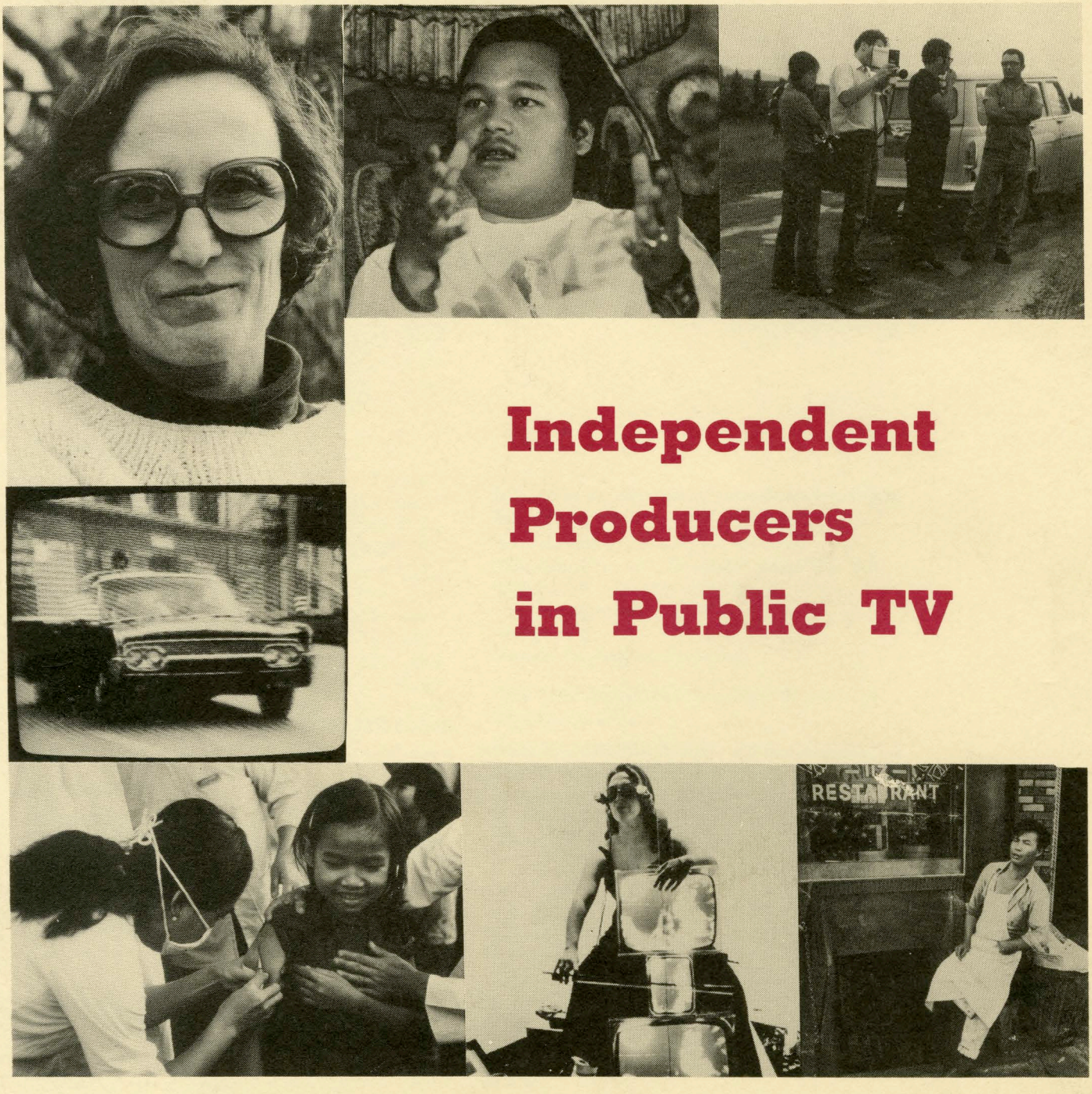
# TELEVISIONS




## Independent Producers in Public TV

Volume 6, Number 4

TELEVISIONS

# Independent Producers in the Future of Public Television

by Nick DeMartino

## Contents

# Editors' Note

This special issue of *Televisions* is devoted to a background paper on independent producers by one of our former editors, Nick DeMartino, who has been working as a consultant to the Carnegie Commission. The study will allow our readers to approach the Commission's recent report *A Public Trust,* marked by its limited direct reference to independent production, with the context and policy options prepared for the commissioners. Independents are beginning to raise questions about the proposed program funding agency that could, the commission staff argues, increase the participation of producers from outside the public TV stations. New bills, debated in Congress, seem to promise more attention to independents. *Televisions* is interested in using this paper as a basis for discussion and we invite responses for publication in the next issue.

Mr. DeMartino summarizes and documents the participation of independents in public television up to now. The question "who are independents and what do they have to offer public television" is answered historically in this study, without looking closely at the growing army of video producers that could be developed as a public TV resource. The concept of artist and excellence are in fact used to obscure the potential that will come out of the proverbial woodwork if the channels are opened.

The definition of independent producer is becoming as complex as the blur between writer and reader. There are video artists and documentarians who survive off grants; the small businesses, usually a group of former freelancers, who get non-broadcast contracts and produce a few shows a year on their own; the full-time non-broadcast producers who work in a specialized shop but are able to create occasional programs for a popular audience; the consumer-producers who make tapes out of an unpredictable dedication, stepping out of home movies; and the expert-professional who translates a content specialization into a TV format. These categories are growing and mixing and there is no way that public TV can or should want to either absorb them into staff positions or somehow arbitrarily try to draw hard lines between amateur and professional, user and artist, or viewer and producer. The alternative that public TV has promised and not delivered lies in nurturing this new reservoir of talent.

The independent producer with expectations for public television rose out of a political demand for access fostered by the anti-war movement, the development of small format technology, and the promise of new distribution through cable and the mail. Their expectations are now being stimulated by the success of VHS and BETA, the growth of cable and the introduction of the videodisc on the consumer market. At the same time non-broadcast video has grown to an unforeseen level with thousands of institutions, corporations, and associations producing more than 50,000 programs a year. This sea of media professionals reflects resources that are different from the independent producers whose programs have been shown on public TV up to this point. Public television can only provide the variety envisioned by the first Carnegie Commission if it steps away from the exclusive model of the staff producer and the rare artist.

# To Our Subscribers

Thank you for your patience during our recent hiatus as we moved our office, changed our format, recruited new staff and contributors, and waited for a grant check to arrive. The next issue has been written and edited, is on its way to the printer and will be in your hands soon to bring us reasonably up to date for a struggling quarterly with a volunteer staff. We have recently, in response to this condition, decided to solicit advertising. Susan Baronoff will handle inquiries.

We continue to have problems with irate subscribers who are not receiving their issues because they have not sent in a change of address card to us and the post office will not forward third-class non-profit mail. Sometimes, unfortunately, the post office does not give our delivery priority care and issues are lost or abandoned. If you do not get an issue, let us know before you start a rumor to the effect that we are defunct.

---

**Editors**
Rebecca Moore
Larry Kirkman
Gayle Gibbons

**TELEVISIONS** is funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

**TELEVISIONS** Magazine is a quarterly publication of Washington Community Video Center, Inc., P.O. Box 21068, Washington, D.C. 20009. Phone: (202) 387-0219. All contributions of articles and photographs are welcome, though we cannot guarantee publication. Send stamped, self-addressed envelope if return is desired. **TELEVISIONS** is composed by General Type. The opinions expressed herein represent those of the staff, except when articles are signed.  Subscription rates: $10 per year (special prepaid rate), $15 per year if billed, $15 per year institutional rate. Back issue price: Vol. 1, $25; Vol. 2, $5; Vol 3, $6; Vol. 4, $2.50 for single issue. Vol. 6 #4 was printed April, 1979.

# Independent Producers in the Future of Public Television

**by Nick DeMartino**

---

# Introduction, Overview, Recommendations

The examination of the role of independent producers within the public television industry provides a lens through which all program development and production can be viewed. Although the various groups that can be included under the broad term "independent producer" are, by definition, working outside stations and networks, the problems and goals they have as producers are much the same as other working in the field.

This study shows that even before the founding of the current PTV system, producers contributed programming while working in various capacities outside the institutional framework of station or network. Today nearly a third of the national PBS program service is delivered by one or another category of "independent" producer.

Yet the distinction of "inside" or "outside" is far less useful than other considerations in today's public television marketplace, and almost impossible to identify, in any event.

Take a look at the six very broad groups of "independent" producers currently at work in the system:

(1) The "classic" independent is the individual filmmaker, now joined by the videotape producer, whose independence is designated because of a determination to retain creative control over production. In 1976-77 about 4 percent of the national PBS schedule was provided by this group, primarily by acquisition of films they financed by non-system funds. This group has been vocal in demanding better treatment, access and funding, and requires specialized consideration.

(2) The non-profit production center, epitomized by Children's Television Workshop, is clearly a non-station producer, and just as clearly an important part of "the system." Seven such centers provided 25 percent of PBS' 1976-77 schedule.

(3) A subgroup of these production centers are the non-profit research and university-based outfits which have only recently entered television production, generally as a result of federal grant opportunities. This group includes organizations like Educational Development Corporation and Applied Management Sciences.

(4) A number of non-television experts have developed production relationships with public TV stations. They may design programs, have editorial veto, own the copyright, raise the money. National Geographic Society, Reader's Digest, the National Humanities Center, Jacques Cousteau Society, Lincoln Center, all are examples from the current schedule.

(5) Public television has trained a relatively small, but growing number of producers who have decided to develop new projects outside the umbrella of the station. Examples include Michael Ambrosino, Christopher Sarsen, David Prowitt, Dick Moore.

(6) The remaining category of "independent" producers are Hollywood television and film production houses that supply the networks and TV syndicators. They may be corporately independent of the three networks, but they are dependent in about every other way. A handful of these producers have begun development of projects for public television, and many would like to develop programs for the PTV market.

Clearly, some of these producers are more a

part of the system than others. The demands voiced by the small individual independents for some rational method of working out various relationships with the system have prompted changes in the past two years that are bringing more of them closer to those goals, although, as this study shows, progress is slow. No real system-wide debate about the appropriate role for these independents has yet been attempted.

Ironically, the only group beside the small video or filmmaker who is not in some way an institutionalized part of the PTV system is the Hollywood producer, who is an ally in the political arena where the small independents have taken their case.

The solution to all these problems, some industry leaders are fond of saying, is increased money, and no independent will argue against that. But before exploring how that money might be administered, it is important to determine whether or not *some* mechanism for non-station independents to finance and produce their programs is inherently beneficial. For if there are, then program designs for the future should accommodate those advantages.

### What are the advantages of independent production to "the System?"

*Ideas.* Indisputably, the greatest advantage is the expansion in the number of ideas available that may wind up on the screen, and the attraction of a larger talent pool to make that programming. There are all kinds of producers in this world, and many of the best may never choose to work full-time for public television. This is no reason to deny the audience the opportunity to see their work. It also provides healthy competition for staff and a chance to compare quality.

*Diversity.* Closely related to expanding the number of creators involved in television is the notion of diversity. This is the buzz-word used in the first Carnegie Commission's report and the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act. The rationale rests on the desirability to the system of a wide number of points of view. Independent producers can draw upon their own networks of contacts in the real world.

Diversity is not to be confused with the notion of "public access." By expanding the number of producers contributing to the national and local program schedules, public TV gains for its audience(s) professionally-packaged "access" to many more segments of the population, far more points of view than would ever be possible from the narrow institutional base of the station.

*Source of Staff.* Just as there are many who may choose to work only occasionally for public TV, there are those who may, after positive association, seek to stay within the system. Public television must develop various procedures through which it can attract and hold talent, and the increasingly professional independent producing community can provide one relatively immediate, cost-effective and equitable method to accomplish this goal.

*Cost.* The broadcaster who has to fill 6,000 or 7,000 hours a year needs programming at a cheaper cost than what he can produce it for. Even at adequate compensation, programs acquired which have been produced by independents with other funds are a bargain. And, in cases where the PTV system is financing programming by independents, most of them will be anxious to come in under budget. If they don't they may not work again. This advantage will be a source of some conflict as PTV is increasingly unionized.

*Innovation.* In mass entertainment a very small emphasis is placed upon experimenting with new techniques, new forms, cross-disciplinary approaches. Public television must foster the individual who follows his curiosity, takes risks, fails. In television again and again the innovations developed by individuals or small groups have been briefly supported, then expropriated, and finally subsumed into the lowest-common-denominator formats. Think of 16mm verite documentaries, video synthesizing (both now most visible in commercials), and small-format videotape. Public television, in fact, serves a parallel function for commercial TV, which has taken over many of its program innovations.

### Why does a producer want to be "independent?"

(1) Many broadcast professionals have a quick and easy answer: *"They can't get a job."* And it's true, to a certain extent. The field is highly competitive, and the number of jobs, either staff or freelance, within the TV and film industries are inadequate to meet the needs of a rapidly growing supply of filmmakers, video producers, technicians, artisans, and others who would like to be working in television.

(2) *"I am an Artist"* is the proclamation of some independents. They have a personal vision and it cannot be tampered with. A staff job at a station is not necessarily the best place to evolve experimental, avant-garde, or visionary material.

(3) *Editorial Control.* Broadcast stations are social institutions that are responsive to many pressures, most notably the need to survive as institutions. Many kinds of programming can simply not be conceptualized, developed and completed within that kind of pressure situation.

(4) *Choice.* Within the traditional framework of broadcast journalism, management is compelled to make choices about what it will or will not support for production. A producer more often than not will become committed to a particular subject for treatment which cannot be supported at that station. He or she wants to do it anyway, and finds a way to do so. In the final analysis, some people also just want to be their own bosses.

(5) *Costs.* The development of an entrepreneurial public television programming environment, the increasing unionization of the major producing stations, and the necessity of maintaining and staffing substantial facilities have driven U.S. public TV production costs quite high. Figures of 50 percent and more for overhead are not unusual. A producer may be more successful seeking a smaller amount of funds without adding on the costs of maintaining an institution. This will only happen, however, when funding is available to non-station producers, and that producer has the track-record and fund-raising capability to compete on a par with the sophisticated PTV producing stations.

(6) *Being Fired.* The larger stations have, as a response to rising costs, frequently found the producers and production staffs to be their most expendable personnel. These are "involuntary" independents.

(7) *Opportunity.* As funds have increased within the public TV system, the opportunities for advancement of talent have not only occurred within the system, but on the fringes.

(8) *Freedom.* For Hollywood producers, used to network line-by-line script approval, casting interference and censorship, the public TV system must seem like a bastion of freedom. The economic imperatives that force creative people to develop programs capable of capturing the attention of 20 or 30 million families do not exist in noncommercial TV. But the wide range of creative freedom which is possible by public TV's lower audience size can be circumscribed by the institutional imperatives of the station organizations or funders that censor or place undue restrictions on producers.

### What are the reasons that some broadcasters oppose independents?

(1) *No talent.* In the case of many small independents who are knocking at the station manager's door, this is true. A better way of looking at this is to ask the question, "what procedures are necessary for me to determine where the talent is?" Many are unwilling to bother.

(2) *Lack of a Concept of Broadcasting.* Many filmmakers and some videomakers don't design their program as if it were going to be seen by an audience watching TV at home. Thus, the length is odd, the content is "obscene" or otherwise unusable, and much of this programming is impossible to be "packaged" into formats or units which an audience will understand or view.

(3) *Bad Ratings.* Closely related to the non-broadcast nature of many small independent works is the lack of audience appeal. This, of course, is a bit hard to pin down when many PTV stations have unmeasurable audiences to begin with. In fact, many recent independent productions have earned record ratings in many markets. With better promotion, one presumes, this could be better evaluated.

(4) *Competition.* The 1978 TV broadcast environment is underfunded and overburdened with facilities that must be maintained, even though they are fast becoming obsolete. Many stations view the possibility of substantial funds for public TV programming going to *any* non-station producer (and in some cases, any other station) as a direct economic threat.

(5) *Trust.* In areas of libel, obscenity, fairness doctrine and equal time provisions, journalistic accuracy, controversial subject matter and treatment, most public broadcasters are not willing to take the risk of trusting independents of any ilk, sometimes not even with the backing of a sister station.

(6) *Control.* Just as many producers want to control their work, so too do many programming executives want that control (and perhaps the money and power that frequently may accompany it).

