Blanculli’s Personal Theory of TV Evolution

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apexart  291 Church Street, NY, NY
Bianculli’s Personal Theory of TV Evolution

EXHIBIT 1

KIDS’ TV 50 SECONDS

TV 1  PUPPET PLAYHOUSE/HOWDY DOODY – 1947, NBC – One of TV’s first hit shows. “Buffalo” Bob Smith’s marionette merriment proved so popular with young viewers that Variety raved, “This program can almost be guaranteed to pin down the squirmiest of the brood.” See also: Ernie Kovacs’ “Buffalo Miklos” parody, in Exhibit 8 (TV 3).

TV 2  KUKLA, FRAN & OLLIE – 1947, NBC – Puppeteer Burr Tillstrom’s gentle children’s show emanated from Chicago, with Fran Allison as on-air host.

TV 3  WATCH MR. WIZARD – 1951, NBC – Don Herbert was one of the first children’s TV hosts to use TV aggressively as a teaching tool, with science as his subject of choice.

TV 4  DING DONG SCHOOL – 1952, NBC – Frances Horwich earned advanced degrees in education, and used them to teach youngsters via television – teaching, for example, how to make peanut butter and banana sandwiches. Was Elvis Presley watching?

TV 5  ANDY’S GANG – 1955, NBC – Character actor Andy Devine reads stories to kids, presents short (and cheap) film clips, and summons a troubleshaking gremlin by saying, “Pluck your magic twanger, Froggy!”

Exhibit 2

KIDS’ TV II 1m 30s

TV 1  THE MICKEY MOUSE CLUB – 1955, ABC – At night, once a week, Disney and ABC presented all sorts of wonders on Disneyland. But every weekday, Jimmie Dodd and the Mouseketeers delighted a generation – beginning with this premiere-episode farewell. “Y? Because we like you…” See also: The animated opening sequence, in Exhibit 10 (TV 3).

TV 2  MISTER ROGERS’ NEIGHBORHOOD – 1968, NET/PBS – The same year Fred Rogers began distributing his children’s show nationally, he presented a special prime-time show aimed at helping parents guide their young kids through the aftermath of the Robert F. Kennedy assassination. A rare, and stunning, clip featuring Daniel Striped Tiger and Lady (Betty) Aberlin. It’s a clip you have to hear to believe, so use your headphones. See also: Fred Rogers as puppeteer on The Children’s Corner, in Exhibit 10 (TV 1); Rogers defending public TV on Capitol Hill, in Exhibit 13 (TV 2); Fred Rogers’ original sneakers and sweater, ON DISPLAY.
**TV 3** SESAME STREET – 1969, NET/PBS (C) – One of the first and best public television series for children – then and now. This clip is a bubbly one: Ernie singing “Rubber Duckie,” first sung on the show in 1970, and reaching No. 11 on Billboard the next year.

**TV 4** SHELLEY DUVALL'S FAERIE TAILE THEATRE – 1982, Showtime (C) – One of my children's first favorite TV shows, and one I was thrilled to show them. Series highlights include Billy Crystal and Jeff Goldblum in The Three Little Pigs, Paul Reubens in Pinocchio – and this opener, with Robin Williams underneath that amphibian costume in The Tale of the Frog Prince.

**TV 5** PEE-WEE'S PLAYHOUSE – 1986, CBS (C) – Speaking of Paul Reubens (see above), here he is as manic children's TV host Pee-wee Herman, presiding over the craziest kids' TV menagerie since Andy's Gang. Here's the theme song – one of the best.

**Exhibit 3**

**ANIMATION**

1m 15s

**TV 1** CRUSADER RABBIT – 1949, syndicated – The first animated series made specifically for television, this was co-created by Jay Ward, who went on to cartoon fame thanks to a certain moose and squirrel. See also: Rocky & His Friends, in Exhibit 3 (TV 2); an original signed Jay Ward Bullwinkle Show cel, and lots of other collected fun stuff, ON DISPLAY.

