Appraising Public Television Programs: Toward an Interpretive and Comparative Evaluation Model

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Abstract

Public television programs are clearly unique from those produced for commercial broadcast. However, unique appraisal guidelines for evaluating public television programs do not exist for archivists. Critical in developing an appraisal model for such programs is an understanding of the history of public broadcasting in the United States, the politics underlying that history, and the entities responsible for the production of public television programs. Past and current appraisal theories also inform the criteria used in the author's appraisal model for public television programs, the application of which is demonstrated for four different types of public television programs.

Introduction

As an American cultural phenomenon, public broadcasting programming has historically stood in clear distinction to commercial radio and television fare. The sound and style of non-commercial radio and television are quickly identifiable. There is a high-mindedness to public broadcasting that is sometimes criticized as beyond the interest level of the average American. Critics on the right argue that public broadcasting's "liberal bias" is out of step with mainstream political values, that it is "elitist," and that the market, not federal subsidies, should govern its fortunes. On the other side of the political spectrum, critics of public broadcasting say that its current method of corporate underwriting has made it a near-commercial medium and that public broadcasting needs to return to its original mission.[1]

[1] For a conservative critique of public television, see Laurence Jarvik, *PBS: Behind the Screen* (Rocklin, Calif.: Prima Publishing, 1997). In November 1999, Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting

Though individual viewers may at times agree with portions of either critique, millions of them regularly contribute financially to their local stations during seasonal pledge breaks when the normal program schedule is replaced with specials that range from musical fare to financial self-improvement, along with direct appeals for money and the constant din of ringing phones. To these supporters, public broadcasting challenges and informs, it makes a learning experience out of home entertainment, it is a cultural form that changes attitudes and enriches lives.

Public broadcasting is more properly, more technically understood as *public service broadcasting*, whose mission is to take up issues and subjects that commercial broadcasting, because of its market-driven programming process, cannot or will not cover. Starting out in the 1950s as an unwanted step-child of commercial broadcasting, public television has grown into a formidable, if fragmented, industry producing local, regional, and national programs of note.[2] Archivists who work with public television materials see the programs under their care as a special program set within the larger universe of American television programming. They argue that more active measures should be taken to ensure that the widest possible range of public television programming is preserved in archives and made accessible to students of public broadcasting and members of the public broadcasting community. This is, of course, easier said than done.

The Problem

With the special status assigned to public television programs by archivists assumed, and given the thousands of extant hours of public television programs recorded on kinescope film and videotape—media with relatively short lifespans—what appraisal standards should guide archivists of public television program materials? Is each and every public television program worthy of archival acquisition and permanent retention? Once selected, should the archivist take an across-the-board "dub it all" approach to ensure permanent retention? Where will the funding for transfer to a more durable format come from? These questions and others led the author, along with fellow public broadcasting archivist Mary Ide of WGBH/Boston, to devise a research agenda to seek some answers. What follows is a partial presentation of team research

launched a national campaign to reform public broadcasting as a public trust. CIPB is supported by George Soros's Open Society Institute and the Florence & John Schumann Foundation. See "Trust Campaign Launches with Foundation Backing," *Current, The Public Telecommunications Newspaper,* 15 November 1999, Vol. XVIII, No. 21, A8.

[2] Public radio's origins date back to the 1920s with the development of college radio stations, notably University of Wisconsin station WHA. As important as the whole issue of radio programming is, this article necessarily remains focused on television programming.

undertaken in 1995, supported by the Bentley Library Research Fellowship Program for the Study of Modern Archives, and refined in the ensuing years through presentations, discussions with colleagues, and further reading and research.

The immediate product of this research, an interpretive and comparative evaluation model, is presented below. The ultimate aim of the study is to develop a three-tiered national ranking of public television programs, with the first tier being the best and most representative of public television's program record. First-tier programs would ideally be reformatted for permanent retention. The second tier would consist of good and worthy programming to be reformatted as resources become available. The third tier would consist of programs that would remain in their original format but maintained for the life of the medium.

Approach to the Research

We started out with the aim of devising an analytical framework by which we could understand individual public television programs as component parts of a larger body of programs, or an oeuvre, which we could then evaluate comparatively. In this way a ranking of small or large program accessions might be possible. We felt our framework had to be based on a solid comprehension of the public broadcasting industry, its agencies and operations, its internal politics and institutional culture, a critical reading of standard archival appraisal theory, and a consideration of the seminal work done in the appraisal of moving image materials.

A distinction should be made between the particular research approach of each team member. The author was concerned with public broadcasting's national program schedule, while Mary Ide's concern was station specific. I looked at finished programs produced for national broadcast, whereas Ide looked at locally produced programs including program elements. There was, of course, some area of overlap in that many programs produced by WGBH make it to the national PBS schedule.

Public Broadcasting: Definitions and Background

What is public broadcasting, exactly? The term became widely used in the aftermath of the Report of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television,[3] issued in 1967. The Commission, headed by James R. Killian, recognized two

[3] It was originally intended that the commission be a small presidential commission made up of distinguished citizens appointed by President Lyndon Johnson. Johnson however was not inclined to establish another presidential commission. The Carnegie Corporation then stepped in to underwrite a year-long study on how to extend and strengthen educational television in the United States.

aspects to educational television: "(1) instructional television, directed at students in the classroom or otherwise in the general context of formal education, and (2) what we shall call Public Television, which is directed at the general community."[4] For the Commission, public television included "all that is of human interest and importance which is not at the moment appropriate or available for support by advertising, and which is not arranged for formal instruction."[5] The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 established the term as the designation for non-commercial educational television and radio broadcasting in the United States.

Public television channels are those reserved by the Federal Communications Commission to be used by communities, educational institutions, or state and local governments for educational purposes. The original public television channels were set aside in the early 1950s, many of these on ultra high frequency (UHF) channels.[6] Station KUHT/Houston, licensed to the University of Houston, claims to be the first educational television station to go on the air (1953).[7] WQED/Pittsburgh was the first educational station to be licensed to a nonprofit community organization (1954).