It is in the nexus of these two factors—trust and control—that tensions are greatest between institutions and individuals. Public television is no different.

### Some conclusions/recommendations

(1) The distinction between the "independent producer" and other producers within public television has never been clear, but as the definition is broadened to include other groups the policy issues begin to encompass the entire production procedure.

(2) Independents have developed self-identity and effective organization and are now a constituency with allies as diverse as the public interest and minority groups and the Hollywood studios. As a result, they cannot be ignored in policy contructs of the future.

(3) Most of the demands of independents regarding fair treatment, less confusing procedures, equitable payment, copyright ownership and improved communications are eminently reasonable.

The present commitment to independents by stations and the national organizations is uneven, and seems to rest more on the personalities of particular individuals and heightened political pressure rather than a system-wide decision to

institutionalize the relationship and to create structural changes that will remove the causes of continuing bureaucratic misdealings. Several recent changes — new program formats tailored to independent producers, guidelines and handbooks for independents at PBS and CPB, and more funding opportunities, especially at CPB — provide hope that improvement is possible. But, while new funding will be needed for many of the necessary changes, a prerequisite is a system-wide commitment to the role of independent producers as part of the program mix at local, regional and national levels.

(4) Other areas of concern to independents can be seen as a direct threat to the current powers within the system, and strike to the heart of the Commission's deliberations on programming. These include the question of program quality, cost efficiency, facilities planning, editorial freedom versus responsibility, competition versus restraint of trade in public TV program production and marketing.

Implicit in the independent position is the assertion that the entire station-based production process is lacking.

(5) The common goal of all groups of independent producers is to increase the number of hours of new programs which they can get on the air. Acquiring existing material will never answer this need. Leaving this goal to the stations seems to be a clear conflict of interest. Yet sweeping changes that might answer the criticisms of independents and result in increasing their share of programming dollars—solutions like prohibiting stations from producing any national material — seem politically unfeasible. Thus, *the central focus must become the determination of what proportion of the national schedule and how many hours per year should be devoted to non-station production, and who will administer such funds under what guidelines and procedures.*

(6) One method of increasing program opportunities for independents immediately would be to require national programming funds which are granted to stations (the so-called "block grants") be stipulated upon the willingness of the station producers to allocate *half* the production money to outside talent, along the models offered by the *Great American Dream Machine* and *Visions.* Not all programs would lend themselves to such arrangements, but most could contain an independent component.

Furthermore, these "block grants" should be offered in competitions between stations and non-station producers alike. One of the criteria for selection would be the design of an applicant's proposed funneling mechanisms for independents.

(7) In addition, major series should be launched by the system which are effectively designed to utilize the particular talents of independent artists and journalists. The emphasis should be on creating the market for original material conceptualized with broadcast in mind, although the programmers could utilize some acquisitions in the mix. These series concepts should be awarded competitively as well, between both stations and independent producing agencies.

(8) This expansion in the market will give greater opportunity for producers to demonstrate a track record in the specialized business of producing for broadcast audiences. However, as long as individual producers must seek programming money and support from the very agencies they are trying to change, a tension and potential conflict of interest will exist.

A more efficient and system-related solution would be for public television to foster the creation of a specialized national production agency which is part of the PTV "family" of program suppliers, but not tied to an existing station. This new *Center for Independent Television* could be a participant in overall system deliberations on programming strategies and could serve as an advocate for expanding independently-based production. Furthermore, such a center would be a laboratory, not so much for the actual production of programs (it wouldn't need studios), but for the development and structuring of new program formats which are tailored to the evolving independent talent pool. The agency would have the trust of the system and could function, as do other independent centers like CTW, as a bona fide program supplier in the SPC, before CPB and other funders. A center like this would employ both independent producers and experienced system staffers who have demonstrated an interest in the unique problems of independents. This agency could also monitor and help remedy complaints by independents who continue to encounter difficulties with other agencies.

(9) Certain characteristics of the centralized network seem to benefit independents, insofar as they centralize the essential steps needed to develop and broadcast an idea. Serious consideration should be given to the effect of granting at least some of these powers to PBS in exchange for relinquishing its representative role in the political arena.

# A Brief History of Independent Television Production

*The Filmmakers.* No one can say when the phrase "independent producer" entered the vocabulary, but it was probably as much a contradiction in terms then as now.

The notion that an individual or small group of people could complete a movie and deliver it to an audience seemed laughable to all but a few obscure artists until the 1950s. Then the experimental films of artists like Maya Deren and John Whitney found their way before small college groups and art-film houses that had sprung up to show foreign feature films.

The expanding use of audiovisual materials in the schools and colleges, aided by the National Defense Education Act of 1958, created the basis for a noncommercial, non-theatrical distribution network, a further incentive for individual filmmakers to scrape together enough money to produce a film. The proliferation of lightweight 16mm equipment after WWII brought the tools of film production to many more people, particularly as schools began developing film production courses.

In 1960 documentary filmmakers working under Robert Drew at Time-Life, Inc., developed a 16mm film system that permitted synchronous sound and picture without cumbersome connection cables. The group, which included Ricky Leacock, Donn Pennebaker and the Maysles brothers, produced *Primary,* about the Kennedy-Humphrey political race, which was picked up by ABC. For a brief time ABC used the Drew/Time-Life unit to produce a series of documentary specials. But soon they reverted to the standard network news policy which claimed that for reasons of fairness, objectivity, and responsibility, all news programs would have to be produced in-house.

A variation of this dilemma is still an issue in public television today.

By this time the job market for skilled filmmakers was larger in the industrial and education field. Few local TV stations were yet producing news. Entertainment programs had mostly moved to Hollywood where the "independent" companies were suppliers for what the networks wanted. Relatively few independent narrative films were used for TV or in the theatres.

A major new influence for expansion of individual filmmaking was the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts, which established programs for independent and student filmmakers through the American Film Institute.

From 1968 to 1977, the AFI has received 6,586 applications for grants, awarding 230 grants totalling $1,709,369.90 — an average of $7,464.50 for each film. By 1977, 135 films were completed. Eighty-two are still in production, and 13 have been cancelled.

The National Endowment for the Arts Public Media Program (now called Media Arts) began making grants in a number of media-related areas.

The NEA made direct production grants for television, as well as supporting and establishing an entire network of facilities for media producers around the U.S. NEA's regional development program, in particular, was instrumental in heightening public awareness of film and video, as well as offering work for producers outside the major media capitals in New York and Los Angeles.

Foreclosed at the networks, some of the filmmakers capitalized on the tax-shelter regulations of the IRS, which enabled them to interest investors in their productions for theatrical distribution.

One new source of support for the independent, particularly the documentarian interested in both public affairs and culture, was the National Educational Television Network — NET.

This organization, frequently ignored or maligned since Carnegie I's recommendation to decentralize the system, offers what remains the best overall record in its support, treatment and showcasing of the works of independents.

Of course, NET was producing at a time when there were fewer filmmakers, few demands to meet, easier methods of selection, and substantial and unrestricted funds. Because it was functionally a network, NET offered the four elements that any producer prefers, particularly one working without the shelter of an institution:

(1) Money, without specific strings attached.

(2) The authority to determine what programs would be produced.

(3) A programming and format strategy in which particular shows and segments are planned.

(4) A guaranteed distribution system.

*The Video "Revolution."* Just as sound-sync 16mm film had opened up the field of documentary production in 1960, the introduction of

the SONY half-inch black-and-white portable video recorder in 1969 created a flurry of production activity. Coinciding as it did with the growth of the NEA's program supporting community media, the founding of PBS, and the expansion of cable television into major U.S. cities, the video "movement" became the focus for an enormous amount of media activity in the early 1970s.

With portable video, especially linked with cable television, came the possibility of ending the high cost and dominant control of the broadcast networks. Everyone could be a producer. "Public access" to television was a rallying cry, and became part of new regulations in 1972 that cautiously let cable enter the major markets. While later chafing under the expense and restrictions of the access rules and fighting successfully to eliminate them, the cable industry initially welcomed the youthful "video freaks," whom they saw as good salesmen for their service.

Until the development of a new generation of image-processing equipment in 1973 that stabilized the half-inch video signal, very little of the work of the early video groups was ever broadcast. A few exceptions were achieved by shooting the picture off one monitor with a higher-quality tape system, but generally broadcasters used issues of technical quality to block the video producers from airing their work except when the content was exceptionally newsworthy (as in the case of Eldridge Cleaver speaking from Algiers).

Technology notwithstanding, video producers were much quicker to focus their attention on the broadcasters than filmmakers had been. With the exception of a few galleries and minimal school distribution, videomakers had no other outlet than television. Furthermore, part of the rhetoric of the "video revolution" was to change the television industry, not just to make a career as an artist or producer.

All during 1973-75, videomakers around the country began relationships with their local PBS stations. Among the earliest were Portable Channel in Rochester (WXXI), University-Community Video in Minneapolis (KCTA), Optic Nerve (KQED), and a number of producers, experimental artists and documentarians alike, with the New Television Workshop at WGBH and the Television Laboratory at WNET and the National Center for Experiments in Television at KQED. WGBH's anthology, called *Video: The New Wave,* aired on PBS in 1973. The next year the Television Lab co-produced a program called *Lord of the Universe* with a group called TVTV which won a Dupont-Columbia Award. It was coverage of the Guru Marharaj Ji's Houston rally, and worked in the style of two earlier documentaries TVTV had produced of the 1972 Presidential conventions.

TVTV was joined at the TV Lab by Downtown Community Television, which produced *Cuba: The People,* a sympathetic look at the Latin nation. The TV Lab became a major producing unit within WNET, and an access point to local and national television for dozens of video producers in the next few years. (For a detailed chronology and analysis, see "VT on TV" issue of *Televisions* magazine.) Curiously, although filmmakers had organized themselves into distribution cooperatives, screening committees, and the like, they had never approached public television as a collective body. This, despite their participation in a number of projects funded by NEA and CPB designed to bring filmmakers into touch with public television stations.

In early 1976 a coalition of 15 video production groups including all those working regularly with public TV stations, formed an *ad hoc* group to request the establishment of a public affairs fund of $2 to $2.5 million earmarked for independents. Organizers went on the PTV industry circuit selling the track-record of video independents and explaining that video producers needed to cooperate with public TV stations for access to editing hardware, as well as funds and air time. Other groups like the Bay Area Video Coalition also began similar efforts in local communities.

The argument for increased funding to independents rests upon the charge to the Corporation in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967: that it should administer its public money in a manner designed "to facilitate the full development of educational broadcasting in which programs of high quality, obtained from diverse sources, will be made available." This phrase refers to the Carnegie I report, that a "Corporation for public television support at least two national production centers and that it be free to contract with independent producers." Additionally, the legislative history of the 1967 act reflects these concerns. The Senate report stated that the "Corporation will have as one of its purposes the encouragement of program sources..." The House Report noted that CPB could directly fund independent production entities which "will employ and encourage writers, producers, and those other individuals and groups who can lend their best efforts to the development of imaginative and adventuresome broadcast fare."

This rallying cry was picked up by a group of New York-based filmmakers who had been organized since 1974 into the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF). Among the few video producers and cable television activists involved in AIVF were the "Access Committee," which went from access on cable TV to public TV, primarily in response to the proposed purchase of municipal station WNYC-TV by WNET/13. AIVF's activist bent had developed

quite early in its history, when the group testified in Congress in 1975 against the proposed detachment of the AFI from the NEA, on the grounds that AFI had failed in its mission to the small independent. Members had also lobbied against provisions in the new copyright legislation which would have exempted schools and libraries from artists' royalties. The group provides member services, including a film distribution arm that negotiates with pay-cable companies, screenings, a CETA-funded artist program, and a European festivals committee.

The deeper AIVF got into the public television subject, the more complaints were heard from members. A survey of independents brought tale after tale of bureaucratic delay and indecision, unfair or inadequate compensation, physical destruction of film prints, content interference with programs, bad time slots and publicity, late payments, rejection of award-winning programs, and the like.

Many, of course, voiced complaints which many inside the public TV system would also have. Others cried sour grapes, disputing an executive's rejection of their work. It was clear, nonetheless, that despite sporadic involvement with independents over more than a decade, public television as a whole was not set up to deal with these producers.

The complaints reached their peak in 1977 during testimony before Rep. Lionel Van Deerlin's Subcommittee on Communications, which was examining public TV as part of its rewrite of the Communications Act. Linking with public interest advocates, minority producers, critics of public broadcasting and Hollywood producers, several independents outlined what one called public TV's "chamber of horrors."

Those hearings resulted in a flurry of activity at both PBS and CPB designed to assure independents that they were not being overlooked. Taken together with recent advances in program production funding, the campaign can be seen as successful.

AIVF and other spokesmen for independents would like to see improvement in the structures for involvement of independents in public TV, including liaisons or advocates at the local and national level, an ombudsman, the hiring of the independents on programming staffs of the ten largest stations, peer review systems for grant allocation, and automatic screening of award-winning films.

AIVF suggests a compensation scale for acquisitions, an end to the charges that stations attach to facilities used by independents, standard contracts, and increased promotion. They want guaranteed time slots and a minimum of 14 hours of independent work weekly, a limit to foreign acquisitions, and a series of procedural improvements. Also included is a percentage requirement for public TV's budget, demands for greater public accountability and increased community outreach.

# The Record

While it is impossible to examine the nature of every film or video independent's relationship with public TV stations or national organizations, we can evaluate the record of the major broadcasters which have aired independent work. Most of the available data concern national programming efforts. Even those are difficult to track. For one thing, there's the definition problem — who's an independent, and how do you tell? Secondly, the records have never tracked such an issue, so that special studies were required.

In the following table a total of 543.5 of the 1,819 hours distributed in 1976-77 are identified by PBS as "independent hours" — representing 29.9 percent of the total.

In calculating these totals, the PBS research staff has included many programs by independents which come through stations as well as the large, independent production centers like Family Communications, Inc., and Children's Television Workshop, which produced 436 hours or 17.9 percent of the total. Six other producers provided another 131.5 hours of the schedule, or 7.2 percent of the total.

The remaining producers, most of whom delivered single programs and specials, provided 87.0 hours of programming representing 4.9 percent of the total hours broadcast.

While we cannot be sure, it is unlikely that the totals for independent work on PBS have much exceeded this small figure. PBS' Research Department cannot determine what programs were produced by "independents" from its records prior to the 1976-1977 season. In any event, virtually all of those hours came to PBS through local stations, primarily the "Big Five" station production centers in Washington, New York, San Francisco, Boston and Los Angeles. During the early days of PBS in 1970 an informal policy evolved which still predominates today. Sam

**TABLE A**

**Total Independent Hours on PBS National Schedule**
**1976-1977 Season**

| | Independent Hours | All Original Broadcast Hours by Program Type | % Independent Hours | % of All Original Broadcast Hours in Program Type | % of All Original Broadcast Hours |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CULTURAL | 42.7 | 568 | 7.8 | 7.5 | 2.3 |
| EDUCATIVE | 417.8 | 587 | 76.9 | 71.2 | 23.0 |
| PUBLIC AFFAIRS | 83.0 | 664 | 15.3 | 12.5 | 4.6 |
| TOTALS | 543.5 | 1819 | 100.0 | — | 29.9 |

SOURCE: PBS System Research Office

Holt, who headed the programming department then, recalls:

> "I will start out by confessing that to the best of my knowledge I am responsible for the original policy at PBS not to take independent production. I did it when I had a four-person staff, and we had no possible way to process this blizzard of independent producers coming in."

The practical reasons for the exclusionary policy, says Holt, were lack of money, staff, and PBS authority at the national level. PBS was prohibited by its member stations from functioning as a network, but was a non-producing program scheduling agency—a fall-out from the stations' resentment of the centralized NET model.

The policy of sending independents away from the national level and back to local stations, however, was never official, according to Holt. Except for certain system-designated independent production centers like CTW and FCI, or station representatives like SECA (a regional network), the standard entry point to the system became the stations.

Three models have evolved by which an independent producer can gain access to the national PBS interconnection, all of them based in the stations:

(1) *The formatted series model:* An independent strikes a deal with the station or production center for segments, episodes or parts of a series being supervised by the station and aimed at national distribution. These can be acquisitions or newly commissioned work.

(2) *The station-producer model:* An independent sells a program concept or an already produced program or series to a station. The station assumes responsibility for the show, raises the money or markets it to funders, and then delivers it to PBS for distribution.

