developing new series projects.⁴⁴

As available time slots shrank, network power grew. The major studios had a hand in generating much of what America watched on prime time during the 1960s, but even these titans of tinseltown had to pay their tribute to their de facto "partners," the networks. As the decade wore on, the networks not only tightened their hold on scheduling, but expanded their authority in program ownership and even production. By 1964, for example, CBS was not only insisting on profit positions in most of the programs it carried, but creative control as well. Network profit participation in prime time was nearing saturation. Whereas in 1960 the networks held profit participations in 62 percent of their prime-time line-ups, by mid-decade the figure had risen to 91 percent.⁴⁵ In 1965 the FCC issued a proposal, known in the industry as the "50-50 rule," that would have barred the networks from owning or controlling more than 50 percent of prime-time non-news

programming, prohibited them from owning interests in independently produced shows, and severed their involvement in domestic syndication. The rule was debated by the commission, networks, producers, and advertisers throughout the latter half of the decade, ultimately taking shape in 1971 as a set of restrictions known as the Financial Interest and Syndication Rule.⁴⁶

Even with the network's monopolistic grip on programming, and despite some pessimistic prognostications, the independents survived. By the fall of 1971, the bulk of prime-time series were still being generated under familiar Hollywood banners—Universal, 20th Century-Fox, Paramount, and Screen Gems—but all were in league with independents. Smaller firms continued to play a significant role in the new era, although many of the names had changed: Filmways, T & L, and Talent Associates had given way to the likes of Leonard Freeman (*Hawaii Five-0*), MTM Enterprises (*The Mary Tyler Moore Show*), Tandem/TAT (*All in the Family*), and James Komack (*Welcome Back, Kotter*).⁴⁷

Television programming at the end of the 1960s looked very different from the way it had at the beginning, in some respects. The decade was, admittedly, a time of continued imitation and business-as-usual as well as innovation and change. Action-adventure flourished on ABC throughout the decade, western heroes still wandered the video frontier (albeit in smaller numbers), and *Dragnet* even returned in 1967. Lucy, Matt Dillon, and Ed Sullivan all survived well into the 1970s. Time, and television, bore out critic Gilbert Seldes' 1956 observation that "the seesaw between repetition and originality will probably be a permanent characteristic of television."⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the 1960s was a period of flux for American television, both formally and industrially. The structural changes in the motion picture industry influenced the evolving systems and shifting fortunes of independent producers and established Hollywood majors as they struggled to maintain a viable presence in program production. The prevailing climate of crisis in which the decade had begun, fraught with perceived mediocrity and genre overload, and the industry's self-imposed sense of responsibility, resulted in explicit ongoing attempts at differentiation in the telefilm series. As it was in the 1950s, and as it is today, television's forms and the television industry were in transition.

Television, then as now, was a business of regulated innovation, and nowhere is this more clearly evidenced than in the evolution of television's storytelling strategies. The economic mechanisms that determine the life and form of popular TV narrative dictate that television must change in order to survive. Producers and networks are involved in a constant process of redefinition, attempting to strike the right balance of entertainment and ideas, familiarity and innovation, continuity and flexibility. The simple imperative of product differentiation, driven by a belief in the audience's desire for novelty, decreed that the telefilm circa 1960 had to diversify. Innovation in this environment was borne of industry pressures and desperation, a product of brainstorming, spitballing, recombination, imitation, theft, *bricolage*, and, on occasion, originality and creativity. And at the end of the

decade television was still in flux, reinventing its dramatic forms as part of its ongoing efforts to navigate the creative and commercial imperatives of standardization and innovation. To say that the early 1960s was a period of differentiation is to isolate one moment in the ongoing process of differentiation that characterizes the entire history of television storytelling. To propose that the decade was dominated by the Hollywood telefilm demands the recognition that the telefilm itself was a varied textual phenomenon, and that it continued to evolve.