The Educational Television Facilities Act of 1962 expanded the number of stations considerably. This act provided funds for up to 50 percent of the cost of new facilities and up to 25 percent of the cost for improving facilities already operating. As of December 31, 1962, there were seventy-nine educational television stations licensed. By 1965 the number had jumped to 106. Today there are 350 public television stations in operation.

The Entities of Public Broadcasting

The cast of characters in American public broadcasting can be confusing to those outside the industry—and to many inside it. The individual public stations form the system's backbone. Some states—Maryland, Vermont, and Alabama for example—have built in-state networks consisting of several stations that carry the same program schedules.

The most visible national institutions of public broadcasting are the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and National Public Radio (NPR). The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967

[4] *Public Television: A Program for Action: The Report and Recommendations of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967), 1.

[5] *Public Television: A Program for Action,* 1. The Commission's initial aim was to include purely instructional broadcasting, i.e., programs designed for classroom viewing in its plan. It decided however to put the issue of school television aside for further study.

[6] Of the 242 original reservations, 162 were UHF (ultra high frequency) channels and 80 were VHF (very high frequency). VHF was the preferred band.

[7] See William Hawes, *Public Television: America's First Station* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 1996).

provided for the creation of the CPB. CPB's role is to receive and disburse government and other funds to create programming. CPB is, strictly speaking, neither an agency nor an establishment of the United States government; it is a publicly chartered corporation. To insulate it from political pressure, the 1967 Act prohibited CPB from operating a network of public broadcasting stations.

Shortly after its inauguration, CPB formed a study group to look into the matter of interconnection. The study group recommended the establishment of a separate entity to serve as station interconnect point and program distributor. This entity was the Public Broadcasting Service. PBS is a membership organization composed of public television stations. Its board of directors consists of station representatives as well as lay members who represent professional or community points of view.

CPB and PBS have had a stormy relationship with each other over the years. In 1972, after what President Richard Nixon saw as anti-administration bias in programs funded by CPB and aired by PBS, the White House sought to take over both entities. The president's staff was initially successful in packing the CPB board of directors with Nixon supporters, but not so with the PBS board. When the pro-Nixon CPB board moved to annihilate PBS's prerogative and supervise programming directly, PBS fought back, reorganizing itself under the leadership of Ralph Rogers of station KERA/Dallas. Rogers successfully negotiated a partnership agreement with CPB board chairman Thomas Curtis, then with James Killian, former chair of the Carnegie Commission, who succeeded Curtis as CPB chairman. The agreement specifically established the size of grants to local stations under different levels of federal funding. More importantly, however, it established a smoother working relationship between the two primary national entities of public broadcasting.

Closely allied to PBS, and actually emerging from it, is the Association of America's Public Television Stations (APTS). Founded in 1980 by public television station managers who wanted to better represent their interests in Washington, APTS lobbies Congress on legislative and regulatory issues of importance to public broadcasters.[8]

National Educational Television (NET), another entity of public broadcasting worth mentioning, preceded both CPB and PBS and was truly a pioneer of noncommercial television programming. NET started in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1952 as the Educational Radio and Television Center (ETRC). The Center's role was to collect noncommercial programming for radio and television and to

[8] A relatively new national entity on the public broadcasting scene is the National Forum for Public Television Senior Executives. The Forum's goal is to change the way station executives communicate and interact with one another on issues affecting all public television licensees. It seeks to create a framework and process that enables public television senior executives to address critical opportunities and make collective decisions when necessary.

distribute or "bicycle" that programming from station to station in the form of audiotape, phonograph recordings, or kinescope film.[9]

In 1959, by this time receiving its funding from the Ford Foundation, the ETRC moved to New York City and changed its name to the National Educational Television and Radio Center. NETRC, soon to become simply National Educational Television or NET, was now directly involved in producing programs for noncommercial broadcast. With the coming of CPB and PBS, however, NET's role was diminished. In 1970 it merged with the New York City public station WNDT, the new entity becoming WNET/Channel 13.[10]

The Culture of Public Broadcasting

The organizational culture of public broadcasting derives from the interests, concerns, and values of broadcast journalists, creative artists, educators, radio and television engineers, corporate managers, and, to some extent, politicians and viewer/subscribers. The cultural tensions that arise from the sometimes disparate perspectives of these participants serve both to impede and promote the realization of the goals of public television. A sense of impoverishment, of having to do things on a shoestring, and of being something less than commercial broadcasting is a common thread running through the telling of the public broadcasting story.[11] Public pleas for financial assistance by means of pledge drives and auctions have become a hallmark of public television.

Public broadcasters who came out of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB) or the Joint Committee for Educational Television (JCET), two trade organizations that long pre-date the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, tend to look at the purpose of public television differently from those whose early experience was with NET or from those who have only known CPB and PBS. While accepting the implications of "public television" as defined by the Carnegie Commission, this group maintains a

[9] With the practical development of videotape in the early 1960s and communications satellite technology in the late 1970s, distribution of PTV programs was simplified considerably. However, in the early years of videotape, the tape itself was frequently reused for new programs. Thus many early public television broadcasts have been lost.

[10] For an in-depth and very readable account of the political, institutional, and cultural history of public broadcasting, see James Day, *The Vanishing Vision: The Inside Story of Public Television* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Other useful histories of public broadcasting are John Witherspoon, Roselle Kovitz, Robert K. Avery and Alan G. Stavitsky, *The History of Public Broadcasting* (Washington, D.C.: Current, The Public Television Newspaper, 2000) and Robert J. Blakely, *To Serve the Public Interest: Educational Broadcasting in the United States* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1979).