(3) *The station "Presenter" model:* An independent brings a completed project to PBS, CPB or a station and it is routed to a station that is willing to assume editorial responsibility and perform technical and promotional tasks.

The formal result of this policy occurred in June, 1977, as a result of actions by independent producer Martha Stuart.

### Acquisitions

By far the easiest, safest, and cheapest method for public television to use the work of independents is by purchasing a completed or near-completed tape or film.

Since most American films and tapes presented to public television were not originally designed or funded specifically for broadcast, many PTV officials complain that this work is not as attractive in getting audience attention as imported programming, which was generally prepared for TV. In addition, a British show produced at a high budget is often available at a fraction of the original cost. U.S. independents must not only be willing to sell broadcast rights for three years at a cost far below what they have spent making the work, but they must put their films and tapes, often produced on small budgets, up against the most experienced television production organizations in the world.

Despite these disadvantages, it appears that public television is beginning to buy more work from independents. As a market is created, producers will have a greater incentive to gear their programming to that market, in expectation of getting at least a small return on the investment.

During the early '70s, following the policy enunciated by Holt, PBS passed acquisition requests to the stations. Few records exist from this period, except those national programs which were financed by CPB. However, the bulk of funding for national programming went to production centers to produce specific shows, each of which was designed to implement the Ford Foundation's desire to build the capability of these in-house operations. This was a quite different goal from the previous NET arrangement of centralizing the entire national program out-

put in one location. That arrangement resulted in substantial involvement with independent suppliers, and, most importantly, the conceptualization of program formats which could utilize the advantages of independent production.

A handful of national "showcases" were funded by Ford and CPB, and produced by stations.

One early example was a program called *Flick-Out*, a showcase of independent acquisitions packaged by WGBH and financed by CPB. Filmmakers were paid $100 to $125 per minute. In addition, it was a non-exclusive acquisition, permitting the producer to continue seeking other sales. The series encountered a great deal of controversy, primarily because of nudity, language, and standards. Evidently this series cooled many stations to the idea of independent filmmakers. A later showcase packaged by WGBH was *Something Personal*, six independent and three station documentaries by and about women.

*San Francisco Mix* was "an attempt to do a totally video show ... a totally visual program with no host, multiple elements. KQED actually made the program by having the director sit in a mixing room and feed the various elements in sequence into the line system ... It was very elaborate, with the whole station built around the electronic capability to do that. It was a 1960s idea of what visuals, or video as it was called then, could do."* Some contract work and acquisitions were used in that program, produced in 1970 by KQED and funded by Ford and CPB.

Following the establishment of two regional film centers at PTV stations in Texas and New Hampshire, and a youth film center in Georgia, CPB financed two series—one documentary, one arts—which showcased works produced by stations around the country. A major portion of these programs were produced by independents who had been contracted by the local stations. The objective of this plan was to bring local and regional producing talent into the stations which had previously developed only limited ability to deliver quality programs.

In 1973-74, following the Nixon veto of the public broadcasting authorization bill and the reorganization of CPB and PBS, CPB became much more actively involved in individual program choices. They no longer sent block grants to stations, preferring to use their programming funds, which had been cut back by the Community Service Grant policy, to develop and pilot new shows. In subsequent seasons, CPB began enlarging its purchase of individual programs, first from new stations, then from outside producers.

While it's almost impossible to determine how many of the station acquisitions for national air were independently produced, by the 1976-77 season the figure totalled 31 programs at a cost of $374,049, or an average of $12,066. That figure includes the costs charged by the station to "package and present" the program, as well as the fee paid to the producer for broadcast rights.

By looking at more detailed figures at WNET's Acquisitions Department, we can see why many independent producers cite this "toll fee" as a major complaint.

During FY 1977-78, WNET's acquisition budget for locally aired programs is $492,230, with $359,000 (73 percent) of that budget going directly for acquisition and 27 percent for "packaging." Of these totals, $34,043 was allocated to buy films produced by American independents, slightly less than 10 percent of the direct acquisition budget.

Aside from the fact that WNET, like many stations, finds a 10-to-1 preference for foreign acquisitions over American productions†, independents object strenuously to a 27 percent cost being tacked on to their programs. They would prefer to deal with PBS and CPB directly, thus avoiding those costs.

But PBS and the stations insist that those overhead fees are real costs, covering functions that the stations can provide, and that PBS is unable to provide because stations have prohibited them from doing so. These functions include:

(1) *Authority.* The stations have continued their reluctance to grant PBS the authority or the funds to function as a network—i.e., to be able to make programming, funding and scheduling decisions under one roof.

(2) *Responsibility.* PBS claims that as a result, the organization could not be held legally responsible for any libel, slander, obscenity, equal time or fairness obligations. Plus, more lawyers cost money.

(3) *Journalism.* Since PBS is neither a production agency nor a network, it has never employed a staff of professional journalists or experienced producers who have the expertise to check questions of content.

(4) *Facilities.* Since the organization maintains no production facilities, editing machines and the like, PBS finds it easier to funnel programs which need technical work to stations which are so equipped.

(5) *Promotion.* PBS publicity about programs is designed for use by its member stations, not for the general press. Thus, as in the case with fa-

†Of the 200-250 American films produced by small independents screened in calendar year 1977, WNET purchased 51 locally and presented 12 to PBS for acquisition. Compared to British series like *The Glittering Prizes* at $1,200 per episode, American product was just not as attractive. Even discounting the scarcity of independently-produced series, $1,200 for a feature-length film is just too good a deal to pass up.

cilities, an underfunded program prefers to farm out such tasks to stations.

The evidence indicates that each of these claims has been circumvented when necessary. PBS itself passed a resolution in 1977 affirming the fact that independent production could come directly to the staff without going to a station, primarily because of pressure applied by independents.

Furthermore, eleven "independent production centers" were successful in receiving approval from PBS for direct distribution of their materials to the stations in 1977-78 without going through a station first, and, presumably, without paying the "toll charge" for packaging, publicity, technical work and the like.

None of these programs suppliers is a small, individual independent producer. Each has either close ties to a station production center or has received major funding from a federal government agency, or both. Organizations like CTW and FCI have had a special status as members of the PBS "family" for many years. Other suppliers like Bicultural Television in Oakland, California, deliver totally underwritten material which the system seems anxious to broadcast. Other productions are, in fact, "peculiar" cases which, under typical conditions, would have been produced and delivered by stations. These include *Lincoln Center* and *Firing Line* series.

In most cases the programs by these production centers and others which have gone directly to PBS are not the kind of programming which would tend to give the system legal or journalistic problems. Many of the programs by small-scale independents, particularly documentaries, are the most problematic. Thorny legal questions of fairness, balance and objectivity, equal time, libel, and obscenity can result in costly court action which PBS has neither the funds nor the political support of the stations to back.

Thus, the larger production center which delivers federally-financed children's or other noncontroversial programming can much more easily gain the confidence of PBS and the backing of stations than single program producers who are independent of any editorial supervision of a station.

Even with the 1977 policy change at PBS, these small independents continue to be told that it is just *easier* for everyone when the small producer goes to a station.

In order for this new policy to begin to be implemented, two changes must occur:

First, PBS must gain the authority within the system to exercise network-like programming functions as it has in less difficult situations. In order to do this, PBS will not only need greater support from stations, but at the same time must improve its staff's journalistic credibility and expertise. Furthermore, the current PBS function of representing stations in a kind of trade association fashion before Congress and elsewhere seriously jeopardizes the ability of any staff to make decisions that are free from political influence and the chilling effect of funders' scrutiny.

Second, independents must work to gain the trust of a larger section of the public broadcasting establishment. This can only be done as the market for independent work grows and more producers have the opportunity to build solid track records.

This process of gaining trust independent of the stations needs considerable attention. As long as the incentive is strong for producers to continue to funnel everything through stations and no procedure for changing this is established, it will be difficult for this process of trust-building to occur.

*Other acquisition models.* Within the station and the independent production centers, certain program formats have utilized material acquired or commissioned from individual film and videomakers. The *Woman Alive* format was built around 20-minute films which were made by independent women filmmakers. The CTW productions like *Sesame Street* and the *Electric Company* routinely contracted for new and original material from independent filmmakers, notably animators. Ongoing series like *Nova* and *MacNeil/Lehrer Report* on very rare occasions used material produced by independents.

Other national acquisition mechanisms include the SAM and SIP, two specialized variations of the SPC, the buying market that finances new productions. Like the SPC itself, these two mechanisms do not result in venturesome program choices. The SAM primarily purchased movie packages. SIP concentrates on programs with high audience appeal for use during fund-raising pitches. Only one independent work was purchased by this mechanism, TVTV's *Superbowl* documentary.

Acquisitions for local, regional and national distribution will probably see continued growth as public television seeks to raise its profile in the independent community. It is a safe, cheap way to program, if the material can be made to fit into a broadcast format. But even if PBS and CPB raise the national scale to the $400 per minute from the present $200 to $250 as the AIVF has suggested, the revenues from acquisitions will never be more than partial repayment for a project which has to be financed elsewhere.

In print it's the equivalent of magazine rights to a book. First you have to write and publish the book.

### The "acquisition" of video and the union issue

In 1973 the video group Optic Nerve made a deal

with KQED to air a documentary they were producing about the Miss California pageant. When *Fifty Wonderful Years* aired the credits indicated that the program had been produced by Optic Nerve *and* KQED, implying that the station, which was about to enter contract negotiations with its technical unions, had used non-union labor on one of its own in-house productions. The gaffe became an issue in contract negotiations, and the resulting contract made it almost impossible for KQED to work with independent video producers for a number of years.

This union issue continues to cause difficulties for independent video production. For technical reasons, videomakers may want to develop relationships with broadcasters to facilitate airing their works.

Such relationships work best in the early phases of planning and pre-production, since a producer must choose what level of technical sophistication will be budgeted into the production — something which is less of a choice for filmmakers.

The two principal technical decisions are (1) whether to shoot a production in color, and (2) what kind of editing system will be required. Both questions may be best resolved in the context of a specific broadcast relationship — hence, the source of continuing tension with union work rules.

The question of color is a considerable cost issue. In film production the burden of cost is in processing. In video it is in equipment rental. Black-and-white material is rarely acceptable on broadcast any more, except in cases where low-light cameras are used to record nighttime or indoor action which could not be otherwise captured. The best example of this is *The Police Tapes*, a documentary about the South Bronx by Alan and Susan Raymond.

If color video is used, considerably more expensive cameras are required if the producer intends to shoot indoors or without massive lighting. Such an investment is not feasible generally unless the production has a reasonable chance of airing nationally, often a prime motivation for videomakers to seek relationships with local stations.

The editing question makes the union issue even more difficult. Once the raw material has been shot, the producer must edit to meet FCC and PBS technical requirements. This is best accomplished by using sophisticated time-code computer editors, two-inch quadruplex videotape machines, time-base correctors and image enhancers, titling and special effects equipment. Commercial video houses can provide these services, but the cost is high. With original production funds for independents being so scarce, videomakers have frequently sought co-production relationships with stations that can provide these services, thus lowering the actual amount of cash necessary up front. However, such arrangements have caused tension between station management and the independents. Stations may charge the producer as much or more than a commercial editing house for these services against the budget of the total project. In seeking to "make-up" the difference between the cash and the in-kind services, a station may charge an additional overhead figure to cover administrative and fund-raising expenses.

In order to forge a relationship with an independent videomaker, the unionized public TV station must "get around" the union rules, which generally prohibit management from hiring non-union personnel within a 30- or 50-mile radius of the city of license. The most common solution is for the station to "acquire" the work of the videomaker, even though it may not yet have been produced, and even though the station may be writing a check to help support the production. Other cases result in stations refusing to work with local video groups but supporting the work of producers across the country because of the 50-mile-limit rule.

As more and more public TV stations are unionized this issue is bound to heat up. In New York, which of course has a large freelance production industry, a special local of the principal broadcast union (National Association of Broadcast Engineers and Technicians) has been established for freelancers. And, as "independent" groups get larger, the unions have begun organizing their production employees as well.

Recent strikes by NABET against ABC and NBC illustrate additional problems which are created by the industry's switch to video. Traditionally NABET engineers are responsible for electronic technical work, most of which had been done in studio. As small-format video moved electronics into the field, replacing film production, the engineers claimed jurisdiction over this hardware. Management wished to hire freelancers and to cut down the size of video crews, much to the chagrin of both film crews and engineers. Such work-rule and jurisdictional disputes can be expected to continue as the technology evolves and becomes less labor-intensive.

### Drama

Essentially a writer's medium, drama can be a vehicle which offers great potential for non-station production, as the current *Visions* series produced at KCET illustrates. Under the direction of Barbara Schultz, whose credentials go back to the early period of TV when anthology dramas were a staple of the American screen, *Visions* was established in 1975 with Ford, NEA and CPB funds as a showcase for new writing talent. The original program proposal required 50 percent of the productions to be produced outside the KCET-

housed *Visions* unit. This was downgraded because of a cut in funding, but the series did manage to include nine independently-produced shows during the first two seasons. Among them were some of the most critically acclaimed as well as the least successful shows, proving the old maxim about the freedom to fail.

No other continuing drama series on public television has made such an effort to seek out independents, although both *Hollywood Television Theatre* and *Great Performances* have made single-program arrangements with non-station producers.

The dramatic special is perhaps even more ideally suited to the special problems of independents, since the costs and logistics of mounting a single program are considerably less than a series. Many such programs have been produced or co-produced with non-station producers, including shows like *The Belle of Amherst* and the James Whitmore Harry Truman special.

### Fillers

Another contribution made by *Visions* has been the innovative use of filler material, a necessary component of many public television programs. In the case of *Visions* the variable time remaining to fill out a broadcast hour were produced by independents — TVTV, videoartist Ron Hayes, and the Improvisational Theatre Project at Mark Taper Forum. Many of the acquisitions purchased at WNET and other stations are short films designed to use as filler after British import series.

Charles Allen, Vice President of Programming for KCET, the producing station for *Visions*, believes the short filler idea is an excellent programming concept for television. Having failed to sell PBS on the notion of "Bicentennial Minutes," he says that the idea was taken to CBS where it ran for a year. "The notion is that some kinds of information can be best conveyed in a minute spot," says Allen. KCET is airing locally-produced spots on women's self-defense in the wake of publicity about the "Hillside Strangler." With proper editorial planning, independents could be an excellent source of one-minute program concepts which could be dropped throughout the schedule all day and evening. The same would be true for the material that fills out the broadcast hours of various imported programs—instead of ten minutes of an on-air host, how about half of that going for creatively planned and conceived short films?

### The experimental centers

In 1967 KQED received $150,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation to develop an experimental workshop in humanities. This eventually grew into a center to experiment in the television medium itself — called the National Center for Experiments in Television, under the direction of Bryce Howard and later Paul Kaufman. Subsequent support of NCET by CPB (totalling $700,000) and by the Rockefeller Foundation ($496,000) kept this center operating until 1975. During its existence the Center moved steadily away from the actual operation of the broadcast station, and a relatively small amount of programming, even of an experimental nature, was developed there for either local KQED or national PBS airing. During the period of funding considerable criticism was leveled at CPB for its major commitment. David Stewart of CPB describes the value of the Center: "The first efforts emphasized aesthetic control over abstracted and deliberately distorted images. Early experimentation was awkward, fumbling, unsystematic, and in its odd way, quite startling. The experimenters sometimes seemed to be pushing their independence too far, resisting requests for clarification of their intentions. . . ."

Experimental TV activities, says Stewart, "rarely have direct mass appeal, but they do move many talented people who are able to give them a second modified life through subsequent creations as writers, designers, directors, choreographers, cameramen, and composers. . . . Most *basic* changes in the 'looks' of television will probably be the result of uncompromising experimentation."

Not only was a relatively small amount of its program experiments used on local or national broadcasts, the methods of selecting artists were criticized by members of the local community and by others in the field nationally. The San Francisco Center became more and more like a true "laboratory," working on pure research into the nature of the medium's capabilities rather than either packaging broadcast TV or providing a major access route for emerging talent.