**TV 2** ROCKY AND HIS FRIENDS/THE BULLWINKLE SHOW – 1959, ABC/NBC (C) – Brilliant show, including Mr. Peabody and his pet boy Sherman in “Peabody’s Improbable History,” the straight-arrow Canadian Mountie in “Dudley Do-Right,” and Edward Everett Horton narrating “Fractured Fairy Tales.” This clip still makes me laugh, more than half a century later. See also: Crusader Rabbit, in Exhibit 3 (TV 1); an original signed Jay Ward Bullwinkle Show cel, and lots of other collected fun stuff, ON DISPLAY.

**TV 3** THE FLINTSTONES – 1960, ABC (C) – Hanna/Barbera’s Stone Age cartoon is nothing more, and a lot less, than a prehistoric variant of The Honeymooners, with Fred, Wilma, Barney and Betty standing in for Ralph, Alice, Ed and Trixie. But it’s the only animated series in history to end a season in TV's Top 20.

**TV 4** THE SIMPSONS – 1989, Fox (C) – Spun off from The Tracey Ullman Show, the yellow-skinned Simpsons got their own showcase, beginning with this Christmas special. Bart's version of “Jingle Bells,” shown here, delighted my kids when they saw it – and even more when I tipped some carolers at a restaurant to
reprise it in holiday harmony. See also: The Simpsons parody of A Clockwork Orange, in Exhibit 17 (TV 5); and a ridiculous number of Simpsons cels, swag, plates and other collectibles, ON DISPLAY.

TV 5  FAMILY GUY – 1999, Fox (C) – This clip, from the show’s current season, featured a crossover with The Simpsons – and a “cameo” by Fred Flintstone himself, making this the perfect way to end this tour through TV animation. See also: a Family Guy wall clock, ON DISPLAY.

Exhibit 4
TEENS ON TV
Time: 2m 5s

TV 1  THE MANY LOVES OF DOBIE GILLIS – 1959, CBS – Dwayne Hickman’s Dobie muses about love next to Rodin’s “Thinker” – while, in this clip, Bob Denver, Warren Beatty and Tuesday Weld populate Dobie’s classroom.

TV 2  GIDGET – 1965, ABC (C) – Sally Field plays a “surfer chick” with an understanding father (a professor and widower) in this youth-appeal show with an occasional women’s liberation bent.

TV 3  THE WONDER YEARS – 1988, ABC (C) – A brilliant show about growing up in Sixties suburbia, superbly written and just as perfectly performed. In November 2014, I moderated a panel at New York’s 92Y reuniting series stars Fred Savage, Danica McKellar and Josh Saviano – another example of my career providing me with memorable and unexpected experiences. This clip is from the pilot, with Savage’s Kevin Arnold seeking out his neighbor, McKellar’s Winnie Cooper, just after they learned of the death of her older brother in Vietnam. Daniel Stern provides the narration of the adult Kevin – narration definitely worth hearing.

TV 4  MY SO-CALLED LIFE – 1994, ABC (C) – Claire Danes, now of Homeland, got her start here, in a show that took the internal monologue of teenagers and pushed it to new heights.

TV 5  FREAKS AND GEEKS – 1999, NBC (C) – Paul Feig created this underappreciated cult comedy-drama, but executive producer Judd Apatow used it to amass a minor-league team of all-stars before they all hit the majors. Seth Rogen, James Franco, Jason Segel, and Linda Cardellini, among others, all got their start here.
Exhibit 5  TV 1  ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN – 1952, syndicated – By the time the Man of Steel got to TV, the DC Comics superhero already had appeared on radio, been animated by the Fleischer studio, and been featured in live-action movie serials. This is the show, though, that started TV’s love affair with superheroes, and introduced an opening credits narration that most Baby Boomers committed to memory: “Look, up in the sky! It’s a bird. It’s a plane! It’s...Superman!” See also: A collectible Adventures of Superman plate, ON DISPLAY.