[11] Ray Hurlburt, a founder of public television in Alabama, referred to himself as "the damndest scrounger in the state" when it came to begging for used equipment from commercial stations. Quoted from "An Interview with Raymond Hurlburt," Public Broadcasting Oral History Project, March 4, 1981, p. 12, The Papers of Jim Robertson, National Public Broadcasting Archives, University of Maryland Libraries.

concern for truly educational programming strictly defined, charging that too much of an entertainment nature is broadcast.[12]

Within public broadcasting there is also a "localist" and a "centralist" cultural dichotomy. This has been referred to as "a two-party system" wherein the parties clash over long- vs. short-term goals.[13] An outsider can, at times, observe something of a bunker mentality within public broadcasting, especially when appropriations for public broadcasting are being discussed in the United States Senate.

Public Television Programming and Program Production

Knowledge of how public television programs are created in the first place, the politics of public television programming, and the players in programming are important factors in the ultimate evaluation of those programs. In the early days of noncommercial television, programming was a local matter, meaning that programs were produced for the local viewing market. Some stations emerged as producers of programs that other stations wanted to air because of their own limited program offerings. These programs were shot on kinescope film and shared with the stations wanting to air them.

The formation of the National Educational Television and Radio Center set the stage for program production with a national audience in mind. The Ford Foundation played a central role in providing the funds to produce programs for national broadcast. NETRC (later NET) served from the early 1960s to the time of its merger into WNET as a national program production center, producing cultural and public affairs programs to be aired by affiliate stations. Successful examples of these are: *The Public Broadcast Laboratory, The Great American Dream Machine, A Conversation With,* and *Lincoln Center/Stage 5.*

The Ford Foundation, through its Office of Public Broadcasting, was a strong player in public television program planning from 1951 through 1976. Stations would apply directly to the Foundation for funding support for specific proposals. Ford Foundation staff maintained information on stations and made station visits to assist it in making funding decisions.[14]

The National Public Affairs Center for Television (NPACT) was established in 1971 to produce public affairs programming for a national audience. It was NPACT's coverage of the 1972 presidential campaign, decidedly unfavorable

[12] One of the most vociferous of these was John Schwarzwalder of KTCA, St. Paul, Minn. Schwarzwalder railed against "public" television versus "educational" television on an interview program broadcast from St. Paul in public television's infancy. See Schwarzwalder, *ETV in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Dillon Press, 1970). (ETV is the common abbreviation for educational television.)

[13] Frederick Breitenfeld, Jr., "Public Broadcasting: A Two Party System," *Public Telecommunications Review* 4 (March/April 1976): 19–23. The National Forum for Public Television Senior Executives mentioned in footnote 8 is a current response to this ongoing power dichotomy in public broadcasting.

[14] See *Ford Foundation Activities in Noncommercial Broadcasting 1951–1976* (New York: Ford Foundation, [1976]).

to Richard Nixon, that unleashed Nixon's attack on public broadcasting. Though the attack failed, one of its consequences was the acknowledgement by public broadcasters that some public television offerings did not reflect the views and values of the communities served by certain stations. To allay charges of "liberal bias," in 1973, PBS president Hartford Gunn presented a plan for a consensus approach to public television programming.[15] This plan became known as the Station Program Cooperative (SPC). In January 1974 PBS member stations adopted a set of guidelines for the SPC. These guidelines were an attempt to provide for station participation and choice in the selection and financing of national programming.

Although it was initially hailed as a solid and much needed reform, once it was in operation the SPC began to be criticized for selecting shows that were noncontroversial or mediocre productions. "Playing it safe" was how one critic of the SPC put it. Another called it a way of selecting programs that were "safe, cheap and known."[16]

To offset these new charges of mediocrity in programming, the Eastern Educational Television Network (EEN), an organization that provides regional representation and program acquisition, began to purchase and offer programs that dealt with a greater variety of subjects. This allowed local stations the option of offering SPC programs as well as more interesting or adventurous fare, such as *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and *All Creatures Great and Small.*[17]

Suggestions for reforming the SPC were floated in the early 1980s, and dissatisfaction with the system came to a head toward the end of that decade. In 1989 PBS began consultations with CPB and the Association of America's Public Television Stations to explore the idea of greater centralization in the program selection procedure. In October 1989 a vice president for national programming and promotion—a chief program executive—was hired at PBS, and by 1991 the SPC had been phased out.

Another player in public television programming is the CPB Program Fund. Established in 1980, the Program Fund supports programs that are too expensive for public television's other funding mechanisms, that are too controversial or subjective, or that are not guaranteed to be broadly popular (such as programs directed at minorities). The Program Fund gives priority to five program areas: children's and family programs; minority programs; cultural

[15] See "Inside the Program Cooperative: An Interview with Hartford Gunn," *Public Telecommunications Review* 2 (August 1974): 16–27.

[16] John J. O'Connor, "Should Public Television Be Playing It Safe?," *Public Telecommunications Review* (March/April 1980): 46–48; also Michael G. Reeves and Tom W. Hoffer, "The Safe, Cheap and Known: A Content Analysis of the First (1974) PBS Program Cooperative," *Journal of Broadcasting* 20 (Fall 1976): 549–65.

[17] Conversation with Robert Davidson, former EEN director of program development, March 24, 1997. In the 1980s, EEN's alternative program service became known as American Program Service and is currently called simply American Public Television.

programs of excellence; science and information programs, particularly health-related; and public affairs.

Program production continues to be undertaken by most stations for local broadcast. These often include local public affairs and minority-specific programs. The major producing stations are WGBH/Boston, WNET/New York, WETA/Washington, D.C., and KCET/Los Angeles. Two or more of these stations sometimes join forces to coproduce programs.[18]

A recent phenomenon in program production has been the emergence and utilization of independent producers for major program productions. Beginning in the mid-1970s, independent producers had been complaining that they were being underutilized by public television. Some independents claimed they were being deliberately and systematically denied access to the public airwaves. After a decade of agitation, the Public Telecommunications Act of 1988 mandated the formation of the Independent Television Service (ITVS). ITVS is funded by CPB to support programs that involve creative risk.