Rockefeller was instrumental in establishing a second experimental TV center at WNET/New York in 1972. Under the direction of David Loxton, the Television Laboratory at Channel 13 received almost $1,000,000 in four years to support a wide range of program experiments. A major component of the Lab was the artist-in-residence program, initiated by the New York State Council on the Arts, which brought in 20 artists in various disciplines to utilize television tools during 1973-75. The Lab evolved a sophisticated post-production capability and staff, and became the principal funnel through which video producers were brought into the station and the national system. For filmmakers, the Acquisition Department under Nelsa Gidney, and special arrangements with the program department were until recently, the primary means of access.

Increasingly the Lab has emphasized the broadcast product. In 1975 an anthology series of video works called *Video and Television Review*

*(VTR)* began to air locally. *VTR* was the first regular series devoted to video, with some 40 programs produced in all during three seasons. The most recent set was aired on PBS. Some of these episodes were the results of the artists-in-residence; others were acquired or commissioned from around the country. The Lab also produced portraits of video groups and a number of in-house productions.

The TV Lab was able to use its funding mandate for experiments with new technology, in order to develop the form of video documentaries. Starting with the award-winning *Lord of the Universe* (1973), the TV Lab collaborated with Top Value Television (TVTV) to produce 6½ hours of provocative non-fiction programming. Since that time the TV Lab has broadcast the work of Downtown Community Television (three hours); Global Village (one hour); Allan and Susan Raymond (90 minutes); and many others in the *VTR* series.

Also in the 1976-77 season the TV Lab produced *Making Television Dance* with choreographer Twyla Tharp and co-produced two *Visions* dramas with WGBH.

The TV Lab's success in producing high-quality documentaries with independent video journalists was clearly a factor in the 1977 grant by the Ford Foundation and the NEA of $500,000 to operate a documentary fund for independent producers (see *Documentaries*). Six film and one video producer received contracts to produce documentaries from this fund. In 1977 the Lab received a commitment from CPB to support its work for the first time.

Loxton has developed a relationship with the station management that permits him a certian autonomy and editorial control that has suited many of the artists and documentarians with whom the Lab has worked. Some others have not been satisfied, complaining not only of Loxton's own dominance in the production process, but of station interference as well.

Whether such charges are accurate may be beside the point. The TV Lab is clearly the organization which has delivered more original programming to local and national air from video independents than any other. Much of it has been award-winning. At a budget of nearly $1 million in FY 1977, the TV Lab is a broadcasting success.

The third experimental center established by the Rockefeller Foundation was the New Television Laboratory at WGBH/Boston. In 1974 the Workshop was established under the direction of Fred Barzyk. During its first year the Workshop consolidated its experimentation with half-inch which WGBH had pioneered for a number of years. Like the TV Lab at 13, the first year saw a large influx of visiting artists, some 75, similarly with the funding of the state arts council. "There was no pressure to create a finished, polished product; exploration of high risk, low-cost experiments was encouraged," for both video artists and dancers, musicians, and dramatists.

Barzyk and Loxton have worked together a great deal, on two *Visions* dramas as well as many of videoart showcases aired nationally on PBS. In 1974, *Video Visionaries* was produced as an anthology; an earlier program, *The Medium is the Medium* (1968) was the first national look at the emerging videoart field.

Barzyk's direction changed in 1975-76, becoming increasingly preoccupied with larger scale projects for broadcast, including an ambitious comedy special starring Lily Tomlin and featuring commissioned works of many video artists *(Collisions)*, and *Mother's Little Network*, a comedy pilot. The Workshop also distributed artists materials extensively in museums.

In 1977 the original small-format video equipment of the Workshop was transferred to a local production and access organization, the Boston Film and Video Foundation. WGBH has first rights to materials produced in that facility, and the Foundation assumes responsibilities for access policies in the community.

It is difficult to generalize about the relative success and failures of these three centers. All were associated with major producing stations and headed by creative and talented producers. All were well-funded for a seed period by the Rockefeller Foundation. All were aimed to experiment with the medium of television. The TV Lab is the only fully functioning operation remaining, due in large part to the aggressiveness and energy with which Loxton has pursued his task, and a degree of support from management.

Despite the efforts to create an environment of creativity for many different kinds of artists and an access point for independents, Loxton freely admits that the Experimental Lab model is limited in terms of the volume of production it could ever generate. "We're interested in producing programs that challenge the way people think about television," he says. And yet both Boston and New York centers have moved into fairly conventional television management activities—pilot development, documentary journalism, big budget drama. Loxton's current project is a science fiction series.

It is clear that an "experimental" center specifically established within a broadcast station must steer between the extreme of producing only experimental work, as did the San Francisco Center, and becoming an interesting, if slightly different producing unit within the station. Such centers, if they aim toward innovation as a goal, cannot be expected to be a major volume supplier in the system.

## Documentaries

Since the departure of Bill Moyers from public television and the demise of the National Public Affairs Center for Television, no documentaries have been produced regularly by the system. Occasional local documentaries were presented to the system and acquired by CPB. Fred Wiseman, who enjoyed a subsidy from the Ford Foundation to produce a documentary a year, continued to do so. The video documentaries produced and packaged by the TV Lab at WNET were likewise made possible by foundation support.

But not since the days of *NET Journal*, when a weekly documentary aired, could public TV say, as it did then, that it generated more documentaries than the three commercial networks combined. The Nixon "freeze" on public affairs and the money squeeze made them an aberration, not a regular part of PTV's program mix.*

In the winter of 1976, CPB sponsored a series of seminars on public affairs in which the stations expressed their desire for more documentaries. "But we don't want a pig in a poke," said one program manager, citing the often controversial nature of these programs. Participating in these meetings were representatives of the newly-formed Coalition for New Public Affairs Programming, which continued to urge the system to invest in documentaries, particularly those produced by independents.

By the summer, plans were being made for two separate mechanisms to finance original documentaries. The first, announced by the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, provided $500,000 if it could be matched, to an organization that would administer a fund specifically designed for independent film and video documentarians.

Soon thereafter CPB announced its intentions of advancing $1 million to prime the pump of a "revolving" documentary fund, which would finance a number of works by both independents and stations. The theory behind the fund was that once the programs were produced they would be offered for sale in the SPC, with all resulting revenues going back to replenish the fund. This was designed to let the stations put their money where their mouths were, and at the same time to have the opportunity to pre-screen the programs.

Both projects took a while to get started. The CPB fund began operation in January, 1977, following several months of dispute at the CPB board level over whether a representative of PBS would be allowed to help select programs, as originally planned. The fund was yet another political football between the two organizations.

The Ford/NEA project was stalled in late 1976 because no applicant suitable to the funders could be found who was willing to match the $500,000 sum. As a result the matching requirement was dropped, 28 organizations applied, in a second round of deadlines, and the TV Lab at WNET was selected in September, 1977.

Six independent filmmakers and one video producer were selected by the TV Lab after a rapid, but elaborate screening panel selection process. Over 880 proposals were received from independents all over the country. While the final decision rested in the hands of Loxton and a panel of broadcasters and filmmakers, the Lab was under considerable pressure to provide the appearance, if not the substance of due process. Given the huge volume of applications, it is almost impossible to evaluate how effective that process was at this point. Clearly, Loxton's travels to speak with large groups of sometimes hostile film and videomakers and extensive press work helped create the enormous flood of applications.

The other major funding source for documentaries, CPB's "Revolving" Documentary fund, received 76 proposals in two installments, and selected ten producers. Four were completely outside stations. Of the six station awards, three were independents in cooperation with stations.

At the same time two other funding sources were initiated for independent documentaries—The Film Fund, with about $250,000 in its first year for socially committed documentaries, and a new production grant category at the NEA, which made seven grants to independents, all but one of which were documentaries.

The PBS plan, issued after the formulation of the Ford/NEA and the CPB documentary funds, was to allocate one hour per week for a *Documentary Showcase*, combining acquisitions with the newly-commissioned works and station contributions.

The CPB choices were made by two people, Calvin Watson, Director of TV Activities, and Richard Ellison, PBS Director of Current Affairs. All other funds developed some variation of a peer review process.

Only the first two of CPB's documentaries have been completed and both were disappointing, attracting too few station-buyers in the SPC to warrant placing them on the PBS "hard schedule." It may be too soon to know, but many

*Perhaps one measure of success in documentaries is whether the "rules" are broken.

Says one observer: "There are seven deadly taboos in the world of television documentaries. You will rarely if ever see documentaries on your home screen about: big labor, big business, big TV networks, the automotive industry, nuclear power, the military-industrial complex, U.S. foreign policy. Most of these taboos have been violated at least once by one or more of the three major networks, but mostly in years gone by—and the violators paid for their courage by losing out in the ratings war. . . ." "Where TV Documentaries Don't Dare to Tread" by John Culhane, *New York Times*, February 20, 1977.

observers are predicting that stations will refuse to buy *any* documentaries because their cost-per-minute is so high. The first CPB-offered documentary, priced at $124,000, was *Plutonium: Element of Risk* by independent Don Widener in cooperation with KCET. PBS ruled that the program did not meet its journalism standards and signaled the stations to that effect. As a result of that controversy and the cost, the program was bought by 20 stations.

Doubtless PBS' judgment that the program was of dubious journalistic quality affected its appeal to stations. Another station-produced documentary, however, attracted only 40 buyers. An earlier SPC documentary offer, *The Police Tapes* by Alan and Susan Raymond, was priced at $25,000 and not enough stations bought it to recoup the investment made by WNET.

Unless stations have much greater income, it seems unlikely that they will select documentaries, particularly controversial ones, in preference to cheaper, safer programs offered in the SPC.

The case also illustrates the continuing conflict between CPB and PBS, and the difficulty of financing and scheduling programs under different organizations.

Another series of documentaries aired during the 1976-77 season called *Americana*. These half-hour documentaries were acquisitions selected and programmed by PBS, many from independents. The idea was dropped because of a lack of staff time and a shortage of consistently high-quality half-hour documentaries. Unfortunately, a number of producers, realizing that this would provide a new market for the shorter format, began producing with *Americana* in mind.

Despite all these difficulties, the recent upsurge in documentaries, particularly for independents, is clearly a vote of confidence by funders.

### Conclusions

Public television's record of designing, financing and airing programming from independent suppliers is spotty. On the surface the statistics indicate that almost a third of the present national program mix comes from non-station suppliers. And yet, the majority of that programming seems to be on the schedule more as a result of the fact that it has been funded by federal agencies than because of a concerted effort to seek out and format "independent work."

While acquiring previously-produced material does offer the chance for PBS and the local stations to improve their profile with independents by enlarging the number of successful contracts, the effect on the total number of hours is minimal. Furthermore, because of economic factors, acquisitions will never have the effect of sustaining or developing the capability of American independent producers to improve the quality or to compete in the acquisition market with major European production organizations who can afford to dump their material into the U.S. market at drastically lower prices.

The handful of organizations within the stations specifically designed to foster original program material by independents for broadcast have had varying degrees of success. Nonetheless, the work of independents has won many awards for public television. In other cases, experimental units have not developed much programming for broadcast.

The situations which seem to offer the best examples of gaining air time and production money from independents are those program designs which take into account the unique characteristics of using independents to produce for television. In the drama field, *Visions* has succeeded in creating a model worth emulating in different scales of productions. *Great American Dream Machine* offered an innovative method of using both in-house and outside producers and its format permitted a wide range of styles and content. Funding for documentaries and single programs has been possible for independent producers, largely because of the commitment of the funders to establish the ground rules so that independents could successfully enter the market.

Nonetheless, the "bread-and-butter" part of any broadcasting service must be series development, an area which has only recently begun to be open to non-station producers.

# Funding Public Television Programming

### The Corporation for Public Broadcasting

Since its establishment a decade ago, the public television system has been transformed from a program production system based upon Ford Foundation-funded station production centers into a complex marketplace in which these same centers continue to produce the majority of programs, but under substantially different rules.

As money has come to public television from corporations, additional private foundations, public contributions, state and federal sources, it becomes impossible to generalize about exactly how programs are "typically" financed.

Nonetheless, it is clear from examining the changing funding patterns that the opening up of more sources has increased the number of producers who are able to enter the public television marketplace, and that an increasing number of these producers are independent of any of the major PTV production centers. In addition, a larger number of stations are increasingly able to enter the national programming arena, albeit in a minor way compared to the "major stations."

This section focuses upon the budget of the Television Activities Department of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting as a method of defining these trends. While CPB's share of the total funding mix of the PTV system has declined, the policies which it has pursued do provide an index of the changes in program finance in the entire system.

In addition, a number of results can be directly traced to the changes in CPB's policies that affect the creation of several new groups of "independents" within the PTV program marketplace, as well as the expansion of opportunities for all non-station producers.

*Table B* shows the expenditures of CPB's Television Activities Department for nine years. This breakdown, taken from figures provided by that department, seeks to determine a number of facts:

(1) The size in dollar terms of the CPB investment in program activities.

(2) The effect of changes like the initiation of the SPC in 1974 and the elimination of block grants to major production centers in 1973.

(3) The relative commitment by the Corporation to the major production centers during these changes as compared to all other producers.

(4) The growth of other program categories, in particular research and development, piloting and individual program acquisition and support.

Determination of the total CPB expenditure on programming is somewhat confusing because these figures include two categories of funds not directly applied by the Television Activities Department to program related grants or contracts. From 1972 to 1976 the total budget of the Department contained "restricted grants." These are funds which were passed through CPB from corporations underwriting programs at stations or other production centers. The grants do not represent any determination by CPB staff, nor were these funds appropriated from Congress. Their inclusion in the budget was designed to enable CPB to take advantage of matching provisions from the U. S. Treasury, money which would then be distributed to stations in the form of Community Service Grants.

Another figure which clouds the actual program expenditures is the CPB contribution to SPC, which will be discussed below.

By excluding these two items, we can see that CPB reached its highest budget figure in 1973, with a total of $13.1 million. This total did not reach the $10 million mark again until 1977 (if we include the transition quarter between 1976 and 1977). By 1978 the total jumped to $18.5 million.

During the first four years of its existence, CPB made "block grants" to production centers which had been designated as worth investment by the Ford Foundation. These were WETA/Washington, WNET/New York, WGBH/Boston, KQED/San Francisco, and KCET/Los Angeles. In addition to these station centers, Children's Television Workshop (CTW) had been established with generous Ford Foundation support. Another major program supplier, Family Communications, Inc. (FCI), which also produced children's programs, received major grant support from CPB.

The "block" grants reached a peak of $5.6 million in 1972 before CPB cut them off. Thus, the 1972 total program budget left only $6.1 million at its discretion for program support, most of which went to these seven major producers as well.

In 1972 Richard Nixon's veto of the long-range funding for public broadcasting and a number of other moves pressuring the PTV system resulted in a revamping of CPB's Board and a series of internecine battles within the system that resulted in an uneasy truce called the Partnership Agreement in 1973. A main feature of this truce was the establishment of the Station Program Cooperative, which permitted stations

## TABLE B

**Corporation for Public Broadcasting**
**Television Activities Department**

### PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES (1969-1977)

| | *1969* | *1970* | *1971* | *1972* | *1973* | *1974* | *1975* | *1976* | *TQ* | *1977* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL ANNUAL EXPENDITURE* | 1,164,929 | 4,985,094 | 10,583,492 | 15,514,566 | 16,262,473 | 17,134,721 | 12,279,547 | 10,144,954 | 388,172 | 12,917,483 |
| TOTAL WITHOUT SPC OR RESTRICTED FUNDS† | 1,164,929 | 4,989,094 | 10,583,492 | 12,231,875 | 13,143,221 | 8,283,381 | 3,347,460 | 5,258,918 | 388,172 | 9,917,483 |
| BASIC PROGRAM GRANTS | 500,062 | 1,000,000 | 3,075,343 | 5,640,000 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| CONTRIBUTION TO SPC | — | — | — | — | — | — | 4,225,707 | 4,586,036 | — | 3,000,000 |
| SERIES & INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS (ALL PRODUCERS) | | | | | | | | | | |
| CPB FUNDS | 664,867 | 3,947,912 | 7,507,621 | 6,113,456 | 12,778,290 | 8,044,405 | 2,967,460 | 4,115,485 | 159,549 | 5,855,040‡ |
| Restricted Funds† | — | — | — | 3,282,691 | 3,119,252 | 8,851,340 | 4,706,380 | 300,000 | — | — |
| Totals | 664,867 | 3,947,912 | 7,507,621 | 9,396,147 | 15,897,542 | 16,895,745 | 7,673,840 | 4,415,485 | 159,549 | 5,855,040 |
| RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FUNDS | — | 25,000 | 528 | 339,401 | 280,986 | 10,850 | 235,000 | 229,041 | 97,276 | 707,072 |
| PILOTS | — | 12,182 | — | 139,018 | 83,945 | 228,126 | 145,000 | 844,251 | 76,627 | 881,111 |
| OTHER PROJECTS | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 70,141 | 54,720 | — |
| STEP-UP AND ACQUISITIONS | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2,474,260 |

*The total expenditures column may not equal the figures provided by CPB in Appendix XV because of differences in computation.