TV 2  BATMAN – 1966, ABC (C) – Taking an intentionally camp and pop art approach to the DC Comics hero, this series, starring Adam West as Batman and Burt Ward as Robin, was a serialized hit in the Sixties, briefly but memorably. Here’s a clip from the pilot, in which Batman approaches a moll, played by Jill St. John, and does the Batuci dance re-interpreted by John Travolta in Pulp Fiction. See also: Julie Newmar as Catwoman, in Exhibit 11 (TV 3), and the TV CONFESSIONAL.

TV 3  WONDER WOMAN – 1975, ABC/CBS (C) – Lynda Carter, Miss World USA of 1972, spun herself into a higher level of international fame as Diana Prince, a.k.a. the Amazon known as Wonder Woman. Like its DC Comics inspiration, this lighthearted prime-time series was an odd mixture of feminism and helplessness, boldness and bondage. See also: Wonder Woman Barbie doll, ON DISPLAY.

TV 4  SMALLVILLE – 2001, WB/CW (C) – After the successes of Adventures of Superman and ABC’s Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman, this series spent a decade expanding the “origin story” of the Man of Steel, focusing on his teen and young adult years. By the time it ended, it spun off another DC Comics-inspired CW series, Arrow (about Green Arrow), which in turn spun off the current The Flash. And in this clip, Smallville made a nod to superhero history, featuring as guest star, playing a scientist, a post-paralysis Christopher Reeve, once the big-screen embodiment of Superman.

TV 5  GOTHAM – 2014, Fox (C) – This current series, like Smallville, takes its time expanding the Batman “origin story,” going so far back in time that the hero, had he donned his costume right away, would be a Batboy. The villains, too, haven’t fully discovered themselves, or their costumed alter egos, but their slow development has been quite entertaining – and infinitely darker than TV’s original Batman. This scene, from the pilot, presents the
crime which drove young Bruce Wayne to a life as a costumed seeker of justice.

Exhibit 6

TV 1 THAT GIRL – 1966, ABC (C) – Mario Thomas starred in what has become a familiar feminist TV staple: the single working woman, juggling romance and career in the big city. In all but one of the shows in this section, that city is New York, which "that girl," wannabe actress Ann Marie, confronts with big smiles and bold fashion choices.

TV 2 THE MARY TYLER MOORE SHOW – 1970, CBS (C) – The city this time is Minneapolis, and the young woman is Mary Richards, played to iconic perfection by Mary Tyler Moore. Ed Asner plays Lou Grant, the gruff boss at the TV station where she applies for a job. And, during her job interview in this clip, she demonstrates that she's got spunk. This is the show that launched MTM Productions, which, in both comedy and drama, evolved TV to a higher form.

TV 3 THE DAYS AND NIGHTS OF MOLLY DODD – 1987, NBC (C) – This inexplicably forgotten NBC sitcom, later produced for Lifetime cable, was one of the more sophisticated sitcoms ever written – more like a series of short films, really. Created by Jay Tarses, it starred Blair Brown as a divorced woman determined to survive in New York, and maybe even find professional and personal fulfillment along the way.

TV 4 SEX AND THE CITY – 1998, HBO (C) – Playing a columnist (young people should think "blogger," only without the Internet) who writes about sex, and New York, Sarah Jessica Parker adapted the "ladies who lunch" idea for a new generation, and inspired a whole series of fashion trends in the process. The shoes really caught on; the tutus, not so much.

TV 5 GIRLS – 2012, HBO (C) – Unlike all the other "Girls" in this grouping, Lena Dunham not only stars in her show, but created it as well – making both the show and her character of Hannah, an aspiring writer in New York, exactly what Hannah confesses a desire to become: a voice of her generation. See also: The Single Working Women in TV illustration, ON DISPLAY.
TV 1  TONIGHT! – 1954, NBC – Steve Allen was behind the desk as the host of the first incarnation of the Tonight show, setting the basic elements for all late-night talk shows to come. But for the start of his initial broadcast, shown here, Allen started out not at a desk – but seated at his piano, explaining the program’s basic concept.