In terms of genre, public television programs are generally classified as cultural programs including dance, dramatic performance, and music; information/skills programs; children's programs; news/public affairs, and sports.[19] Furthermore, any television production—commercial and noncommercial—creates a tremendous volume of ancillary and support record, ranging from initial proposals to multi-drafts of treatments and scripts to correspondence between producers, directors, writers, talent, and technicians to contract and budgetary data, publicity materials, press clippings, and outtakes. These are all areas of archival selection consideration.

The Archives of Public Broadcasting

The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 stipulated that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting "establish and maintain a library and archives of noncommercial educational television or radio programs and related materials and develop public awareness of and disseminate information about non-commercial educational television or radio."[20] Little was done by the three primary national entities of public broadcasting—CPB, PBS, and NPR—in the ensuing years to comply systematically with this stipulation.

In the 1970s NPR arranged with the National Archives and the Library of Congress to transfer, store, and manage older news and information and cultural

[18] *American Playhouse,* which produced original American dramatic programs for broadcast on public television, originated as a joint effort between WNET and KCET.

[19] See Solomon Katzman and Nathan Katzman, *Public Television Programming Content by Category, Fiscal Year 1978* (Washington, D.C.: CPB, 1978), 49.

[20] S.1160, A Bill to Amend the Communications Act of 1934, March 2, 1967, 15.

programming in audio reel format. Subsequent to the Copyright Act of 1976, the Library of Congress began to accession selected public television programs. PBS embarked on a plan to develop a public television program archives in the early 1980s but never fully realized the plan.[21] The inactive textual files of the organizations that comprise public broadcasting were either consigned to off-site records storage facilities or destroyed. In 1988 Donald R. McNeil, a former PBS board member who, early in his career, had been assistant, then acting director of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, launched an effort to establish a public broadcasting archives on a cooperative basis. McNeil enlisted the chief officers of CPB, PBS, NPR, and APTS in the effort.[22]

The National Public Broadcasting Archives (NPBA) was inaugurated in June 1990 with the University of Maryland Libraries as its host institution. NPBA's mission is to work with the major organizations of public broadcasting to preserve and make accessible the archival record of those organizations.[23] NPBA also acquires the personal papers of individuals who have made significant contributions to the development of public broadcasting, and it provides archival services to several Washington D.C. metropolitan-area public stations—WETA television and radio, WAMU 88.5 FM, and Maryland Public Television.

NPBA's initial concern was textual materials, that is, the correspondence, memoranda, reports, program files, and other paper-based materials that comprise traditional archives. NPBA staff came to realize, however, that certain audiotape and videotape materials produced or acquired by its client agencies were not necessarily being maintained under adequate environmental conditions and were in urgent need of transfer to archival custody.[24]

Archival outreach to the stations is also a concern for NPBA. While it is impossible to serve as a national central repository for all public television and radio stations, it is within NPBA's mission to advise and assist stations in establishing archives or work out archival service agreements between stations and local universities or historical societies.[25] Although many public television

[21] In 1977 Alan Lewis, then-supervisor of acquisitions at PBS's Public Television Library, began to develop plans for a separate Public Television Archives within PBS. By 1980 the Archives was partially up and running but was forced to shut down due to cutbacks at PBS in 1982. In 1993 the Library of Congress signed a formal agreement with PBS to transfer and manage the PBS tape library.

[22] McNeil had been instrumental in establishing the Mass Communications History Center at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. A number of important public broadcasting collections were acquired under this program, for example, the archives of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters and National Educational Television.

[23] NPBA has established deposit agreements with fifteen public broadcasting organizations.

[24] At the time of this writing, NPBA holds some 8,000 videotapes in various formats, some 12,000 audiotapes in various formats, and some 500 reels of kinescope film.

[25] A number of university special collections departments have long-standing program maintenance agreements with local public stations. San Francisco State University library's partnership with station KQED is an example.

stations maintain collections of past program efforts and refer to them, WGBH/Boston is the only station with a fully mandated and developed archives program. It is worth noting also that NPBA sees its role as facilitating the work of developing appraisal standards to be shared among the various players nationwide.

Archival Appraisal and the Appraisal of Moving Image Materials

Archival appraisal is an evaluation process by which records, whatever their format, are selected for inclusion in archives. There is some dispute among archivists about the application of value to records. This is based on a strict reading of British archivist Sir Hilary Jenkinson, who believed that archivists should never apply value to records, that records transferred to archives should be selected by the creators of said records, and that the archivist's job is primarily custodial.[26]

With the emergence of huge quantities of records produced by modern governments and other complex organizations, archivists began to recognize the need for an activist approach to the selection of records for inclusion in archives. An early advocate for a proactive approach was Philip C. Brooks, of the National Archives and Records Service, who wrote on the subject in the 1940s. Brooks's colleague G. Philip Bauer also wrote on selection, emphasizing cost and use as guidelines.[27]

Brooks and Bauer were followed by Theodore Schellenberg, also of the National Archives, as an articulator of appraisal thinking. In "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records" and in his book *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques,* Schellenberg proposed that archival appraisal involves understanding primary and secondary values of records, plus a recognition of their evidential and informational sub-values.[28]

In the forty years since Schellenberg proposed his principles of appraisal, several others have added important elements to the body of appraisal thinking.

[26] Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration,* rev. ed. (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co. Ltd., 1965), 144–45. Luciana Duranti attacks American appraisal theory and practice on the basis of attribution of value. See Luciana Duranti, "The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory," *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 336. Frank Boles and Mark Greene responded to Duranti's critique in "Et Tu Schellenberg? Thoughts on the Dagger of American Appraisal Theory," *American Archivist* 59 (Summer 1996): 298–310.

[27] See Philip C. Brooks, "The Selection of Records for Preservation," *American Archivist* 3 (October 1940): 221–34 and "The Archivist's Concern in Records Administration," *American Archivist* 6 (July 1943): 158–64. See also G. Philip Bauer, "The Appraisal of Current and Recent Records: Staff Information Paper # 13 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, 1946).