As yet there has been little in the literature to indicate that American television between the late 1950s and early 1970s was anything but homogeneous, formulaic, static, violent, and/or idiotic. Not so distant historically, and still so familiar via syndication, '60s TV is easy to take for granted. As we tend to accept received assumptions about program forms (e.g., 1960s as escapist wasteland), so do we affirm too easily stock accounts of television's development. Claims of the stability of the industry and its programming after 1959 give only the broadest outlines of the processes and practices at work during a remarkable period of change. Television was stable insofar as Hollywood largely dominated the telefilm, but still quite dynamic in terms of who dominated Hollywood. Obviously, this is complicated territory, which will be fully understood only cumulatively, one step—one case study—at a time. At this stage it may be enough to acknowledge the overarching hegemony of the networks while recognizing the significant role of independent producers and the shifting power relationships within the industry during the 1960s. The questions that emerge as we look more closely at the industry and its products suggest that there is still much to discover about what 1960s television—as industry and as artifact—really was.

Notes

1. Morris J. Gelman, "The Hollywood Story," *Television* (September 1963): 33.
2. William Boddy, *Fifties Television* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990): 2.
3. "Is There a Programming Crisis?," *Television* (February 1957): 50–52, ff.; "A Need for Innovation: Levy," *Variety* (30 September 1959): 23; "Aubrey of CBS: A New Era Ahead," *Television* (September 1959): 58 ff.; Murray Horowitz, "Vid-filmeries' Soul-Searching," *Variety* (29 November 1959): 31; Harold Hackett, "A Plea to Widen TV's Horizons for More Creativity," *Variety* (1 January 1960): 80.
4. Tino Balio, ed. *Hollywood in the Age of Television* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990): 35.
5. Kevin Robins, "Reimagined Communities? European Image Spaces, Beyond Fordism," *Cultural Studies* 3 (May 1989): 152. Also see Michael Curtin, "On Edge: Culture Industries in the Neo-Network Era," in Richard Ohmann, ed., *Making and Selling Culture* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996).
6. "Hollywood in a Television Boom," *Broadcasting* (26 October 1959): 88–90. Some important recent scholarship on Hollywood-TV symbiosis includes: Robert Vianello, "The Rise of the Telefilm and the Networks' Hegemony Over the Motion Picture Industry," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9 (Summer 1984): 204–18; William Boddy, "The Studios Move into Prime Time: Hollywood and the

Television Industry in the 1950s," *Cinema Journal* 24 (Summer 1985): 23–37; Douglas Gomery, "Failed Opportunities: The Integration of the U.S. Motion Picture and Television Industries," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9 (Summer 1984): 219–28; Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting* (Urbana: Illinois, 1990); Tino Balio, ed. *Hollywood in the Age of Television* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); and Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

7. As Vance Kepley has noted apropos of NBC, that company's emphasis on outside suppliers allowed it to minimize risk, cut overhead costs, and streamline its operations. Vance Kepley, "From Operation Frontal Lobes to the Bob and Bob Show," in Balio, ed., *Hollywood in the Age of Television*, 54. On the similar CBS strategy see William Boddy, "Building the World's Largest Advertising Medium: CBS and Television, 1940–1960," in the same volume, 78–80.

8. The "empty spots" story is repeated in Boddy, *Fifties*, 238; Hilmes, 66; Kepley, 55; Laurence Bergreen, *Look Now, Pay Later* (New York: New American Library, 1980), 229; James Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992): 88.

9. See, for example, "CBS Eye on 3 Areas," *Variety* (18 November 1959): 27.

10. "Plateau on Hour Film Shows," *Variety* (24 February 1960): 27. See also "King-Size 'Bread & Butter,'" *Variety* (13 February 1957): 29, 71; Murray Horowitz, "Hour Vidpix Yen Still Hot," *Variety* (4 November 1959): 27; "Why the Rush to Hour-Long Shows?," *Broadcasting* (17 April 1961): 108–9.

11. George Rosen, "Kintner: We'll Take Charge," *Variety* (11 December 1963): 21. See also "Magazine Concept a Panacea for Program Evils? Hardly," *Variety* (25 November 1959): 32; "Who Controls What in TV Films," *Broadcasting* (17 October 1960): 29–36.

12. See also "Co-Financing on Pilots Continues to Pose Problems," *Variety* (18 November 1959): 30. On network control and ownership see "CBS: If We Play 'Em, We Own 'Em," *Variety* (30 March 1960): 25; "The Swing to Network Control," *Broadcasting* (16 May 1960): 92.

13. For the network line on their "risk" in program development see "Swing to Network Control," 93; "For TV Networks: A Long Day In Court," *Television* (March 1962): 72–102.