TV 2  TONIGHT: THE JACK PAAR TONIGHT SHOW – 1957, NBC – Jack Paar brought unpredictability to the Tonight show – no more so than when he reacted to what he considered unfair censorship of a monologue joke by walking off his show without any warning, leaving stunned sidekick Hugh Downs to take over. A month later, after a national furor and an NBC apology, Paar returned, with one of the best-delivered punch lines in late-night history. Both clips are shown here.

TV 3  THE TONIGHT SHOW STARRING JOHNNY CARSON – 1962, NBC – How do you select one clip to personify the King of Late Night, who reigned for 30 years? Easy: Show the 1964 clip that’s one of the purest examples of live TV in history. Ed Ames, who played Mingo the Native American opposite Fess Parker’s frontiersman on TV’s Daniel Boone, demonstrated his tomahawk-throwing technique by throwing his weapon at the chalk outline of a cowboy. What a shot – and, by Carson, what a brilliantly timed ad-lib reaction.

TV 4  THE DICK CAVEY SHOW – 1969, ABC (C) – Dick Cavett, who broke into show business as a writer for Jack Paar, inherited and expanded his former boss’ love of conversation. As a result, he got many great guests on his shows, and got great things out of them. The list includes Marlon Brando, Katharine Hepburn, an infamous squabble between Gore Vidal and Norman Mailer, and, on this particular show, John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

TV 5  LATE SHOW WITH DAVID LETTERMAN – 1993, CBS (C) – David Letterman went from daytime and Late Night on NBC to his new late-night program on CBS, housed in the theater that once housed The Ed Sullivan Show. Like the early years of NBC’s Tonight shows, Letterman and his Late Show personified New York – never more so than in 2001, when, shown here, he became the first talk-show host to return to the air after the 9/11 attacks.
TV 1  THE JACK BENNY PROGRAM – 1950, NBC/CBS – A long-time radio star who repeated his success effortlessly on the new medium of television. Benny’s programs were a hybrid of the variety show and what would later become the Seinfeld model: a sitcom about the entertainer as an exaggerated version of himself, in a well-written show “about nothing.” This early “hillbilly” performance piece demonstrates both Benny’s actual musical talent with the violin, and his perfect delivery of a punch line that, even now, is unexpected and shocking. Make sure to use your headphones for this one.

TV 2  YOUR SHOW OF SHOWS – 1950, NBC – This pioneering Sid Caesar vehicle, also starring Carl Reiner, Howard Morris and Imogene Coca, was the prime-time Saturday Night Live of its day: each show was live, 90 minutes long, and featured a repertory company of regulars, a guest host, and musical guests. And it was brilliant (no wonder, with a writing staff that included Mel Brooks, Neil Simon, and other equally famous and gifted comic icons) – never more so than in this extended spoof of TV’s popular ambush biography series, This Is Your Life.

TV 3  THE ERNIE KOVACS SHOW – 1950-62, various local shows and networks – Ernie Kovacs was a TV pioneer who loved going where no one had gone before. His recurring bits included the Nairobi Trio: three people in gorilla costumes (usually Ernie, his wife and co-star Edie Adams, and unbilled guest Jack Lemmon) pretending to play the same strange song. He’d also take on current TV hits, as when he parodied Howdy Doody as “Buffalo Miklos.” See also: Original scripts from Ernie Kovacs and Edie Adams’ shows, ON DISPLAY; Ernie’s cowboy TV parodies, featuring Ranold the Devil Horse, ON DISPLAY and on (TV 6).