[28] Theodore Schellenberg, "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records," Bulletin of the National Archives, No. 8 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956); and *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

Maynard Brichford's *Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal & Accessioning*, part of the Society of American Archivists' original *Basic Manual Series*, built on the Schellenberg appraisal model, presenting four concerns as the foundation of appraisal thinking: the characteristics of the records, administrative values, research values, and archival values.[29] Under archival values, Brichford included the relationship of a record or records to other records and the costs of processing and storage. In 1991 Frank Boles and Julia Marks Young devised an appraisal model based on decision theory. The core of the Boles and Young approach involves three modules: value-of-information, costs-of-retention, and implications-of-the-selection-decision.[30] In 1993 the Society of American Archivists published a new basic manual on appraisal entitled *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* by F. Gerald Ham. In this volume, Ham sees appraisal, along with acquisition and accessioning, as subsets of the larger process of selection.[31]

During the past decade, a functionalist approach to appraisal began to be articulated in North American archival literature. In 1992 Helen Samuels proposed a methodology she called "institutional functional analysis" in a work that examined the appraisal of the records of colleges and universities. Also in 1992 Terry Cook introduced the functionalist concept of "macro-appraisal." Joan Krizack's "documentation planning," initially developed for appraising hospital and health care records, is a function-based approach. Bruce Bruemmer's 1995 article "Avoiding Accidents of Evidence: Functional Analysis in the Appraisal of Business Records" reviews the functionalist literature up to that date while arguing for such an approach to the selection of American business records. By the end of the 1990s, it seemed that function-based appraisal theory was a widely accepted mode of analysis and guide to practice, at least in the North American context.[32]

Professional literature relating specifically to the appraisal of moving image materials is scant but certainly crucial in coming to grips with the com-

[29] Maynard Brichford, *Archives & Manuscripts: Appraisal & Accessioning* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977).

[30] Frank Boles in association with Julia Marks Young, *Archival Appraisal* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 1991). This is an expanded version of an earlier article, "Exploring the Black Box: The Appraisal of University Administrative Records," *American Archivist* 48 (Spring 1985): 121-40.

[31] F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993), 2.

[32] For institutional functional analysis, see Helen Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992). For macro-appraisal, see Terry Cook, "Mind Ovcr Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal" in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh Taylor*, edited by Barbara Craig (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992). For documentation planning, see Joan Krizack, *Documentation Planning for the U.S. Health Care System* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). Bruemmer's article is contained in James M. O'Toole, ed., *The Records of American Business* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1997). For a recent exposition that places functional appraisal within an organizational studies context, see Victoria Lemieux, "Applying Mintzberg's Theories on Organizational Configuration to Archival Appraisal," *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998): 32–85.

plexity of film and video formats, such as those used for public television programming, and the issues inherent in evaluation. Sam Kula was the first to tackle the subject in his 1983 RAMP study, *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images.* This was followed in 1986 by Rosemary Bergeron's "The Selection of Television Productions for Archival Preservation," and in 1991 Ernest J. Dick presented selection guidelines for programming of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). In 1995 the International Federation of Television Archives (FIAT) drafted revised selection standards, and in the same year Greg Eamon and Rosemary Bergeron prepared a discussion of selection factors for the Task Force on the Preservation and Enhanced Use of Canada's Audio-Visual Heritage. A curatorial manual aimed at archivists handling television newsfilm, released in 1997, includes a chapter on appraisal by Ernest J. Dick.[33]

Each of these articles and studies is well worth reading, but three of them deserve specific summation. Sam Kula's RAMP study is directed at national or state-owned broadcasting organizations, and commercial or independent television groups, as well as film archives. As such, Kula's is a broad-brush approach. He notes that volume is a serious concern in moving image archives and suggests a records management tack to "ensure the immediate protection of all the records generated for a limited time, to allow time for an evaluation of the total production for archival purposes and the preparation of a schedule which will specify which programmes are to be retained for long term conservation."[34] Further, he establishes a typology of archival moving images based on provenance, function, and form to ensure an integrated collecting effort in which context is protected. This approach naturally involves materials above and beyond the "record copy" or master print of a particular program. Included here are production elements as well as pertinent textual documentation. What distinguishes moving image records management from the management of paper records is the greater difficulty in reaching consensus in what should be retained. In most cases, he argues, producers will be at odds with archivists as to which variant versions and outtakes are retained. Kula advises moving image

[33] Sam Kula, *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images: A RAMP Study with Guidelines* (Paris: UNESCO, 1983); Rosemary Bergeron, "The Selection of Television Productions for Archival Preservation," *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986–87): 41–53; Ernest J. Dick, "An Archival Acquisition Strategy for the Broadcast Records of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 11, no. 3 (1991): 253–68; International Federation of Television Archives Programming and Production Commission, "Recommended Standards and Procedures for Selection for Preservation of Television Programme Material," September 1995; Rosemary Bergeron and Greg Eamon, "Selection Factors for Audio-Visual Archives, Annex B in *Fading Away: Strategic Options to Ensure the Protection of and Access to Our Audio-Visual Memory,*" Task Force on the Preservation and Enhanced Use of Canada's Audio-Visual Heritage (June 1995); Ernest J. Dick, "Appraisal of Collections" in *The Administration of Television Newsfilm and Videotape Collections: A Curatorial Manual,* edited by Steven Davidson and Gregory Lukow (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1997), 31–47. For a broader, multimedia approach to selection and appraisal, see Helen Harrison, "Selection and Audiovisual Collections," *IFLA Journal* 21, no. 3 (1995): 185–90.