†Restricted funds during 1972-1976 are underwriting grants made to producing stations, but "passed through" CPB and included in programming totals for eligibility in a federal matching program. The money does not represent federal appropriations to CPB.

‡In 1977 Series were listed separately from Individual Program Acquisition and "Step-ups" for the first time.

## TABLE B-1*

**Corporation for Public Broadcasting**
**Television Activities Department**

### SERIES AND INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS BY TYPE OF PRODUCER
(1969-1977)

| | *1969* | *1970* | *1971* | *1972* | *1973* | *1974* | *1975* | *1976* | *1977* | *1978* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ALL GRANTS FOR SERIES AND INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS† | | | | | | | | | | |
| CPB Funds Only | 664,867 | 3,947,912 | 7,507,621 | 6,113,456 | 12,778,290 | 8,044,405 | 2,967,460 | 4,115,485 | 159,549 | 5,855,040 |
| Restricted Funds‡ | — | — | — | 3,282,691 | 3,119,252 | 8,851,340 | 4,706,380 | 300,000 | — | — |
| Totals | 664,867 | 3,947,912 | 7,507,621 | 9,396,147 | 15,897,542 | 16,895,745 | 7,673,840 | 4,415,485 | 159,549 | 5,855,040 |
| GRANTS TO LARGE PRODUCTION CENTERS** | | | | | | | | | | |
| CPB Funds | 282,262 | 3,150,393 | 4,827,215 | 4,206,351 | 11,473,488 | 7,656,742 | 2,358,276 | 3,949,420 | 25,281 | 5,069,040 |
| Restricted Funds‡ | — | — | — | 2,931,391 | 3,098,852 | 7,964,943 | 4,706,380 | 300,000 | — | — |
| Totals | 282,262 | 3,150,393 | 4,827,215 | 7,137,742 | 14,572,340 | 15,621,685 | 7,064,656 | 4,249,420 | 25,281 | 5,069,040 |
| GRANTS TO ALL OTHER STATIONS AND INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS | | | | | | | | | | |
| CPB Funds | 382,605 | 797,519 | 2,680,406 | 1,907,105 | 1,304,802 | 387,663 | 609,184 | 166,065 | 134,268 | 786,000 |
| Restricted Funds‡ | — | — | — | 351,300 | 20,400 | 886,397 | — | — | — | — |
| Totals | 382,605 | 797,519 | 2,680,406 | 2,258,405 | 1,325,202 | 1,274,060 | 609,184 | 166,065 | 134,268 | 786,000 |

*This table examines the totals of "SERIES AND INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS" category in TABLE B, previous page.

†This table does not include single programs for 1977, when it was listed as a separate category.

‡Restricted funds during 1972-1976 are underwriting grants made to producing stations, but passed through CPB and included in programming totals for eligibility in a federal matching program. The money does not represent federal appropriations to CPB.

**Large production centers are KCET, WNET, KQED, WGBH, WETA, Family Communications and Children's Television Workshop.

to use their own discretion in selecting programs. CPB began its contribution to the SPC in FY 1975 at $4.2 million.

We can see that the SPC investment lowered the discretionary funds in TV Activities considerably. During the 1973 and 1974 seasons CPB had $13.1 and $8.3 million at their disposal, respectively. In 1975 the total departmental budget had plunged, largely because of the new Community Service Grant arrangement. Subtracting the SPC contribution, the department was able to allocate only about $3 million for program activities.

When the SPC was established many envisioned that CPB would continue financing the "bread-and-butter" programs which had been produced at the seven major production centers. This would have left the stations free to develop new programs, to fill out their schedules in a way which would give them greater authority. It didn't work out that way.

Faced with a cutback in its programming department from the CSG and SPC policies that were part of the compromise agreement, CPB announced that it would no longer provide support to series beyond a second season. This policy threw many programs into the SPC, far too many for the stations to finance with their own funds, nor even with the contributions of the Ford Foundation and CPB.

Whereas CPB supported major programs in 1973 and 1974, mostly at the large producing agencies and stations, in 1975 the only two major program grants were made to WETA and CTW, totalling more than half of the department's $3 million budget.

If CPB was unable (or unwilling, some might say) to support major ongoing series during the period following the SPC, management reasoned that it might continue to have an important role in program financing if it were to move into the development of new programs and the acquisition of existing material. These related developments had significance for independent producers and smaller stations alike, and we shall return to the point for greater examination.

*The production centers.* The concept of production centers in television is sensible—one builds a critical mass of expertise and experience where a steady stream of material will be conceptualized and delivered for distribution. Public television's experience with the production center was major in its early days, being the beneficiary of some 250 annual hours of programs by the National Educational Television (NET) organization. This central network-like production-and-distribution center was merged into WNET/Channel 13, and became one of several locations where quality productions were to be developed for the new PBS distribution system.

*Table C* shows just how much the system has relied upon these production centers for basic programming. WNET alone estimates its share of the national schedule to be one-third. And, while CPB funds are only a fraction of the national programming fund's total, these figures show that the seven production centers received a majority — in most cases an overwhelming preponderance—of CPB programming money in all years but two, 1969 and the transition quarter. In 1969 these production centers received a sum that was almost as great as the program budget in "block grants." The transition quarter is something of an anomaly in accounting procedures. (The federal government changed its fiscal year from July to October. This quarter represents that period of transition.)

*Table C* breaks these figures out to include restricted grants — corporate funds — and the CPB series and program budget alone. The figures indicate that the proportion of earmarked corporate funds passing through CPB to the seven largest producers was roughly the same as the CPB breakdown, and in some cases somewhat higher.

It is interesting to note that after the discontinuation of block grants in 1973 the percentage of CPB's programming money going to the production centers rose from 75 percent to above 90 percent, where it has stayed until 1978. In other words, CPB's grant-making has, until very recently, served to support the maintenance of the major production centers with or without block-type grants.

What did change during the 1973-77 period was how these monies were dispensed.

*Program development. Table D* illustrates the budget breakdown by category of the CPB Television Activities Department. These figures emphasize the analysis we have just seen—that the SPC figure replaced the block grant figure in rough approximation of percentage. This is true whether we include the corporate "restricted grants" or not. During the two years without either SPC or block grants, 1973 and 1974. CPB spent virtually all of its money on series or individual programs, and most of that to the production centers.

Between 1975 and 1977 the SPC contribution declined in proportion to other program categories — partially because CPB's total budget rose, as well as the cut made in 1977 to the SPC.

These tables also indicate that after the initiation of the SPC and the decision of CPB not to fund series beyond two seasons, an increasing share of the programming funds was devoted to research and development of new programs, piloting, and the acquisition of existing programs.

## TABLE C

**Corporation for Public Broadcasting**
**Television Activities Department**

### PERCENTAGE OF PROGRAM GRANTS TO PRODUCTION CENTERS* AND ALL OTHER PRODUCERS

(1969-1977) (In Percentages)

(Including Restricted Grants)

| | *1969* | *1970* | *1971* | *1972* | *1973* | *1974* | *1975* | *1976* | *TQ* | *1977* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Production Centers* | 42 | 79.8 | 64.3 | 75 | 91.7 | 92.5 | 92.1 | 96.2 | 15.9 | 86.6 |
| All Other Stations and Independents | 58 | 20.2 | 35.7 | 25 | 8.3 | 7.5 | 7.9 | 3.8 | 84.1 | 13.4 |
| (Without Restricted Grants) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Production Centers* | N/A | N/A | N/A | 68.8 | 89.8 | 95.1 | 79.5 | 96 | N/A | N/A |
| All Others | N/A | N/A | N/A | 31.2 | 10.2 | 4.9 | 20.5 | 4 | N/A | N/A |

*Production Centers in this analysis include five public television stations — WETA, WNET, KQED, WGHB, and KCET, and the two independent production centers — Children's Television Workshop and Family Communications, Inc.

## TABLE D

**Corporation for Public Broadcasting**
**Television Activities Department**

### BUDGET BREAKDOWN BY CATEGORY

(Including Restricted Funds)
1969-1977 (Percent of Total Budget)

| | *1969* | *1970* | *1971* | *1972* | *1973* | *1974* | *1975* | *1976* | *TQ* | *1977* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Basic Program Grants (Block Grant System) | 43 | 20.1 | 29 | 36.4 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Contribution to SPC | — | — | — | — | — | — | 34.3 | 45.2 | — | 23.2 |
| Series and Individual Programs | 57 | 79.2 | 70.9 | 60.6 | 97.7 | 98 | 62.5 | 43.6 | 41 | 45.3 |
| R&D Funds | — | .5 | .00005 | 2.2 | 1.7 | .06 | 1.9 | 2.4 | 25.1 | 5.5 |
| Pilots | — | .2 | — | .1 | .5 | 1.3 | 1.1 | 8.4 | 19.7 | 6.8 |
| Other Projects | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 14.1 | — |
| Step-Up* and Acquisitions | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 19.2 |

*Step-up and acquisition of single programs was not tracked as a separate category until 1977. Such grants appear in category (3), Series and Individual Programs.

---

### New condition of national production

The elaborate and lengthy step-funding and grantsmanship process with federal agencies, CPB and underwriters, often with a final portion of the budget coming from the SPC, was quite different for producing organizations than it was under the block-grant system previously fostered by the Ford Foundation.

The major producing stations increasingly found that the entire cost of a program aimed at the national audience must be borne by grants specifically raised for that program, and have placed their producing personnel on contract only for the duration of specific projects.

William Osterhaus, president of KQED/San Francisco, describes the process:

> "In national production virtually everything that happens is funded. That means that the staffs of four or five or six projects that you might have working on your premises are all funded and their work and time and energy and office space and everything is taken with that 100 percent of the time. And whether you have any excess space or staff time or appropriate talent and so on, is the question, in order to devote to anything else. Well, we generally don't. We have to go outside and find these people and bring them in and put them in a place and make them do something.."

While stations differ in this policy, James Loper, president of KCET/Los Angeles, describes his station's policy:

"The whole theory of the way KCET

## TABLE E

**Corporation for Public Broadcasting**
**Television Activities Department**

### BUDGET ANALYSIS BY PRODUCER TYPE

1977-1978

**FISCAL YEAR 1977:**

| *Category* | *Big Five Stations* | *All Other Stations* | *FCI CTW* | *All Other Independents* | *Other** | *Totals* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $ 217,494 (6) | 56,069 (4) | 32,200 (1) | 401,309 (15) | — | 707,072 (26) |
| R&D | av: 36,249 | 14,017 | 32,200 | 26,754 | — | 27,195 |
| | 30.76% † | 7.93% | 4.55% | 56.76% | — | |
| | 373,923 (7) | 34,880 (1) | 125,000 (1) | 347,308 (4) | — | 881,111 (13) |
| PILOTS | av: 53,418 | 34,880 | 125,000 | 86,827 | — | 67,778 |
| | 42.44% | 3.95% | 14.18% | 39.41% | | |
| | 4,194,040 (8) | 300,000 (1) | 875,000 (1) | 486,000 (2) | — | 5,855,040 (12) |
| SERIES | av: 524,255 | 300,000 | 875,000 | 243,000 | — | 487,753 |
| | 71.63% | 5.12% | 14.94% | 8.30% | — | |
| INDIVIDUAL | 1,253,018 (28) | 460,261 (48) | — | 508,981 (11) | 252,000 (1) | 2,474,260 (88) |
| PROGRAMS & | av: 44,751 | 9,589 | — | 46,271 | 252,000 | 28,117 |
| STEP-UPS | 50.64% | 18.60% | — | 20.57% | 10.18% | |
| | 6,038,475 (49) | 851,210 (54) | 1,032,200 (3) | 1,743,598 (32) | 252,000 (1) | 9,917,483 (139) |
| TOTALS | av: 123,234 | 15,763 | 344,067 | 54,487 | 252,000 | 71,349 |
| | 60.60% | 9.27% | 11.24% | 16.15% | 2.74% | |

**FISCAL YEAR 1978** (committed through January, 1978):

| *Category* | *Big Five Stations* | *All Other Stations* | *FCI CTW* | *All Other Independents* | *Other* | *Totals* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $ 270,550 (5) | 65,665 (3) | — | 335,616 (9) | | 671,831 (17) |
| R&D | av: 54,110 | 21,883 | — | 37,291 | | 23,167 |
| | 40.27% | 9,77% | | 49.96% | | |
| | 14,000 (1) | 67,789 (1) | — | 679,322 (6) | | 761,111 (8) |
| PILOTS | av: 14,000 | 67,789 | — | 113,220 | | 95,139 |
| | 1.83% | 8.90% | | 89.25% | | |
| | 4,675,031 (11) | 1,200,000 (3) | — | 1,700,000 (3) | | 7,575,031 (17) |
| SERIES | av: 425,003 | 400,000 | — | 566,667 | | 445,590 |
| | 61.71% | 15.84% | | 22.44% | | |
| | 861,652 (13) | 329,772 | — | 121,068 (3) | | 1,312,492 (23) |
| SPECIALS | av: 66,281 | 47,110 | — | 40,356 | | 57,065 |
| | 65.65% | 25.12% | | 9.22% | | |
| | 426,303 (24) | 214,340 (23) | — | — | | 640,643 (47) |
| STEP-UPS | av: 17,763 | 9,319 | — | — | | 13,631 |
| | 66.54% | 33.45% | | | | |
| | 129,068 (1) | 112,203 (1) | — | — | | 241,271 (2) |
| DOCUMENTARIES | av: 129,068 | 112,203 | — | — | | 120,636 |
| | 53.50% | 46.50% | | | | |
| | 6,376,604 (55) | 1,989,769 (38) | — | 2,836,006 (21) | | 11,202,379 (114) |
| TOTALS | av: 115,938 | 52,362 | — | 135,047 | | 98,266 |
| | 56.92% | 17.76% | | 25.32% | | |
| TWO-YEAR | 12,415,079 (104) | 2,840,979 (92) | 1,032,200 (3) | 4,579,604 (53) | 252,000 (1) | 21,119,862 (253) |
| TOTALS | av: 119,376 | 30,880 | 344,067 | 86,408 | 252,000 | 83,478 |
| | 58.78% | 13.45% | 4.89% | 21.68% | 1.19% | |

Figures in parentheses represent number of grants per category.

*One grant was made to a number of producers and could not be included in other totals.

†All percentages are computed to determine percentage of grants given to a particular category of producers within a given type of grant. For relative portion of total budget, see Table C.

operates is that even though our budget has risen dramatically over the last few years, the staff has not, and we have employed for the last three years a very low staff of about 200-210 people. Last year we employed 990 part-time contractors, per-diem employees in all kinds of positions, whether they be actors or writers or stage hands or crafts-people or what have you. We have always felt that sitting here in Hollywood in the middle of a creative community it would be ridiculous to keep all these people on staff all the time when there is this kind of talent that exists in the community.."

In order to maintain the staffs necessary to raise funds, administer grants and maintain facilities, the large stations generally carry an overhead or G&A (general and administrative) figure of between 22 and 58 percent. Former WGBH producer Michael Ambrosino points out:

"There is a great subtlety in the question of overhead. At one point the overhead at stations could be quite modest. A producer could go from small project to small project with very little waste of time and money. But when a station is spending three-quarters of its time as a national production agency, unless it is super-efficient, producers and staff can be waiting months between projects or being paid during development of projects. This is because of the problems of deadlines and delays for grants.."

Thus, the costs of doing business for stations has risen even beyond the rate of inflation, adding to the amount of money which the development offices must raise on any given project.