TV 4  THE SMOTHERS BROTHERS COMEDY HOUR – 1967, CBS (C) – One of the most influential TV shows of the Sixties, and one which I ended up writing a book about, called Dangerously Funny. This Season 1 clip, never released on home video, shows the end of an early sketch explaining why Tom and Dick Smothers were so daringly different. It’s “Billy the Kid’s Birthday Party,” in which Tom’s Billy wants to celebrate his birthday by making love to Belle Starr (guest star Janet Leigh), but that’s not acceptable on TV, so they kill him instead – accompanied by a tune provided by some other guest stars, Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel. See also: George Harrison visiting Tom and Dick unannounced in Exhibit 12 (TV 5); an entire display of Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour head writer Mason Williams’ poetry, journals, photography and other
Smothers-related material **ON DISPLAY**; five samples of Smothers Brothers clips (TV 7).

**TV 5**  **ROWAN & MARTIN'S LAUGH-IN** – 1967, NBC (C) – This variety series, hosted by Dan Rowan and Dick Martin, became TV's Number 1 show for a while, with its fast-paced editing style echoing the approach of Ernie Kovacs more than a decade before. Lily Tomlin and Goldie Hawn were shot to stardom by this series, and so was ukulele-playing Tiny Tim, shown here in his first appearance.

**TV 1**  **THE CAROL BURNETT SHOW** – 1967, CBS (C) – A sketch variety show that was popular and durable for a reason, it shied away from controversy and just had fun: One of its signature bits was waiting to see how, and when, Tim Conway would break up co-star Harvey Korman with an impish ad lib. Most famous of all from this show, though, was a *Gone with the Wind* parody driven home by Bob Mackie's inspired costume design. See it here.

**TV 2**  **MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS** – 1979, public TV import (C) – This sketch comedy series broke all the rules, and set ridiculously high standards for the next generation. Absurdity, surrealism, and parody co-existed and intermingled, often with no more to connect them than the ultimately famous tag line, “And now for something completely different.” Terry Gilliam provided the stunningly original animation; the other Python members supplied the rest, including Michael Palin removing his barber smock to sing of his true life's passion in “The Lumberjack Song.” Headphones highly recommended.

**TV 3**  **SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE** – 1975, NBC (C) – This is the show that got me into the TV critic game. Some 40 years later, it's still going – and at this writing, so am I. Here's a famous Season 1 sketch, with Not Ready for Prime Time Player Chevy Chase conducting a job interview with guest host Richard Pryor. **See also:** My initial *Saturday Night Live* review for *The Gainesville Sun*, **ON DISPLAY**.

**TV 4**  **SECOND CITY TV** – 1976, syndicated (C) – This show had the perfect premise for a variety sketch series: presenting the antics, off camera as well as on, at a small TV station. What a show, and what a cast: John Candy, Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, Andrea Martin, Dave Thomas, Harold Ramis and Joe Flaherty, joined later by Rick Moranis and Martin Short. Brilliantly
performed from the start – as with this Season 1 sketch, featuring O’Hara and Martin in an educational TV show called “English for Beginners.”

TV 5 THE MUPPET SHOW – 1976, syndicated (C) – This series came out the same year as Second City TV, and had a very similar premise: the onstage and backstage efforts of “putting on a show,” but this time with a Muppet, Kermit the Frog, as the master of ceremonies. When I was young, I loved the peripheral characters most: the Swedish Chef, for example, and Statler and Waldorf. Now that I’m old, I realize I’ve become Statler and Waldorf.

PERSONAL SNAPSHOTs IN TV HISTORY

Exhibit 10

TV 1 THE CHILDREN’S CORNER – 1953, WQED Pittsburgh/ syndicated – Fred Rogers was the unseen puppeteer whose hand puppets interacted with host Josie Carey on this locally produced children’s show. I was locally produced that year as well, by my parents, and this show is my earliest TV memory. Here’s a clip from 1955, which I probably saw when it was first televised, when I was 2. See also: Fred Rogers in a very serious Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood special from 1968, in Exhibit 2 (TV 2); Rogers defending public TV on Capitol Hill, in Exhibit 13 (TV 2); and Fred Rogers’ original sneakers and sweater, ON DISPLAY.