[34] Kula, *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images,* 12.

archivists to apply "a rough cost benefit analysis and attempt to assess probable use of the materials by researchers in the years to come."[35]

Ernest Dick's article, "An Archival Acquisition Strategy for the Broadcast Records of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation," also discusses the differing, and at times opposing, points of view of broadcasters and archivists. The CBC policy as described by Dick is genre-based. "This organization of archival appraisal respects the provenance of the administrative context of the broadcasting industry and is not an artificial or arbitrary imposition."[36] Dick argues for extensive news and current affairs program acquisition in order to "allow posterity to evaluate how it reflected, distorted or shaped our times."[37] As for entertainment programming, he notes that Canada has adopted so much American dramatic and performing arts programming that Canadians have developed relatively few such productions, therefore "extensive archival retention of performing arts and dramatic programming might be considered because of its representation of [Canadian] performing arts."[38]

In "Selection Factors for Audio-Visual Archives," Rosemary Bergeron and Greg Eamon offer a set of considerations to guide selection decisions. These include pertinence of the programs to the collecting organization; the significance of the audiovisual work; evidential/informational values; aesthetic value; research value; form or medium; uniqueness, rarity, or age of the material; its commercial value; the significance of the creator, author, or collector; and its impact or popularity.

One problem that emerges from these and other readings in the appraisal or selection of audiovisual materials is the inclusiveness of their implications. If followed to the letter, selection based on the criteria presented would result in very large bodies of program materials in need of regular reformatting for preservation and access. This problem is not lost on the cited authors, of course. Ernest Dick puts in most succinctly in the conclusion of his CBC study.

> The archivists of broadcast programming have been preoccupied with generating all the arguments and eloquence that they could muster on behalf of the preservation of the records of broadcasting . . . Perhaps we need to reverse this thinking and logic. We may better serve the broadcast industry, as well as posterity, by actively determining what of the broadcasting record does not need to be saved for the future.[39]

[35] Kula, *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images*, 88.

[36] Dick, "The Archival Acquisition Strategy," 261.

[37] Dick, "The Archival Acquisition Strategy," 261.

[38] Dick, "The Archival Acquisition Strategy," 263.

[39] Dick, "The Archival Acquisition Strategy," 266. For a good analysis of the relationship between appraisal and preservation issues, see Tyler O. Walters, "Contemporary Appraisal Methods and Preservation Decision-Making," *American Archivist 59* (Summer 1996): 332–38.

A review of the appraisal literature allows one to see, in a pragmatic way, where standard archival theory works in evaluating television programs and where it doesn't. In this research, I found much in the tried-and-true Schellenbergian canon to be applicable, and this is reflected below. In the end, however, I had to reject the functionalist school as a guide to appraising public television programs. Sam Kula hinted at the problem in his RAMP study:

> Since moving image records are seldom part of government records series, and therefore firmly grounded as to provenance and evidentiary function, they are not readily assessible in the context of the activity that initiated their production. Moving images produced outside of direct government sponsorship—the so-called private sector in countries where film and television production are not state monopolies—are even more difficult to appraise using the selection criteria developed for government records.[40]

It could be said that program production, distribution, and airing are the basic functions of the public broadcasting—or any broadcasting—system. These basic functions are accepted simply as a given. The broadly, and in some ways subjectively, derived institutional functions as delineated by Samuels and others seem irrelevant to the appraisal of television programs. It is true that various corporate organizational processes unite to conceive, finance, and produce a program. But this product exists more as a cultural object than as the mere endpoint of a variety of administrative functions. Functional analysis may help in deciding what production support materials are to be retained as archival; it does not help in dealing with program appraisal per se.

An Evaluation Scheme for Public Television Program Appraisal

In the early 1980s Alan Lewis, then the PBS program archivist, proposed selection criteria for what would be preserved in the short-lived Public Television Archives at PBS in Washington, D.C. Lewis based his criteria on those developed by the International Federation of Television Archives in 1980. The criteria consisted of seven categories for preservation:

- all personality profile programs;
- all news and public affairs programs;
- cultural programs to the extent the material is unique and unduplicated;
- a broad sampling of children's programming;
- the first and final episodes of series and "such other episodes as are necessary to document changes in plot, setting, characterization, technique etc." plus a full week of series programming;
- some non-national public television material; and

[40] Kula, *The Archival Appraisal of Moving Images*, 1–2.

- not-for-broadcast programs such as new season previews, samplers, teleconference, and closed-circuit programs.[41]

Lewis's criteria were never fully applied because of the closing of the Public Television Archives. They nevertheless share the inclusiveness of the schemes of Kula and Dick mentioned above.

In 1995 Edwin G. Cohen, former director and founder of the Agency for Instructional Television (AIT) devised an evaluation scheme for instructional television programs.[42] Supported by CPB, Cohen surveyed various instructional technology facilities in the United States to identify what extant instructional television materials needed to be placed under archival control. Cohen's purpose in undertaking this project was to provide the National Public Broadcasting Archives with information to help determine the extent of its commitment to acquiring instructional television materials.

Based on intensive study and contact with a knowledgeable advisory group, Cohen's criteria included:

- Importance—i.e., programming that had enduring and widespread use, set new standards, or gave vital curriculum support. Also included here were landmark projects, influential practices, model procedures, major research, consequential legislation, significant organizations, or prominent individuals;
- Representativeness—i.e., instructional series/telecourses with all their components within major subject areas, at various academic levels, for a range of learners, for different instructional purposes, and using various instructional approaches; and/or typical programs/units within selected series/telecourses;
- Completeness—i.e., materials provide comprehensive understanding of particular programming, events, and organizations on a highly selective basis;
- Perishability—i.e., materials most threatened by destruction or deterioration.[43]

In Cohen's scheme, the categories were broad but the application was narrow; the universe of affected programming was smaller than the public television programming under scrutiny here. The individuals who participated in the study were a coherent group with a history of working together—they could come to relatively easy agreement about their choices. This is not the case with the national or "evening schedule" programming of public television, the primary purview of the National Public Broadcasting Archives.

[41] The criteria were published in "Archives Notes," an occasional newsletter from the Public Television Archives, edited by Alan Lewis.

[42] Instructional television program production was, at least in the heyday of instructional television, taken up by independent, non-station entities like the Agency for Instructional Television, now known as the Agency for Instructional Technology, headquartered in Bloomington, Indiana.