An examination of the station-produced series during this period reveals another interesting trend: the increasing reliance by stations upon outside producers who bring their creative projects to public television through the major production centers. Programs like the *National Geographic Specials* and *Jacques Cousteau Odyssey* are produced by separate entities in cooperation with KQED and KCET, respectively. Indeed, PBS officials who attempted to identify "independent" productions for this report were constantly confronted with the difficulty of determining which station-produced programs were really theirs, and which were done by "independents." Osterhaus of KQED:

"At any time a station like this has a number of programs that are in some form of development, ranging from actual production to raising money to putting together a proposal. And right now we probably have anywhere from 6 to 10 projects nationally which are in some stage of development.... We have a number of projects which are generated by individuals who come to us and ask us to work with them in the development of ideas. A great many of these we can't get involved with, for one reason or another. Either we don't think the idea's that great, or our plate is already full for the time being.... But of the projects, local and national, that are currently in production, I would say probably 50 percent of them, at least, are from outside producers.."

James Loper, of KCET/Los Angeles:

"I don't think it makes much difference where the excellence comes from, whether it's independent producers or television stations or 20th Century Fox.... We do not believe in the closed system at all...."

The Vice President for Programming at KCET, Charles Allen:

"You are expanding the number of ideas that are to be considered for funding and a greater diversity of programs to choose from results."

The result of attitudes like these at KCET and KQED, as well as the other major producing centers in the system, has been a wide range of production deals with producers who did not actually germinate the idea within the station bureaucracy, and increasing competition between the stations for the best-known non-station producers, as well as the most highly competent fund-raising and development personnel.

### The independents and direct program funds

During the period when this entrepreneurial arrangement for program funding developed, independent producers were increasing their contact with the public television system. As we saw in early sections, both film and video producers went to local stations, national production centers, producers of particular program formats, and the two national organizations. Demands for access were coupled with requests for money to support *new* production, as well as the purchase of programs which had been funded by other agencies.

While program acquisition was a relatively inexpensive way to increase the *number* of producers that could at least partially benefit from

the PTV system, advance financing of program ideas was a considerably more difficult, risky and controversial activity.

During 1972 to 1977 the NEA's Media Arts budget rose steadily from $2 million to $7 million, benefitting an increasingly large number of grantees (a rise from 53 recipients in 1972 to 292 in 1977).

A similar expansion of grant money from other federal sources, notably the National Endowment for the Humanities, various HEW entities, and foundation sources, made the *possibility* of developing broadcast programming considerably greater for the independent producer—as well as the large producing station.

The critical stage in program development is that period when the idea is transformed into something which has a funded budget. Until the possibility of financial support to independent producers during the *development* stage was created, the likelihood of programs ever getting on the air, except by acquisition, was slim.

CPB's role in this exchange, I believe, has been significant. It can be demonstrated in *Table F,* which analyzes the 1977 and 1978 program expenditures of the CPB TV Activities Department by type of producer.

In contrast to previous years, by 1977 the combined totals of the "Big Five" producing stations, CTW and FCI have been reduced to about 72 percent. While these producers maintained a high share of the series funding (86 percent), the addition of pilots, R&D, and individual program grants lowered the total.

The figures for 1978 continue this trend, with the seven major producers garnering 56.9 percent of all CPB program funds thus far expended. The series figure in 1978 is 61.7 percent.

The average of 1977 and 1978 for the major producers is 65 percent,* considerably lower than the average of 90 percent and more for the 1973-1976 series and program budgets.

Clearly, the producers to gain in these developments are those at the smaller stations, which received 13.5 percent of the grants over the two years, and "independent" producers, which received 21.7 percent of the total. For smaller stations (which includes several stations that are as large as the so-called Big Five), a total of 92 grants were made. Independents received 53 grants, while the Big Five, CTW and FCI totalled 107.

The average size of grants indicates that while both smaller stations and independents received increasingly larger grants, independents in 1978 have exceeded even the large producing stations in the size of average grants. This is due to the fact that piloting and R&D, which really only began in 1976 in earnest, was coming to fruition by 1978 in the form of series funding.

Another major factor was the increase in pilot and R&D grants during the two-year period received by independent producers. In this area the CPB policy has changed. In absolute number, size of grants, and percentages, independent producers have become the group to which CPB has vested most of its plans for the future development of new programs.

Affecting the averages for both kinds of station producers is the large number of single program and acquistions. In fact, for smaller stations, the acquisition remains the primary method of gaining access to the national schedule.

It is clear from these data that the program environment in 1977-78 is considerably more competitive for station production centers than it ever has been, at least as far as CPB is concerned. The CPB shift to independent producers in this period can be seen as a *cause,* but to many observers CPB funding patterns must be seen more as an effect of the overall funding process, the increasingly entrepreneurial nature of the business, and the increased pressure and attention of a host of independent producers who started at vastly different places within the industry.

It seems unlikely that CPB made the policy changes it did in 1974-1976 that enabled greater independent entree to funds purely to support independent production. Nor does it seem that the Corporation's main interest was to undercut the station production centers.

Instead, the theme which must underline much of the CPB policy during this period is an increasing desire on the part of the Board, and the resulting implementation by staff, to get more involved in specific program schedule. This goal can only partially be traced to the Board changes wrought by the Nixon activities in 1972-73.

Added to that must be the intangible factor of professional and personal competition between CPB and PBS for leadership in the system and control over program decisions.

Reaction to the CPB role in program development has not been favorable from any of the groups of producers under study here. The large production centers want very much to return to previous policy—not only to reverse the trend to go to other producers, but to reinstate the almost automatic "block" grants that would reduce the necessity for them to prove to CPB that a particular program should be funded for development, pilot, series, acquisition, or whatever.

The smaller stations have been less vocal, but have, through PBS and in other forms, criticized CPB not only for interfering with program development, but with having a lousy record of bringing programs to the air. While it's impossible to evaluate the programs funded for R&D and piloting during the past two years, earlier efforts have

*This figure includes one grant listed as "other" on Table F.

not been well received, to a large degree because many of these programs were so-called "target audience" efforts which did not do well in ratings.

Independent producers have been critical because CPB had not, until recently, devoted much real programming money outside the stations, nor had the Corporation designed formats which could be programmed by independents. Recent piloting and R&D activities and the creation of the Revolving Documentary Fund will calm many critics, at least those who were beneficiaries of the CPB programs.

Except for a few scattered experimental projects, early support for independent producers at CPB was demonstrated primarily by indirect programs like seminars, residencies, and other activities designed to bring independent filmmakers and videomakers into direct contact with PTV industry personnel. Many of these programs were developed in cooperation with the NEA, but were initiated within the CPB staff.

As indicated in earlier sections, a number of CPB-funded programs through stations served to package independent acquisitions, and in other cases to finance new work. Yet, as the data shows, an overwhelming amount of the programming funds, which represented the biggest section of the TV Activities Department budget, went to the large production centers. In fact, CPB never had any particular policy against independents, as recalled by Don Quayle, one of the original CPB executives and a Vice President until last year:

> "...There was no conscious decision, it was an evolutionary thing. ... There was certainly no stated policy against independents.... But it was in the program committee of the Board, as we brought in proposals, that the sort of producers' kind of reaffirmation statement was made.
>
> "I remember, for example, that it was discussed when a member of the program committee raised a question about one of the first TVTV productions (in 1973).... We had staff authority over individual programs ... but a committee member raised a question: was it done in association with a station? No, but we don't require that — We do fund individuals and independent producers. So it got discussed, reaffirmed, restated, although no formal public statement was issued.."

Just which independents qualified to receive support, of course, is the most elusive policy to identify. While pressures from the smaller individual independents increased during the period of 1975-77, other dynamics within the industry brought new groups of "independents" into being and led CPB to reach out on its own accord.

**Departures from the stations**

One result of the entire entrepreneurial orientation of the system has been the departure of experienced producers who have been nurtured and trained by public television stations, but who are now attempting to develop their program ideas outside the stations themselves.

Why have such producers as Michael Ambrosino and Christopher Sarsen of WGBH, David Prowitt of WNET, Dick Moore of NET and KQED, chosen to withdraw from the station production umbrella and take their chances as independents?

The reasons vary in every case, but a number of trends have emerged:

(1) The overhead at stations has risen to such a point that producers feel the costs of production have exceeded the limits of available funding.

(2) As stations have moved into contract relationships with producers, signed union contracts, and begun to amortize various institutional and facilities costs into production grants, the factors which had previously made working at a station seem attractive were beginning to fade.

(3) Producers increasingly want artistic, editorial, planning and economic control over all aspects of production.

(4) The principal advantages of a station — their willingness to carry producers between productions and during development periods, and their knowledge of the complete PTV funding and distribution system — are skills and capabilities which the more experienced PTV producers feel able to assume themselves.

(5) Some funding agencies became more willing to fund development stages for new projects, thus providing the opportunity to test the waters for certain producers with track-records.

(6) One producer who had grown up in public television and has been operating independently for the last five years is David Prowitt. Prowitt had been with NET and stayed at WNET for a number of years. While he strongly criticizes the destruction of NET by Carnegie I and subsequent decisions by the Ford Foundation, Prowitt has been a beneficiary of the new entrepreneurial PTV environment. Producing both science and arts programming, he has generally raised his own money from underwriters and then brought the shows to a number of stations for presenting within the system.

Describing himself as "one of those people who saw public television as a mission," Prowitt feels he had no choice but to become independent of a station. For one thing, the station nearly doubles the cost of production with addition of overhead. "They have facilities to keep occupied. Their costs are higher. The facilities are not state-of-the-art. My job is quality, not maintaining those facilities," says Prowitt.

Thus, with a core staff of 12 operating in Washington, D.C. (in the same suite of offices as WETA), Prowitt approaches the same funders as the stations do, going head-to-head in certain program fields.

Some of Prowitt's critics suggest that the split between him and WNET was due as much to their dissatisfaction with him as Prowitt's complaints about the station. And yet, even his critics at stations find it increasingly difficult to argue with his assertions that "we've found the system insupportable to work in."

Once the programming has been developed, Prowitt does develop relationships with stations, although he indicates that this is as much a matter of experience as choice.

A number of PTV producers have chosen to go the independent route more recently than Prowitt. Michael Ambrosino, the WGBH producer who created *Nova,* left the station in March, 1976 to develop a new series, *The People.** There were three reasons: first, Ambrosino wanted a leave of absence from all other work in order to develop the concept of his anthropology/archeology series. No such policy existed at WGBH, who could not afford to underwrite these costs as they had done for *Nova* several years earlier. Second, the station's union contract restricted employment of freelance film personnel and the types of work and rules under which they could work. Third, Ambrosino wanted control of publicity materials, as well as study guides and other print, an policy which WGBH would not support.

Development for the new series was funded by the Humanities Endowment, as well as from Ambrosino's pocket. Only part of the full series funding has been raised. "As I look at the success or lack of it in *The People,* I have to constantly ask myself whether the WGBH fund-raising, which would be part of the 28 to 58 percent overhead, would have raised the money for me by now. Even though they let me use their files and I'm a pretty good fundraiser, they are far more knowledgeable and effective at raising money for other people's projects," says Ambrosino.

In the final analysis, Ambrosino may wind up developing some kind of relationship with WGBH—different from when he was a full-time staff producer, and different from what he had envisioned had his series been fully funded.

WQED/Pittsburgh is a station which has made enormous strides within the system in recent years packaging independent producers in special arrangements. "Management often feels that the best people are independent — those who want to work on what they want to work on. They take the gambles," says Vice President Dan Fales, who recently moved from WNET to WQED. The station is in the process, as are many others, of making deals with independents at various stages in their projects.

And yet, this kind of arrangement is not the same as functioning entirely independently. Another producer who has moved from WGBH is Christopher Sarsen, who developed *Zoom* and *Feeling Free.* His new series, *Winslow House* is one of the projects included in the CPB data, having received R&D, and piloting funds. As an independent, Sarsen has suffered the acute problem of cash-flow. Since the project is dependent at this point on one funder, all planning must flow from the cash which CPB issues. Delays at CPB have put Sarsen in a bind, since the studios he has reserved at WGBH will not be available after April. Such practical consequences of entrepreneurship may drive some producers back to stations, which have the economic clout to borrow during periods of grant delays.

Other producers who have had some relationship to stations include Dick Moore, who was at NET and station manager of KQED; Luis Ruiz, formerly of KCET; Topper Carew of WGBH; and many of the producers who worked at NET.

### The government

Another category of non-profit entrepreneur in public television is the educational or research-based facility which succeeds in obtaining programming funds on the basis of non-programming criteria. Many of these grantees have been funded by federal agencies which have mandated certain educational or social goals as a condition for funding. The principal program is the Television for All Children project, funded under the Emergency School Assistance Act and administered by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The U.S. Office of Aging, the Office of Education, National Institutes of Education, and to a lesser degree to the Endowments, have made grants to programs that fit this description.

While many of these projects have been produced by public television stations themselves, the class of independent producer described here differs in that the organization wins the grant by virtue of its research, testing, and/or evaluation capabilities. In some cases the programs themselves are sub-contracted to other companies which have production experience. Programming from these projects are offered to stations—both public and commercial—at minimal costs. Questions of content interference by funders, as well as conflict of interest in the awarding of certain of the grants, have raised widespread criticism of the programs.

Very little of CPB's funding has been allocated to this kind of producer, since ESAA and other

*Discussion in depth of Ambrosino's case can be found in Dick Polsky's study of *Nova* for the Commission.

federal agency program support generally covers 100 percent of production costs.

**Hollywood**

In the business of commercial television entertainment "independent" producers, heavily dominated by the six major studios and smaller companies operating under their wings, receive R&D, treatment, script, and piloting money from the three networks. Series are still the mainstay of the industry despite the recent interest in mini-series and made-for-TV movies. Networks do not buy these programs; they pay license fees, usually below the costs for the company that produces them. The profits are made from residuals in reruns, U.S. and international syndication.

The growth of domestic syndication in the past few years has given rise to considerably more new production which is designed to air first off the networks. Such programming never goes through the program development, piloting, and series licensing procedures at the networks. Instead, commitments by stations guarantee a certain level of financing that covers production costs. FCC regulations requiring local stations to reserve a half-hour of prime time (usually the 7:30 to 8:00 slot) for "access" programming, and a few comedy-variety vehicles. Very few local stations produced their own programs for the local market. More ambitious original productions for syndication were launched by Norman Lear's TAT Productions with *Mary Hartman* and its spin-offs, and by Operation Primetime, an MCA-TV-backed scheme to develop mini-series for local station syndication.

Public television stations have been added to those markets targeted by syndicators for some programs, usually through EEN and other buying groups. This kind of involvement by Hollywood producers can be expected to continue, although it will have little effect upon the production of new material for PTV.

Whether Hollywood producers will seek to develop original materials for public television is a more controversial subject within the field.

Public TV with its various funders and decentralized marketplace, offers no quick way of putting a program into production. In addition, a number of factors inhibit the interest of most Hollywood producers in the public TV marketplace:

(1) The low licensing fees involved in much of public TV's programming.

(2) The fact that standard national public television rights involve four airings in three years, rather than two airings in one year, as is the standard commercial licensing arrangement.

(3) The laborious process of fund-raising, and the related fact that public TV so infrequently pays for the initial development of an idea to the proposal stage.

(4) Restrictions on copyright ownership and secondary rights policies. CPB, as well as other federal funders like NEH and HEW, require a 50/50 split in revenues derived from any theatrical release, domestic or international TV syndication, cassette or 16mm sales, and the like, in proportion to the agency funding (usually until the total of the original grant is repaid).

(5) Real or perceived restraints in content by various funding agencies.

(6) A confusion of overall programming strategy within which a producer can develop program concept.

Nonetheless, in 1975 CPB, having hired a former 20th Century Fox executive, began wooing Hollywood producers.

In 1976 one such deal received press attention, and focused a certain amount of criticism upon the Corporation for becoming too "Hollywood-oriented." This was a $20,000 development grant awarded to Norman Lear, producer of "All in the Family" and many other hit shows. The idea was for a series of short stories, and the deal fell through at least partly because another short-story series was almost ready for PBS air at the time.