TV 2 CAPTAIN KANGAROO – 1955, CBS – Bob Keeshan hosted this very sweet children’s show, which featured puppets (Mr. Moose and Bunny Rabbit), human co-stars (Mr. Green Jeans), stories read aloud, and the animated adventures of Tom Terrific. See also: a cel-preparation sketch drawing of Tom Terrific, ON DISPLAY.

TV 3 THE MICKEY MOUSE CLUB – 1955, ABC – Like most kids my age, I loved this show. When it was revived for a new generation, from 1989-1994 by the Disney Channel, its Mouseketeer stars included Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Justin Timberlake, Ryan Gosling, Keri Russell and J.C. Chasez. But my version had Annette Funicello, and that great opening sequence...

TV 4 PETER PAN – 1955, NBC (C) – Mary Martin reprised her 1954 Broadway starring role for this NBC special, alongside Cyril Richard as Captain Hook – first in a live 1955 production, then again a year later, and finally in a 1960 color version captured on
videotape. That's the one shown here — and the one I reviewed positively in my diary, at age 6. And during the course of this exhibition, I'll get to review Peter Pan again: NBC is mounting a
now live TV production on Dec. 4, starring Allison Williams and Christopher Walken. See also: My diary and its obsessive TV entries, ON DISPLAY.

**TV 5** THE WIZARD OF OZ – 1956, CBS (C) – This classic 1939 musical first was shown on TV in 1956, then again, annually, from 1959-1962, and almost every year since. When I saw it as a kid, it was on a black-and-white television set — so I had no idea, when Dorothy landed in Oz, that anything changed but the scenery. The “horse of a different color” joke? Totally lost on me, until years later. See also: My diary and its obsessive TV entries, ON DISPLAY.

**TV 1** GILLIGAN’S ISLAND – 1964, CBS (C) – For most viewers of this show, the basic sex symbol debate comes down to “Ginger vs. Mary Ann.” Watching as I approached my teens, I preferred Tina Louise’s Ginger — but was fascinated, most of all, by the episode in which I wasn’t forced to choose: the one in which Dawn Wells, as Mary Ann, temporarily thought she was Ginger, and dressed and acted accordingly.

**TV 2** I DREAM OF JEANIE – 1965, NBC (C) – I don’t know what it says about me (but it certainly says something), that when it came to both Barbara Eden on this show, and Elizabeth Montgomery on Bewitched, I was much less attracted to those stars’ blonde protagonists than to their trouble-making brunette doppelgängers: Samantha’s cousin Serena on Bewitched, and Jeannie’s evil sister, the unimaginatively named Jeannie II, on this sitcom. See also: The I Dream of Jeannie Barbie doll, ON DISPLAY.

**TV 3** BATMAN – 1966, ABC (C) – Julie Newmar as Catwoman? For most male viewers my age, and to more than a few female ones, this selection is self-explanatory. Besides, anything else I admit here can only come back to haunt me. See also: The TV CONFESSIONAL.

**TV 4** THE AVENGERS – 1966, ABC – This is sort of a cheat, because this was a black-and-white episode of The Avengers, starring Diana Rigg as the ultra-alluring secret agent Emma Peel, that didn’t arrive stateside until years later. Her color episodes, with her mod costumes and liberated feistiness, were eye-catching
enough — but had I seen this episode then, with the outfit she wore as she went (barely) undercover, I may not have survived. Incidentally, I interviewed Diana Rigg decades later, when she was host of the PBS series *Mystery!*, and she couldn’t have been more lovely. See also: The TV CONFESSIONAL.

TV 5 NOXZEMA SHAVING AD — 1967, all networks (C) — If the name Gunilla Knutsson doesn’t ring a bell, if you were around in the Sixties, her face and voice, in this sexy ad for shaving cream, surely will. “Take it off. Take it all off…”

TV 1 THE TWILIGHT ZONE — 1959, CBS — This show rocked me early, and often. There’s a whole book to be written about lessons learned from Rod Serling’s *The Twilight Zone*. (I know, because a TV critic friend of mine, Mark Dawidziak, is writing it.) Serling’s ominous introductions to his inventive tales are absolutely iconic — as are many of the stories’ twist endings, as in this one from “To Serve Man.” See also: Rod Serling’s typewriter, and an overview of his many impressive credits, ON DISPLAY.