[43] Edwin G. Cohen, "Activating an Instructional Television and Radio Collection within the National Public Broadcasting Archives," 28 April 1995, pp. 3–4. Copies maintained by NPBA and CPB.

To try to overcome the dilemma posed by the various approaches to moving image appraisal which would result in highly inclusive collections, we derived a synthesized and simplified evaluation scheme for national schedule public television programs based on traditional archival appraisal considerations, the special concerns of moving image archivists, and the concerns of public television professionals as we perceived them. This scheme involves more of an interpretive process than a checklist of characteristics that point to retention or nonretention. The elements of the scheme are:

- *Provenance:* This consideration stems from the complexity of public television program production. It takes into account the era of production (NET, PBS, pre-NET); whether or not it was chosen as an SPC offering; whether or not it is an independent production, a foreign production, or a coproduction; whether the program master exists; and whether related textual or other material exists.
- *Cost of Retention:* This includes storage and processing costs, costs of conservation or reformatting, and costs of reference access. Film or tape quality and the extent of deterioration come under consideration here as well.
- *Implications of Selection Decision:* These differ slightly from Boles and Young's sense of the term. Included here are considerations of copyright and intellectual property, the location of other copies of the program that might exist, the format and generation of the copies being appraised, and the political implications of retention and the general implications of nonretention.
- *Reference Potential:* This ranges from scholarly and other fair uses to rebroadcast or repurposing in the form of multi-media CD ROM, or use for informational content—stock footage of people, places, and things; examples of a documentary style; or moving images of personalities and events of significance to be used in a new production. Also important here is whether production or other files exist as back-up materials.
- *Critical Values:* The public television archivist must evaluate several subcategories of program components to make a thorough archival interpretation of the program in question. These subcategories include an assessment of production values; the program's popularity; its significance other than that suggested by popularity or unpopularity; its information content (evidential/informational values) and completeness.

Conclusion

The purpose here has been to show the conceptual development of a method for evaluating public television program materials. Out of the appli-

cation of this method, one can derive a thumbnail description of a given program based on organizational, technical, and appraisal theory-based elements which can in turn be compared to other like descriptions to allow an evaluation of a body of programs held locally, or more generally among institutions that maintain public television programs.

Issues of preservation and access are inherent in any attempt to come to grips with the appraisal of moving image and other audiovisual materials, and their implications must inform appraisal deliberations alongside other more traditional archival concerns. The specific appraisal issue here is one of selecting programs already in archival custody to which a long-term preservation and reformatting commitment should be made. This evaluation model may or may not help moving-image archivists limit the program materials to be selected; but, once selected, it helps to marshal scant maintenance resources. It argues that locus—where a program or a body of programs fit into an overall oeuvre—needs to be the foundation for appraisal/selection decisions. It then argues that the preservation/access issue becomes a key determinant in evaluating programs.[44]

The practicality of this model remains to be tested. As of this writing, funds are being sought to apply the scheme to a group of 435 PBS programs held by the National Public Broadcasting Archives. The appendix to this article provides a simple application of the model to four programs that are part of this group. This application is meant to serve merely as an illustration of the model's workability and is in no way conclusive. As mentioned above, the ultimate aim of this study is to construct a national ranking of public television programs based on the model presented here. This ranking system could then be used to garner resources to ensure the widest possible preservation of American public television programs.

Appraisal of television program materials, indeed of audiovisual materials in general, is still in its infancy. What is presented here is a tentative first step in synthesizing various levels of thinking on the subject. Further theoretical work is needed, especially in the area of understanding the technology or the "mechanicity" of audiovisual materials, their complexity and fragility, their compound nature, and how these features affect archival retention. It is also important to understand the role of mass media in society and the workings of visual culture in developing moving image appraisal thinking. This study, though limited, should encourage further steps in these directions.

[44] If preservation concerns are truly central to moving image appraisal, then the matter of reformatting needs to be settled. Audiovisual archivists hold to analog reformatting while the industry keeps moving in a digital direction. The fate of videotape is still unsure, but archivists may soon be forced to make a decision as to the best digital preservation format. See Terry Pristen, "DVD Killed Video's Star," *New York Times,* 7 January 2000, Business Section, 1.

Appendix—Applying the Model

Short of working systematically off a master program list, the benefits of the evaluation scheme discussed in this article can be demonstrated by a local application. What follows is an example of what this scheme can disclose about a group of programs held by NPBA. These programs are part of a larger group of 2,800 3/4" videocassettes, consisting of 435 separate programs, transferred to NPBA from PBS in 1994. They include news and public affairs programs, cultural and sports programs, and information/skills programs. They are nonmaster tapes, either taped off-air at PBS or sent to PBS by stations. The collection served an in-house ready reference function during the ten years it was actively maintained, 1972–1982.

The task here is to decide, given limited resources for preservation of videotape, what programs are worthy of reformatting. For the sake of argument, we will assume that preservation dubbing will be done in-house at a labor cost of $10/hour, and that tape stock, S-VHS cassettes, cost $10/cassette. Two cassette copies of each program tape will be made, one for access, one for back-up. A ratio of two hours of handling time per tape hour is also assumed.

Four types of programs are described along with the appraisal assessments in the five categories of the model. An interpretation of how these appraisal factors can be used to compare different types and categories of programming follows the appraisal assessments.

1. Jimmy Carter Cabinet Confirmation Hearings Program Tapes

Description:
This is a group of 54 3/4" videocassettes. The tapes include live footage from the hearings as well as studio commentary and interviews. They date from January 10 to February 22, 1977.

Provenance:

Taped off-air by PBS engineers on 3/4" cassettes.
Followed the era of controversial programming represented by NPACT.
Funded directly by CPB.
Produced by WETA Greater Washington DC.

Cost of Retention:

The tapes have been fully processed by NPBA, that is, they have been fully arranged and described and a series guide exists.
Damage to some tapes, repair required.
Cost of duplication = $2,160.00 plus repair costs.