14. For the fall of 1964, CBS-TV president Aubrey ordered only eight pilots (compared to 20-plus at the other networks), and was considering most series on the basis of scripts or treatments. George Rosen, "A to Z: (Aubrey to Zanuck)," *Variety* (4 December 1963): 17. Richard Oulahan and William Lambert, "The Tyrant's Fall That Rocked the TV World," *Life* (10 September 1965): 96. According to Kepley, NBC eventually began ordering MCA product without pilots. With the right track record, a producer might sell a series without a pilot; see Deborah Haber, "In the Wings," *Television* (January 1964): 38–41, 68–70.

15. Rosen, "A to Z."

16. Thomas Schatz, *Old Hollywood/New Hollywood: Ritual, Art and Industry* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984): 172. For an essential examination of independent feature production before and after the decrees see Janet Staiger, "Individualism vs. Collectivism," *Screen* 24 (July–October 1983): 68–79. Also see Staiger's Chapter 24, "The Labor Force, Financing, and the Mode of Production," in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985): 317–19, and Chapter 26 on the Package Unit system, 330–337.

17. Staiger, "Individualism vs. Collectivism," 68-69.
18. Thus the designation excluded the feature film "majors," but included producers partnered with the majors in financing and distribution deals. See Edwin H. James, "The Boss is His Brightest Star" *Television* (September 1962): 50; and "Six Studios Big in Network TV," *Broadcasting* (13 August 1962): 59.
19. Early independents included the likes of Hal Roach (Laurel and Hardy and *Our Gang* veteran), Frederick Ziv (radio syndicator), Jerry Fairbanks (Paramount short subjects producer), and General Television Enterprises (former movie executives). Performers-turned-producers also entered the field around 1951-52, with notable success: Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball's Desilu, Jack Webb's Mark VII Productions, Bing Crosby Enterprises, Ozzie Nelson's Stage 5 Productions, and Four Star Television (formed by Dick Powell, David Niven, and Charles Boyer). On early independents see Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*; Balio, ed. *Hollywood in the Age of Television*; Boddy, "The Studios Move into Prime Time"; Anderson, *Hollywood TV*. Trade sources on independent TV production, in addition to those cited above, are Gelman, "Hollywood Story"; *American Cinematographer*, especially "Television Filming Activities" and "Current Assignments" columns, 1949-1968; and *Broadcasting* magazine's "Detailed Look at Fall Schedules" columns, 1960-1965.
20. "Six Studios Big in Network TV," 59. For a useful account of Four Star's genesis, via a profile of Dick Powell, see James, "The Boss is His Brightest Star."
21. Schatz, *Old/New*, 172.
22. "Above-the-line" denotes the creative talent involved in a project: writers, directors, performers, producers. "Below-the-line" personnel are the craftspersons and technicians.
23. Background on the talent agencies' role as TV packagers is derived from "Who Controls What in TV Films," 29-36; "How the Big Talent Agencies Operate," *Broadcasting* (24 October 1960): 70-81; "Financial Outlook 'Good' for Film Production Companies," *Telefilm* (September 1961): 10; Albert Kroeger, "Veni, Vidi, Vici. [Closeup: Ted Ashley]," *Television* (April 1963): 67-80; Deborah Haber, "The Men From Morris: All the Talent Isn't on Stage," *Television* (September 1964): 2-7.
24. "The Men from Morris," 3; Kroeger, "Vini," 70.
25. "A Detailed Look at Fall TV Schedules," *Broadcasting* (27 June 1960): 34-5; "Who Controls What in TV Films;" Gelman, "Hollywood Story."
26. "TV Film Makers Headed For Oblivion?," *Broadcasting* (3 April 1967): 110.
27. On Four Star see James, "Boss is His Brightest Star," 62; "Four Star Goes to Syndicate," *Broadcasting* (21 August 1967): 58; on Cayuga see Joel Engel, *Rod Serling* (Chicago: Contemporary, 1989); on the CBS rural purge see Les Brown, *Television: The Business Behind the Box* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971); Susskind is interviewed in "Says the Critic," *Television* (April 1963): 58-9, 90-100.
28. In addition to *20th-Century Fox Hour*, Fox produced *My Friend Flicka* in 1955, followed by *Dobie Gillis*, *Adventures in Paradise*, and *Five Fingers* (all 1959); the 1960 and '61 Fox menu included *Hong Kong*, *Follow the Sun*, *Margie* and the widely excoriated *Bus Stop*. After *MGM Parade*, Metro sold two feature retreats, *The Thin Man* (1957), and *Northwest Passage* (1958), followed in 1960 by *National Velvet* and *The Islanders*. MGM's other 1961 offerings were the short-lived *Cain's Hundred*, *Father of the Bride*, and *The Asphalt Jungle* (Spring '61 only).
29. Deborah Haber, "The Studio That Came in From the Cold," *Television* (September 1965): 32; Gelman, "Hollywood Story"; *American Cinematographer* columns, 1949-1968; *Broadcasting* "Detailed Look" columns, 1960-1965.
30. "Who Controls What"; Gelman, "Hollywood Story." The whole Warners TV story is told in fascinating detail in Anderson, *Hollywood TV*.