CPB has had limited success in attracting Hollywood producers into its program production process. Board programming committee chairman Donald Santarelli and staff executive Peter Levathes made a trip in late October to speak with the Caucus for Producers, Writers and Directors, a loosely-knit organization to which most of the top independent TV creators in Hollywood belong. A press account describes the goals of the meeting:

> "I'm out here to tell the creative community, 'Bring us your best,'" Santarelli explained in an interview. "There is no reason why public broadcasting should not have the best that producers, writers and directors can do. Our hallmarks are freedom and diversity. They're far from lived up to because we're still in our adolescence, but the future is all ahead of us."*

"The goal is to expand public television's talent pool in hopes of improving the quality and diversity of its programming," he said. "That pool is now largely separate from commercial television's, the former emphasizing cultural interests, the latter emphasizing entertainment for a mass audience. CPB would like to be a catalyst for merging the two," he said. Such activity, like most

*Los Angeles Times, October 19, 1977: "CPB's Dip in the Talent Pool."

of CPB's R&D and piloting efforts, have yet to yield solid series results. As a result, some PTV are not worried that Hollywood will be willing or able to shift into "quality" public TV production. Others are more concerned. William Osterhaus of KQED:

> "I think that the basic concern that is expressed by big stations that have made big commitments in terms of capital investment, staff expertise and so on, in an effort to allow the system to survive. We're now concerned about whether we will be undercut by other people who have only a passing interest in public broadcasting and whose investment doesn't depend at all, exclusively on public broadcasting the way ours does. . . . You have CPB saying that they can get it done more economically by going outside the system. And without an opportunity to make those cost comparisons, I don't know whether that's true or not. We do know, because Norman Lear will tell us and has told us, as have others who are in that kind of situation, that even though in the early development stages they can do a very cheap thing because they can just use on-hand writers and others to pull something together. They recover their costs, they recover their loss, so to speak, once the project actually goes to production. . . . We discover that whatever costs are involved in doing that are pretty low in comparison to what it would cost to do it by starting up a program development group just on one project at any installation, because they're using the producers, the independent producers offices, they're using their typewriters, their letterhead, the contractor's employees of one sort or another and they are able to, with very small comparative costs, get that program to the point of where it's ready to go into pilot production. Whereas a producer within the system — a producing station — often has to generate all of those people and the office space, and so on, in order to be able to cradle that and get it to the same point."

Beneath the purely self-interested apprehension of managers like Osterhaus lies an understanding of the changing television marketplace. Many believe that new technologies like cassettes, discs, cable and satellite will fragment the television audience like magazines and radio before them. The key to the present financial attraction of commercial television is the ability to deliver huge audiences simultaneously to an advertiser. If other distribution mechanisms enhance the audience of public television and increased funding improves the program mix, underwriters may continue to find public television a consistently good buy, thus attracting more and more commercial producers.

If these producers seem to be willing to spend time and some money to get a foothold in public television, they may well pose a threat not only to smaller independents, but to the larger production centers as well.

If that is the case, substantial growth in production budgets will be necessary to accommodate this new and potent group of producers.

### Station buying mechanisms

The Station Program Cooperative (SPC) and other buying mechanisms devised by PBS and the regional networks are designed primarily to deliver series programming.

The goal is a reasonably priced volume of regular programming to the stations, and as a result very little innovative or risky programming has been purchased. The only independent producers which have sucessfully developed and marketed programs through the SPC are the "independent production centers" described earlier in this paper. Indeed, few small-scale independents or Hollywood-type commercial producers have even submitted proposals. For one thing, the SPC has refused to buy documentary packages, even from the largest and most experienced stations in the system (except for *Bill Moyers' Journal).* And, until recently, single program offerings were not successful in the SPC.

With limited resources the stations seem unwilling at this point to commit to any program unless they have seen what it will look like. If a series can receive funding for a season, or at least a pilot, then SPC participation seems much more likely.

A number of the former station producers whose series are in development seem prepared to offer their programs for partial funding in the SPC. This may be possible for a producer like Michael Ambrosino or John Korty, a commercial producer with several major awards for "quality" dramatic specials. It seems less likely for producers with less impressive track records.

Without increased funding, it is almost impossible to determine whether stations will ever buy programs which are not offered by another station. The way the SPC is set up, major program suppliers like WNET also swing enormous weight in the marketplace. They are, in effect, buyers and sellers, thus guaranteeing a substantial share of the SPC business every year. In concert, the major producers can trade off votes and lock up virtually all major production funds, raising serious anti-trust and anti-competitive questions.

Even with greater funds, it appears that the dynamics of the SPC are such that most of the money will go to support familiar producers, or to re-fund projects which have been financed elsewhere in their first season. The SPC becomes the final arbiter of the PBS national schedule.

For small-scale independents, then, the best hope for support from an SPC-type funding mechanism would be an ongoing series format offered by some producing entity which the stations trust or have experience with.

An excellent example of an attempt to do just that is the forthcoming series *Screening Room*, produced by KQED in San Francisco. The idea was developed by staff producer Martha Glassing, who had attended the CPB/NEA-funded "Arden House" seminar, which features independent films and intensive discussion by participants. *Screening Room* is proposed as a 13-week series of 90-minute programs that would feature prominent guests and a talk-show host discussing a variety of independent films which they and the audience would watch together. The program is being produced by Arthur Ginsberg, an organizer of the Bay Area Video Coalition and a pioneer video artist whose Video Free America was one of the Bay Area's first groups. If the acquisition-and-talk-show model is successful in attracting SPC and underwriting funds, Ginsberg would like to commission new works for a format called *Paperback TV.*

The advantage of including SPC funding in the development plans of any new program of this type is the participation and support of the stations, PBS and the entire system. While such support has proven to be difficult to achieve without substantial underwriting from the government or foundations, it could mean a degree of trust for independents which is still lacking.

Whether stations will ever trust anybody but other stations is difficult to predict. But one thing is for sure: the SPC will seldom, under any conceivable structure, finance single programs randomly offered by independents with whom the stations have never done business. If such offerings are not substantially underwritten in the first place, cost alone would be an inhibiting factor at this point. With increased station revenues in the SPC, it is unlikely that they would opt for single program buys over series formats.

---

# The Independent Producer: Issues and Opportunities

The preceding chapters have sketched the current state of affairs in the public TV industry regarding the growing field of independent production. We can see that while the overall percentage of PBS airtime for all independents is nearly one-third, the bulk of that is for children's programs produced at major independent centers and financed with federal funds. We have learned that the small-scale independent, through a variety of mechanisms—primarily the acquisition of work financed outside the PTV system — has gained a relatively small share of the airtime of PBS.

We have also learned that the availability of development funds has spurred some categories of independents to develop projects outside the station umbrella, and have succeeded in capturing a majority of CPB's funds for such purposes.

Finally, specific projects established as a result of pressure by independents can be added to those which have grown from station or production center models to illustrate that independents have a better chance of increasing their share of programming time and money when the entire process is planned with their unique situation in mind.

Virtually any recommendation which can be made regarding independents and public TV rests on two assumptions:

(1) The contributions that producers working outside institutional constraints can make are tremendously important, and add immeasurably to the service that public television can offer to the public. Such contributions, however, also demand special treatment and create special problems for broadcasters.

(2) In order to significantly increase programming for independents, new money must be found. Once that money is guaranteed, the focus becomes one of how to best institutionalize the funding and decision-making to balance the particular challenges that independents raise.

### Programming is *the issue*

The first of these two issues is explored in Section I. The bias of this paper is obvious, but it bears repeating. *I have not found a single person during the research of this paper who does not agree with the premise that public television must find better ways to utilize the talents of independent producers.* The phrase "independent" is, in some ways, a silly one. We

are talking about an industry which is centered in creativity. The parallels are manifest—newspaper and magazine journalism, book publishing, the university, the art market, scientific research. While none is precisely like broadcasting, each is founded upon the creative spark of an individual.

And in each of those parallel institutions, there is the institutional dynamic that places more and more authority and control into the hands of administrative executives at the expense of the individual. Here is an example of how it works in the university:

> "There are implications for us all in the suggested intention of the Yale faculty to reclaim the power and authority it has recently lost to its own administrators. The suggestion that administrative servants have become masters helps us to put the priorities correctly.
>
> "Any first-rate college or university must put teaching and research at the center. Administrators exist to insure that the center is held by professors, who bear the burden of originality, and by students, who ask anew the fundamental, troublesome questions disconcerting to those professors. Administrators are indeed servants but keeping good servants is difficult these days."*

This author goes on to describe the external pressures which militate against the creator-oriented administrator and towards being an institution-maintainer.

Public television has, as Michael Ambrosino puts it, "had two purposes over the last 25 years. One was the development of programs, similar to the independent producers. The second was the development of the institution called public television. While they had to satisfy a programming urge, they also had to spend a lot of time in real estate, union negotiations, fund-raising—just to make sure the institution survived. That's a huge psychic bundle which the independent doesn't carry with him."

And yet, *it is the program that is the heart of the institution*, whether or not the program-maker constitutes the critical center of the process to create those programs.

### How much "independent programming?"

Everyone in the industry and most of those on the edge of it agree that additional funding is necessary to improve programming of any sort. Indeed, the creation of the Commission is premised upon this assumption. Furthermore, it is likely that the bulk of this increased funding will come from some sort of federal source, probably funnelled through a national agency like the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. These issues are subjects for great debate within the Commission, and we cannot resolve them here.

In order to determine the magnitude of financial commitment we are discussing, we must examine the target for programming that a system might establish, and set some reasonable goal in terms of independent production.

Commission staff-generated estimates* envision a program schedule that would distribute 10.5 hours per day of original material, or 3,832 hours annually. This can be compared to 1,819 for FY 1976, or about five hours per day.

By doubling the program output, we could mechanically double the percentage contribution of the various kinds of producers, but this assumes the forces which have given us the present-day shares will continue.

If we were to say that the current 30 percent of the PBS schedule for "independents" should increase to 50 percent, we would be talking about 1,912 hours, or more than the total schedule today. To keep it at its present third would mean almost 1,300 hours of programming. This is compared to the present 544 hours. Ignoring the important matter of what kind of independent we are talking about for a moment, at a minimum we are saying that to maintain the current market share for independents will require more than doubling the number of hours of output. It would require even greater increases in funding, since much of the current production delivered by "independents" is provided by agencies which will be unlikely to continue their current level of support indefinitely.

The following programs could be produced within that total of 1,300 hours: 52 hour specials, 52 half-hour documentaries, 52 hour documentaries, ten six-part hour mini-series, ten 13-week half-hour series, and two daily series. Using average cost figures generated by Commission staff, this kind of programming would require an investment of $142 million.

An operation which represents an expenditure of this magnitude cannot be left to enlightened whim, which is the way many independent producers feel they are currently treated.

### Institutionalizing "independent"

What are the methods by which independents could become a more regular part of the system, as greater amounts of funding become available?

(1) All funding for independents to be funnelled through stations or existing production centers, whether the money is used for acquisitions, specific program formats designed for independent work, "experimental centers," or any other technique of disbursement/contract with the actual producer.

---

*"Scholars' 'Servants'" by Prosser Gifford, Dean of Faculty at Amherst College, *New York Times*, January 26, 1978.

(2) All funding for independents be made available through the national funding mechanism directly, whether it is CPB in its current or an amended form, or a newly-devised national program production entity.

(3) Funding for independents is available in a variety of ways, mixing entry at major production centers, smaller stations, the existing independent production centers, new independent production centers, and the national program funding agency itself (CPB or otherwise).

The first operation is strongly favored by the existing station production centers and many within the system. As we have discussed earlier, the access procedures for PBS' national interconnection continue to be biased towards the local station. This is a station-based industry, and has become more so since Carnegie I. The political power that exists in the system focuses on Congressmen who are strongly influenced by the local broadcaster, public as well as commercial.

Sam Holt puts this argument most persuasively:

> "If it's procedural failure, new bodies or new procedures could shake down the system to where the independent gets an even or fair shake. But to say that it is somehow endemic in the whole structure of public television and you have to change it may put you in the position where somebody draws this bloody quota — 5 percent, 10 percent ... then the next subdivision is for women, and then to Blacks and then to others. Or it has to be like the NEA grants, no more than a certain percent can go to certain states....
>
> "I believe that your best bet is to try to deal with these procedures and try to minimize the formal inclusion of structural changes. As the system begins to have more money, and particularly as more stations begin to have more money, the independent producer is going to find that the biggest benefit he's got is basically what we thought we were doing at the beginning. That is, the multiple points of access to people with money.... Literally, most of the station people would say that if they had enough money, they would take care of the independents, because they's like to use them. ... I think Jay Iselin, for political and programmatic reasons, would like to hire a bunch of these people, and if they're really good, get himself some programs out of it."

**The Funding of Public Broadcasting*, by Rick Beatty, February, 1978.

Opposing this point of view are many producers, independent and otherwise, who view the local stations as the least appealing institution in which to lodge responsibility for national programming. Jack Willis, who worked at NET and WNET before leaving the industry to work independently, testified at the January Commission hearing:

> "How to recapture the dream? I have a number of very specific related proposals that I'd like to suggest. First, for national programming. Take it away from the local stations. As soon as the local stations get involved in national programming, they begin fighting for the bucks. They get delusions of grandeur, and they forget their responsibilities to the local community. When Channel 13 in New York absorbed the national programming functions of WNET, they set up an elaborate apparatus to go after the funding. It cut its local programming budget from $3 million to almost nothing. Why? Because it thought is was easier to raise money off of national programming, and that local news would upset its board members, etc. In the stations where there are inefficient operations, high overhead, lack of professional talent, their need is to raise money with safe programming. Their susceptibility to pressure, their lack of understanding of the creative process — are the worst choices to produce national programming.
>
> "Second, create two or three national programming centers — one in New York, maybe one in Los Angeles, certainly one in the South or Mid-West. They'd be staffed by professional programmers. They'd be given long-term block grants. They should be charged with turning out so many hours of program a year, which is part of the original Ford idea. At least half their programming should be in what is called public affairs, which was also part of the Ford idea. A certain percentage should be what is called minority programs, and a certain percentage of each year's budget sould be set aside for free-lancers. The programs would then be given free to the stations, not the cooperatives that now exist. The production centers could also farm the program out to local stations, and make block grants to other institutions capable of producing programs."

Willis' suggestion is, of course, based on the NET model and bears striking resemblance to the recommendation of the first Carnegie Commission report — the establishment of national production centers whose only job would be the creation of programming. The notion was killed, largely by the Ford Foundation, whose economic clout backed the expansion of the five station production centers and CTW into the network of producing agencies within the licensee-based system. This policy was supported by CPB.

Willis' conception of the national production centers would also require independents to gain access to funds through those agencies. The principal distinction between the two plans, insofar as independent producers are concerned, is the question of whether such production centers should be housed within licensee organizations.

It seems that politically, in 1978 at any rate, the serious discussion of removing production responsibility from licensees is virtually taboo. It bears examination, but it's safe to say that few powerful adherents exist to push this cause. Were Carnegie to back the idea as it did in the first Commission report, substantial politicking would be necessary.

Option #2 would propose one or more separate centers especially for independents, with direct access to a source of funds and distribution for its programming, regardless of how other production centers were established. A recent article* on the subject summarizes the argument, which stems from a discussion of establishing various special interest production centers for women, minorities, etc.

> "Independents, while flattered to be included as a group worthy of its own production center, are quick to point out that as media specialists one of their important functions is to serve as a bridge between all such special interest groups and the public at large. Since the producer must be the "critical filter" in the process, they argue, a single production center serving as an umbrella organization for independent producers would be preferable. Such a National Independent Program Center (NIPC) could operate efficiently and inexpensively since it would not need to maintain a production capability of its own but would function merely as a conduit for funding independent projects. A peer review panel would select program ideas and contractors and could make certain that an adequate number of minority and special interest programs were funded. Because of the minimal cost of such a center, proponents maintain that a number of NIPC-type centers could be established in various parts of the country.
>
> "Once again, the mechanism by which NIPC programs would get aired becomes a significant problem. Would licensees accept the idea of set-aside time period for such programs? If so, which time period? Would the cost of funding programming be justified if it were forced to air in other than prime-time?"

Even though many of these problems raised by the concept of an independent production center will remain in any system which is devised, the most pertinent question remains the political one: if an NET, backed heavily by various institutions, could not survive as a quasi-independent production center, how would "independent producers" manage to muster the political clout to stay in the ballgame? What are the real opinions of the stations and key players in the system regarding the establishment of some kind of national center devoted to fostering independent production? What functions could it perform effectively, and which ones would put it at odds with other production centers.

These questions are somewhat rhetorical, and the answers suggest a different solution, one I have called Option #3. This option envisions a mixed funding situation continuing in the future, even if a substantial increase in funding is possible. It seems that the goals of corporations and federal agencies to fund public television programming will not disappear, nor will the funding, unless Congress explicity prohibits this from occurring — a suggestion which has been strongly urged by some independents and labor leaders. In any event, the percentage may decrease, even as absolute dollar amounts may rise.