Implications of Selection Decision:

A set of the hearings exists at the PBS tape storage facility, in 2" format, and will eventually be moved to the Library of Congress.

WETA maintains copyright.

An important visual historical document would be lost if these tapes were allowed to deteriorate.

Reference Potential:

There would be interest in these tapes for political and historical documentary producers.

Students of the Carter presidency would be interested in screening the tapes

Critical Values:

Production values were low for this program.

Viewers tended to react positively.

Some station programmers were unhappy with pre-empting their regularly scheduled instructional programming for the hearings.

This program was a precursor to C-SPAN and other live governmental affairs programs; it showed there was viewer interest in such programming. (One newspaper called it the "hit of the season.") The program offers good evidence of the workings of the United States Senate and a larger informational content of the workings of American government and of personalities in government.

The programs are a complete run of the Carter cabinet confirmation hearings.

2. Public Television Professional Tennis Broadcasts

Description:

This is a group of 283 3/4" videotape cassettes of professional tennis broadcasts aired in the 1970s.

Provenance:

Some cassettes were taped off-air by stations and sent to PBS. Some were taped off-air by PBS personnel.

Produced by various stations from 1973–1980, mainly WGBH/Boston and KQED/San Francisco.

Funded by various underwriters: United Technologies, Fieldcrest Mills Inc., Joseph Bancroft & Sons Co., for example.

Programs were initially distributed by the Eastern Educational Television Network then directly by PBS.

Program files for many of these broadcasts exist in the PBS Program Files series (NPBA).

Cost of Retention:

Stored with PBS videocassette collection. Preliminary inventory available.

Damage to some tapes, repair required.
Cost of duplication = $11,230.00 plus repair costs

Implications of Selection Decision:

Stations retain copyright to programs.
WGBH productions are held by WGBH Archives in a variety of formats.
If allowed to deteriorate an important and relatively accessible source for tennis history would be lost.

Reference Potential:

Sports historians would be interested in these programs.
Segments or matches might be rebroadcast for biographical documentaries (Arthur Ashe, for example).
Segments might be used for exhibits.

Critical Values:

Production values range from low to medium.
These broadcasts found an audience at a time when tennis was not being shown on commercial television. Tennis ultimately became a commercial broadcast staple.
Though many of these matches are routine games, there are several that stand out as historic.
Voice-over and on-camera commentary by Bud Collins contains a significant degree of tennis history and lore.

3. Over Easy

Description:

This is a group of 265 3/4" videocasettes of a program that aired daily on public television stations from November 1977 through 1979. *Over Easy* was the first major television series to address Americans over 55 years of age. It was a live talk show hosted by Hugh Downs. A typical show consisted of an interview with an in-person guest, usually a notable older American from the entertainment industry or a writer or politician, a segment with a health expert, and a previously taped "lifestyle visit" to the home of an older person of note, interspersed with music or comedy sketches.

Provenance:

Cassettes taped off-air by PBS.
Produced by KQED/San Francisco.
Programs were funded by the U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare and CPB.
Programs were offered to stations through the Station Program Cooperative.

No significant textual back-up material held by NPBA.

Cost of Retention:

Stored with NPBA's PBS videocassette collection. Inventory and database available.

Damage to some tapes, repair required.

Cost of duplication = $10,600.00 plus repair costs

Implications of Selection Decision:

KQED retains rights to programs.

Another set of *Over Easy* is available at San Francisco State University Department of Special Collections and at PBS in 2" format.

Reference Potential:

Programs could be examined for information on aging and health.

Researchers and documentary makers would be interested in footage of notable individuals.

Critical Values:

Production values are relatively high.

The program was the first of its kind.

Its critical reception was good.

Value of health information was high.

The series is incomplete, a number of episodes are missing.

4. ABC Captioned News

Description:

This is a group of 51 3/4" videocassettes. In 1977 ABC News began to make its evening news broadcasts with captions, prepared by WGBH, available to public broadcasting stations. Hearing-impaired people were the intended audience for the programs. The videotapes cover the period from October 19 to December 31, 1982.

Provenance:

Created by ABC in conjunction with WGBH/Boston and taped off-air by PBS.

Funded through the U.S. Department of Education and Whirlpool Corp.

Cost of Retention:

No inventory available.

Cost of duplication = $2,040.00

Implications of Selection Decision:

WGBH Archives holds 83 1" videotape reels of Captioned News, 1980–1982.

Held by Vanderbilt Television Archive in noncaptioned form with abstracts.

Reference Potential:

Some news items would be of research interest—the tainted Tylenol deaths ca. fall 1982, for example.

Critical Values:

Production values were high and tape quality is good.

The program was a cooperative venture between public and commercial television organizations, a first.

The run of programs is incomplete given the length of time the venture lasted.

Evidential value: These programs serve as examples of news program production.

Informational value is broad, i.e., daily news stories over the course of 2.5 months.

Co-anchor Max Robinson was the first African-American anchorman on an American network news program.

Interpretation

The programs examined here represent four different program types—public affairs, information, sports, and news—and as such cannot be compared on the basis of genre. However, certain program features highlighted by the evaluation scheme allow a comparative interpretation that can lead to a prioritization of programs for long-term preservation.

A look at the information derived through this evaluation shows a glaring discrepancy in the cost of reformatting. It would cost less to dub the Carter Cabinet Hearings and the Captioned News than it would to dub *Over Easy* or the Professional Tennis programs. The *Over Easy,* the Captioned News programs, and many of the tennis programs exist elsewhere, closer to the point of provenance. Copyright remains with the producers but NPBA's relationship with WETA implies a special concern for WETA productions. All four programs have significant reference potential, although the accessibility of the ABC Captioned News abstracts at Vanderbilt makes that repository the more likely one to approach with reference queries. All four programs are important in terms of general critical values, but when considered in specific terms of completeness, popularity, and overall significance, the Carter Cabinet Hearings emerge as a reasonable first choice to reformat for preservation and access.