31. "Desilu, Famous Players to G & W," *Broadcasting* (20 February 1967): 71.
32. Les Brown, ed., *Les Brown's Encyclopedia of Television* (New York: Zoetrope, 1982): 129.
33. Gelman, "Hollywood Story," 38.
34. Morris Gelman, "A \$15-Million Gamble on Movies Made for TV," *Television* (December 1966): 42, 54-62.
35. *Hollywood TV*, 257.
36. Joseph Turow, "Unconventional Programs on Commercial Television," in *Individuals in Mass Media Organizations*, ed. James S. Ettema and D. Charles Whitney (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982): 108.
37. "Situation Comedy Comeback," *Variety* (18 November 1959): 29.
38. On "people drama" and New York TV see Morris Gelman, "New York, New York," *Television* (December 1962): 39-45, ff. On the "semi-anthology" see Gelman, "The Hollywood Story," 51; George Rosen, "TV Debut: 'No Mischief' Season," *Variety* (5 September 1962): 1, 30; "TV Anthologies Hit Peak With 8 in 1963-64," *Variety* (26 June 1963): 27.
39. See, for example, Leon Morse, "The Hollywood Viewpoint," *Television* (May 1960): 77.
40. Gelman, "Hollywood Story," 53.
41. Albert R. Kroeger, "Iron Fist Less Velvet Glove," *Television* (March 1964): 52.
42. It should be stressed that "independent production" in this context refers to a form of production that is firmly implicated in the structures and practices of the Hollywood movie-making business—what might be termed mainstream independent production—rather than the current usage of low-budget, self-financed, alternative filmmaking, operating outside of and sometimes in opposition to mainstream business and formal practice. Mainstream independent production is an alternative to the studio system, but it is not an alternative to the Hollywood mode of production; rather it is a component and a version of it, and it operates within the conventional and qualitative norms of dominant commercial filmmaking. As Janet Staiger has pointed out, commercial independent production "has reproduced the dominant practices of Hollywood." "Individualism vs. Collectivism," 69.
43. *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 70.
44. "Hollywood's Hot New Romance," *Broadcasting* (10 January 1966): 27-30; "\$93 Million Week's Film Jackpot," *Broadcasting* (3 October 1966): 25-27.
45. "CBS Control: Not So Remote," *Variety* (19 February 1964): 27; "Aubrey's Show Business Credo," *Variety* (25 March 1964): 26; "Swing to Network Control," 92; "The 'Three Men' Theme," *Time* (12 March 1965): 81.
46. See: "Three Men' Theme"; "In Defense of Network Programming," *Broadcasting* (7 March 1966): 31-33; "Another View on 50-50 Rule," *Broadcasting* (7 March 1966): 34-35; "50-50 Rule gets a Lashing," *Broadcasting* (2 May 1966): 36-38; "Coup d'etat for 50-50 Proposal," *Broadcasting* (6 June 1966): 52-54; "50-50 Fades," *Broadcasting* (27 February 1967): 5. On the "fin-syn" rules see "FCC Ruling a Boon, But . . .," *TV-Radio Age* (1 June 1970): 23; J. Fred MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network TV* (New York: Pantheon, 1990): 184-6.
47. Brown, *The Business Behind the Box*, 358.
48. *The Public Arts* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956): 181-82.