The National Library of Television

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THIS age, known to some as atomic, to others as electronic, and to still others as technological, is made possible and meaningful only through its communications. Television is acknowledged as the most comprehensive and pervasive medium of communications the world has ever known. There is no aspect of human experience that has not been captured by its cameras and fed to its screens at some time and in some place in the world during the 20 years of the existence of television as a potent force for the dissemination of entertainment, information, education, and (occasionally) inspiration.

To gather this monumental output—more than 18,000 hours each year on the three United States television networks alone—and to organize it into a meaningful, useful collection has been a stated objective of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Foundation for 14 years. Progress has been made. Agreements have been signed with three major universities to house branches of the National Library of Television, which will be associated with their burgeoning programs in the communications arts—in Los Angeles, the University of California at Los Angeles; in New York, New York University; and in Washington, The American University. At the same time, contracts have been negotiated with the three television networks and with the major producing organizations to provide the collection, or at least its major elements. Some of television's most exciting productions, especially from its first days in the midforties, will have to be gleaned from the attics and cellars of its pioneers.

The task of those who will be responsible for developing the television collection is formidable indeed. As one begins to think seriously of criteria for selection, of cataloging, of information retrieval, one comes to understand why, after 50 years, there is still no national archive specifically devoted to the motion pictures in this country. There are, of course, the excellent collections of the Library of Congress, the Museum of Modern Art, and others[1]—

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[1] See the article by Raymond E. Fielding on p. 493–500 of this issue of the *American Archivist.*

but none of them is the kind of working library for professionals and students that is so much needed. We are dedicated, however, to the realization of a three-branch national archive for television in this decade.

As I have already suggested, when one is planning a library of television, one must think of the medium in its many roles. It has replaced the newspaper as the prime source of news and it has supplanted radio and the motion picture theater as the leading creator of documentary programs; hence news and documentary presentations must be integral and significant parts of such a collection. Television presents more entertainment—dramatic, musical, variety—than all other media combined; hence these forms, too, must have their place. Television plays an increasingly significant role in education, both on the directly instructional level for students during school hours and on the more generally educative level for adults in the late afternoon and evening; hence the instructional, educational, and cultural programs must be a vital part of the collection. No medium has ever recorded so much history or so effectively mirrored the events, the diversions, the personalities of our time and of the past two decades as has television; and all of this record, on film and videotape, is potentially and rightfully part of the collection of the National Library of Television. In this article, however, let us concentrate on television and the arts.

Television and the arts may logically be approached from three points of view:

1. Television as an art form; that is, the extent to which the medium itself has engendered new forms and new techniques and has evoked from its creators values and standards of creativity different from those of other media.

2. Television as comprising other arts, such as writing, directing, performing, and scenic and costume design.

3. Television as it represents the other arts, their history, and their contemporary developments: the visual arts, music, literature, the theater, opera, and the dance.

The unique qualities of television, both in its transmission and reception, have enabled it to evolve as a distinct art form. Because its image is electronic, it has a flexibility of imagery that cannot be duplicated by the film camera for motion pictures. In its native form, using the television camera, with its superimpositions of image, its transitions, its wide-ranging capability to use electronic background and to project the subject image in many and varied dimensions, television constitutes, when used artistically, a separate

art form. Though television has borrowed from vaudeville and the musical theater to create variety shows, it has developed the variety program into its own unique art form. Similarly, though the medium is indebted to radio for many of its "talk" shows, such programs as "Today" and "Tonight" are uniquely television in their optimum synthesis of the visual and the auditory; and they are art. These forms rely on, indeed have been created to capitalize on, the size of the television screen and the fact that viewing television is a solitary or familial experience, usually occurring in the privacy of one's home or in similarly familiar surroundings. One of the primary objectives of a television archive, then, is to provide the tools for research into these unique qualities of television so that the forms that are unique to television can be more fully developed. Such research, we believe, will also serve to shed light on possible new forms and new techniques of program presentation.

The arts of writing, directing, performing, and design are employed in all dramatic media. Much of their use in television is indistinguishable from their use in theater and especially in motion picture production. But the intimacy of television, the conditions under which it is viewed, and the relentless probing of the camera's eye, as distinguished from the illusion that can be practiced with the film camera, have encouraged the television artist to create in new ways. Television demands of the performer unusually taxing simplicity and economy of projection. The writing must be sparer and more incisive, the direction more to the point, and the design cleaner and leaner, all because of the confined and thus more concentrated image. The collection of the National Library of Television will enable those who practice these creative and interpretative arts, both professionals and students as they emerge into professionalism, to enhance their arts and to use what may seem to be television's limitations as the artistic opportunities they really are.

In its diversity of programing, television is closely related to the visual arts, drama, music, opera, and the dance. In the Hallmark Hall of Fame, the Play of the Week, and other series written or adapted for television by leading playwrights, both past and contemporary dramas have been widely viewed in this country. England, the western and eastern European countries, and Japan have probably contributed even more than the United States to the permanent "literature" of classic drama. The work and the personalities of painters and sculptors have been recorded in art and historical documentaries by men and women of genius in this dis-

tinguished form of controlled reportage. Music, as interpreted and performed by Leonard Bernstein, as taught in a master class by Pablo Casals, as played and sung by the NBC Opera or the Boston Symphony, has been captured by television and stands as the single greatest resource available to professionals and students alike.

A disturbing aspect of television, however, is its transitory quality. Programs of great importance and impact are all too seldom repeated. Unlike the theater or the motion picture house, whose productions remain on view for periods of time, television's productions are usually here today and gone tomorrow. Because of this transitory quality, the task of gathering, organizing, and making available the great works of television becomes even more urgent and more important. Through the cooperative effort of three great universities, the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Foundation, and the hundreds of television professionals and academicians they have mustered for this task, the National Library of Television will house and, more significant, make available to the professional, the academician, the student, and even the general public, television's rich treasure for study and creative use.