What a massive influx of new money will change is the relative power of major players. The producing centers with the existing track records are making a strong pitch for a return to the "block grant" concept of institutional underwriting. This would, at least to some degree, diminish the desperation with which they must seek specific program grants.

Substantial new money will also change the starvation-mentality arguments which govern most debates about the role of independents in the system. At present, nobody has to put his money where his mouth is because there is little money.

What incentive would any production center — in a station or outside — have to develop programming that utilizes "independent" talent?

*"The Independent Producer and Public Broadcasting" by Joel A. Levitch. *Public Telecommunications Review*, November/December, 1977.

At present the incentive is scarcity — snaring a professional who is willing to work on a given project before moving on is effective use of scarce resources. Is there not a natural tendency for the production center not only to use internal staff, but to develop projects built around that staff? Is it not as natural for such a center to seek new talent to build the staff permanently, rather than to seek specialized ways to format independently-produced material? Is there any logic to the prediction that these production centers will "take care of" independents, as Sam Holt suggests?

One type of "incentive" would be to require as a condition for award of the block grants to any production center that half of the program dollars go to outside producers. Larry Grossman, PBS President, says he has no problem in setting such goals, as long as they are not imposed by Congress:

> "If I could own the whole system, one of the conditions that I would put on it is that the money that would be used, has to be set along priorities. One priority is that money should be sure to go to minority produced films, minority and women producers who don't have an equal shot with everyone else. Another priority is that it all cannot be given within the system, that even the base grants should be given with the understanding that recipients will utilize outside producers, directors and filmmakers. ... By the time it comes to appropriating the next funds, you can say ... you didn't do well, you don't get it again."

Grossman makes clear, however, that the preferred way of establishing these priorities would be within and among the stations themselves. Whether his optimism that "encouraging new talent and new creativity" is a top priority for other broadcasters remains to be seen.

### A Center for Independent Television

Yet, it is within these councils of the industry that "priorities" are set. Independent producers — even the largest ones — have little input into the development of long-range planning. While the system has not been notably strong on the subject itself, individual filmmaking entrepreneurs are scarcely likely to enter policy-making discussions with representatives of stations, CPB, the major funders, etc.

As a result, important policy changes which affect the possibilities for independent production — for instance, the shift to piloting at CPB — might as well be acts of God as far as independent producers are concerned.

Even more importantly, the entree to such forums by individuals is perceived — and may well be in fact—a conflict of interest for a particular producer whose program will rise and fall on the decision of an executive at a station or other PTV institution.

What independents need most, perhaps, besides money is an advocate to represent the *vision* of independent work — to represent them as a class of producers rather than as individual complainants. While certainly the ombudsman function would be part of this, as would the function of helping to make "the system" more understandable to a wider range of producers, the primary function of such a *Center for Independent Television* would be to help increase the market share of producers working outside other production entities. A principal contribution in this regard would be to research and develop new program formats which can utilize the particular talents of independents. Another would be to assist those production centers who may need consultation on methods of interfacing independents into the expanding number of new program formats which will come into being with the increase of funding.

A Center for Independent Television could also coordinate and rationalize the mix of access points which now exist for independents, and which will probably continue to exist under most proposed rearrangements (except the centralized network model).

This Center would be staffed rather modestly, able to hire on development staff for specific projects. Leadership could be both independent producers who have experience in administration as well as public broadcasters whose past records indicate an understanding and commitment to independent work.

The greatest contribution of this Center would be to act as a legitimatizing agent for the role of independents within the system. We now face the irony that virtually every PTV organization pays lip service to independents, and yet the number of original hours of programs which are financed by the system and aired on PBS remains miniscule today.

The Center could perform certain functions which will probably never be possible by an independent outside the present stations (whose interests are somewhat different): preparation of new format ideas as a priority, intervention into market arenas like the SPC which had previously been closed to independents, the education of independents about the creation of programming for broadcast, arbitration in disputes between various elements of the system and independents, representation in questions of structural changes like the proposed satellite distribution access policy.

This concept, of course, needs study and

refinement. To a certain extent, its future depends substantially on recommendations by the Commission about how funding for the entire system will flow. But if independents are to gain a share of the programming market in public television, they must have a powerful and trustworthy representative to develop program concepts that are effective as broadcast television and designed for the particular talents of people working as independents. Otherwise, the increases will be marginal and the lipservice extensive.

### The challenge of independence

The establishment of this kind of planning and advocacy organization may focus if not resolve certain issues which independent production raises, and which have been discussed throughout this paper. To recapitulate:

(1) *Freedom versus responsibility.* While total independence means owning nothing to public television, it has meant virtually no broadcast time. In order to gain access to that time, producers need money for original production aimed specifically at the home broadcast audience. The pressure for control and responsibility upon the producer increases with the amount of money at issue. In the current system, the station is functionally the editor, the producer someone who must tailor his presentation of facts to the judgments of that editor.

And yet, as the issue of direct access to PBS has gained ground, the legal and policy basis for the station-filtering function has eroded. Is PBS to become the editor? If so, who will do it there? Are stations ready to let the national organization become final arbiter of the program schedule?

Ultimately, no producer can expect to have final authority over material which is produced for a broadcaster and paid for by that organization. The real question then becomes, to whom is he accountable? At present, the system operates so that the producer is accountable to the Boards of Directors of local stations, generally dominated by large business interests, state agencies, or educational institutions.

PBS would only be able to replace this editorial function if it were not a lobbying group for the amalgamation of stations before Congress. As long as the PBS President sits alongside the CPB President in seeking funds, his ability to remain independent in programming decisions is questionable.

But the editorial responsibility question goes beyond PBS' role, a subject of great debate in the industry. It has to do with an elusive quality called *trust*. There is a vague assumption that if an independent producer goes through a station — any station — that he or she automatically gains the trust of the rest of the system. The fact is that the major producing stations are quite arrogant about the rest of the system, perhaps even more so than the old NET. They may no more trust a station in the middle of nowhere than they do a total stranger. Indeed, the case of independent documentarian Don Widener, who went through KCET, a major producing station, illustrates just how weak the question of trust is even at the pinnacle of the industry.

There will be no hope for any independent producer if they all must rely upon two or three particular stations who trust each other. Each individual must, in the final analysis, develop a track record and the trust which flows from it by him or herself.

(2) *Criteria for selection.* This paper has treated independent producers as creative individuals within the economic marketplace. And yet, by the very nature of the work some producers are better at what they do than others. A continuing complaint by broadcasters centers on what they call the "unprofessionalism" of many independents. These broadcasters claim that the ones you hear from the most are those with the least talent, and that the "good" ones are busy making deals all over the place.

These judgments, to a certain extent, are based on evaluations of independent work which was not *designed* with broadcasting in mind, nor was most independent work financed by broadcasters. And yet there are enormous expectations, whether they be format, length, point of view, language, fairness and objectivity — you name it.

A substantial number of such broadcaster complaints would be resolved by the creation of a market for independent work which is specifically tailored to merge the creative energies of producers and the demands of delivering their work to the audience who is used to viewing along certain patterns.

Yet, there is no doubt that some producers are better than others. Add money to the current structure, and pressures will only increase for the selection process to guarantee that all parties concerned are satisfied — a tough goal to reach.

Two dominant modes of selection have been used by various programs established to use the work of a wide number of producers.

(1) *The grant model.* Pioneered by the National Endowment for the Arts, this model is premised upon a competition for a certain number of grant awards which are then made to the producers. The assumption is that these producers are individual artists (or, in the case of journalists, at least free agents) whose work should be evaluated by others who understand the field. Thus, a system of peer review for grant selection evolved.

(2) *The executive producer model.* Programs like *Visions* and *Great American Dream Machine* work on the model of a newspaper, theatre company of the professional hierarchy. Ultimate authority is vested in the executive producer, who must de-

fend choices to management and the audience, if need be. Thus, great power is vested in the executive producer, who then delegates it to unit producers and line producers as he or she sees fit. While extensive search efforts may be launched to uncover talent, there is a notion of enlightened despotism involved in this system.

The peer-review/grant procedure has several advantages. First, it gives the appearance, if not the substance of fairness. While those involved try to eliminate favoritism and bias, it is difficult to engineer a system based on the judgments of those working in the field without such factors coming into play. Nonetheless, peer review helps to build the professional status of active members of the field, thus strengthening the talent pool and reinforcing other people's judgment about who is competent to judge. Finally, the system has the clarity of competition. Such procedures generally operate under printed guidelines, deadlines, and standards of ethics. Once the competition is finished, it's finished.

This can also be seen as a disadvantage in a broadcast mode, since the competent executive producer may not choose to support the work of a producer at one point, but may want to help him or her get to the point of succeeding at a later date. Programs are frequently a long development process. The peer-group method tends to force producers to prepare their ideas according to an arbitrary deadline. The process is often somewhat bureaucratic and impersonal, as well. Nevertheless, most independents prefer the peer-review process because it has clear groundrules. The ambiguity of pleasing a benevolent dictator is removed. Theoretically, your good idea can be considered along with those of more experienced producers than yourself. And, perhaps most importantly, once you have the grant, you are most likely to retain editorial and artistic control over your product.

The executive producer model also has pros and cons. The continuity of production expertise is frequently cited as a principal advantage, to be balanced by attendant bias which may skew choices to old friends, preferred style, etc. And yet, broadcasters cite time and time again that the "look" of a program is determined by just those kinds of biases. An executive producer must balance his or her view of how a program should evolve with the independent contributions of the producers. Another advantage of this method is the insulation that such a producer can provide for a person working outside the system. A granting agency is unlikely to do so, particularly if it is removed from the kind of formatting for broadcast which the executive producer is engaged in. The executive producer embodies the ultimate in accountability, as well, for while people may not agree with the decision, they will certainly know who is responsible for it. With the peer-group granting procedure, responsibility, and therefore accountability, is spread among several people, usually people who are unconnected with the grant-making institution.

In the final analysis, the executive producer system depends upon the talent of the individual in charge and the organization that backs him or her up. Thus, the element of trust again enters the picture.

Perhaps the best notion of how to select among many willing applicants is some merger of the two ideas, to meet the necessities of fairness as well as to obtain the continuity of formatting. This is easier with some types of programs than others—documentaries, for instance, offered the TV Lab at Channel 13 an opportunity to use an executive producer and a system of peer review to process some 880 proposals. Perhaps the base of university drama schools could help a unit like *Visions* find new talent, new scripts in the dramatic field.

But it is in the new and innovative formats—*Great American Dream Machine* comes to mind—where the tension would perhaps be greatest between the demands of molding a broadcast concept with the processes of democratic selection.

(3) *Local and regional access.* Little has been said about the growth of local programming in the PTV system, and the potential for independent involvement. It seems clear that national production will continue to flow to major cities.

At the present time no incentives exist within the system to generate quality local programming. It costs almost as much as national shows, and very little funding is available. With general increasing of funding, perhaps this will change. And yet, there will always be the temptation for many stations to try for the national audience, where the prestige may exist.

Frequently these local stations need the talent an independent can offer. Says Burnill Clark of KCTS/Seattle: "Independents can do things I can't produce. My resources are too limited, and they extend our ability to service our viewers." Smaller stations like his can offer lower overhead than the national centers, and perhaps a chance for mutual growth.

While relatively few stations contribute to the national schedule, there is reason to believe that the development of regional program exchange and the creation of programming specifically aimed at a regional audience will increase. The coordinating body for many such efforts may logically fall to the regional networks, which have largely served as group buyers, but are exerting a leadership role in the system, particularly over the satellite issue.

Whether local producers and local stations can get together, whether regional networks will welcome independents are matters of conjecture.

But if the principles underlying independent production have any validity, then they should apply to local, regional and national programming.

(4) *Distribution.* Up to this point we have been discussing the creation of funding of programming for the national PBS interconnection, as if such a creature were static, were remaining the same during the next decade. Clearly, new technologies like the satellite, videocassette and disc, and cable TV will ultimately change the environment in which PBS will operate.

With the addition of funds designed to increase production for PBS by independents, a kind of funnel effect will doubtlessly occur, a variation of Parkinson's Law. For, if the "best" of emerging independent production is drawn to and supported by public television, will not several new generations of talent quickly follow? Many have envisioned a kind of hierarchy developing, and in fact this paper implicitly sets one up. A premium has been placed on the establishment of programming designed for our current conception of the broadcast audience, encompassing production values, time-length and format restrictions, various standards imposed by broadcasters, and the like.

With alternative methods of distribution of program materials, it may be quite possible to come closer to reaching potential audiences directly with very different kinds of programming. The National Federation of Local Cable Programmers, for instance, is currently involved in constructing a satellite exchange project which would carry local cable TV access programming from one community to another.

Just as networks of special interest among broadcast stations will be possible with satellite interconnection, so too will other communities of interest develop outside the framework of PTV institutions. Because public tax money has been used to construct the world's most extensive satellite ground network, increased pressure for the use of that system is inevitable. Old arguments of scarcity will be meaningless, at least for a while.

The newly forged compromise within the public TV industry regarding access to the additional satellite transponder space indicates that access will become a major issue. That space may provide a safety valve for the dominant PBS service — a place to unload unwanted producers, much the same way that cable television industry officials unloaded access into the least desirable channels. Or it may become a way of bypassing a stodgy bureaucracy which is incapable of delivering enough good programming to fill the hour-hungry stations' air.

One very likely result is to enable the independent producer *qua* entrepreneur to develop multiple markets for a particular program — particularly a special presentation. This will attract new entrepreneurs, just as the current entrepreneurial grant arrangement attracted new producers into PTV.

An area which will continue to vex independent producers who wish to remain as entrepreneurs is the complicated problem of copyrights, subsidiary rights, and license fees. If national PBS insists on getting four plays in three years, many producers may bypass them entirely and market direct to stations. Similarly, if federal agencies loosen their hold on copyright ownership, more producers will emerge.

(5) *Conclusion.* The goals of independent producers can continue to be somewhat at odds with the public television establishment as it evolves during the next decade; or, as program production increases throughout the entire system, independent producers can become partners in this expansion. Presumably, all parties concerned would prefer the latter. The difficulty becomes in defining how such change can occur.

This paper has attempted to present the history of independent television production to date primarily in economic terms, with analysis that treats the program production process as a single system.

Underlying this approach, however, is a conviction that the structural changes are desirable for *content* reasons — better programs, more points of view, a healthier and more open way to reach the hearts and minds of American viewers.

British scholar and writer Raymond Williams, in examining television in America and Britain, offers a conclusion that illuminates this point: "For many years yet, central programming and networking authorities are going to continue. They must become or continue as public authorities, expressing the concept of the airwaves as public property. But it would be wise to look again at the question which is still unresolved from the earliest days of broadcasting: the relation between transmission and production. In all current systems too few people are making the primary decisions about production. The real need is for more independent production companies, which would be given publicly protected contracts with the programming and networking authorities. It would not be an easy system to devise and administer, but it is the only creative social course to take between the existing monopolies and their new challengers."*

*From *Television: Technology and Cultural Reform*, by Raymond Williams (New York, Schocken Books, 1974) p. 148-9.

**Challenge for Change**
National Film Board
Montreal, Canada

**Colin Young**
National Film School
England

**John Siceloff**
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

**Fred Silverman**
Fort Lee, New Jersey

**Harry Skornia**
Sun City, Florida

**Ag Information**
University of Idaho
Moscow, Idaho

**El Paso Public Library**
El Paso, Texas

**Jesus Trevino**
Los Angeles, California

**Art Department**
ABC
San Francisco, California

**Episcopal Diocese of Alaska**
Fairbanks, Alaska

**Ladies Home Video**
Boulder, Colorado

**Larry Hall**
Committee to Save KQED
Oakland, California

**Maritime Institute of Technology**
Linthicum Heights, Maryland

**Ambulatory Care Center**
Dayton, Ohio

**Steve Christiansen**
Woodland Video
Eugene, Oregon

## They read TELEVISIONS...

## ...So should you.

## SUBSCRIBE

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

P.O. Box 21068, Washington, D.C. 20009

_____ Individual subscription/prepaid ($10/per year)
_____ Individual subscription/billed ($15/per year)
_____ Institutional subscription ($15/per year)

**TELEVISIONS**
A Publication of
Washington Community
Video Center, Inc.
P.O. Box 21068
Washington, D.C. 20009

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. Postage Paid
Washington, D.C. 20009
PERMIT NO. 45242