TV 2 THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW — 1964, CBS — This series actually began in 1948 as *Toast of the Town*, and continued as *Ed Sullivan Show* from 1955 to 1971. But I want to focus on one show, and one evening: Feb. 9, 1964, the night Sullivan presented The Beatles on live TV to American audiences for the first time — and broke all viewing records, while helping to sell millions more Beatles records in the process. I saw that show that night, and began a love affair with The Beatles that has never waned. See also: A lifetime of Beatles art and memorabilia, ON DISPLAY, and an overview of The Beatles on American TV (TV 9).

TV 3 DEATH OF A SALESMAN — 1966, CBS (C) — This production of the Arthur Miller Broadway play, starring Lee J. Cobb as Willy Loman, stunned me when I saw it then, as most subsequent stage revivals have done since. Directed by Alex Segal, and co-starring Mildred Dunnock, George Segal, James Farentino and Bernie Kopell, it still packs power — and its messages are even more relevant.

TV 4 MARK TWAIN TONIGHT! — 1967, CBS (C) — The same year I read Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in junior high, I saw Hal Holbrook embody Twain in this CBS presentation of his brilliant one-man show. I’ve been hooked on Twain ever since, and,
in recent years, have gotten to interact with Holbrook as well, seeing him both on stage as Twain and privately as himself.

**TV 6** THE SMOTHERS BROTHERS COMEDY HOUR – 1967, CBS (C) – No TV program influenced me more when I was young: Every episode introduced me to new and exciting ideas about art, music, politics, entertainment, and much more. What this show tried to do and say was important, even (especially) as it was being prevented from doing so. George Harrison, dropping by unannounced for a show of support, says it better. See also: the end if "Billy the Kid's Birthday Party," a controversial Season 1 sketch, in Exhibit 8 (TV 4); an entire display of Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour head writer Mason Williams' poetry, journals, photography and other Smothers-related material ON DISPLAY; five samples of Smothers Brothers clips (TV 7).

**RANDOM ACTS OF TV BRILLIANCE**

**Exhibit 13**

**TV 1** THE DICK VAN DYKE SHOW – 1961, CBS – Carl Reiner created this smart, modern sitcom, using his own experiences working on Sid Caesar's Your Show of Shows to fuel the story lines for Van Dyke's character, comedy writer and family man Rob Petrie. Rob's wife, Laura, was played by Mary Tyler Moore – and at work, his boss was played by Reiner, who, in this classic episode from 1965, was outed as a bald man by Laura on national TV. *(Time: 3m 16s)*

**TV 2** FRED ROGERS TESTIFIES – 1969 (C) – On Capitol Hill, in front of the Communications Subcommittee, relatively unknown children's TV host Fred Rogers testifies on behalf of public television. He's hoping to persuade Sen. John Pastore, the chairman, to approve the $20 million funding for public TV – and he does so, singlehandedly. Use the headphones for this one. See also: Fred Rogers in a very serious Mister Rogers' Neighborhood special from 1968, in Exhibit 2 (TV 2); Fred Rogers as puppeteer on The Children's Corner, in Exhibit 10 (TV 1); and Fred Rogers' original sneakers and sweater, ON DISPLAY. *(Time: 6m 59s)*

**TV 3** DUEL – 1971, ABC (C) – Four years before he directed Jaws, Steven Spielberg made this made-for-TV dry run: The story, written by Richard Matheson, of a meek driver (Dennis Weaver) terrorized by an unseen trucker at the wheel of what amounts to a virtual killing machine. Think great white shark, only on land – then
think of the ending of *Jaws*, and watch this, which came first. *(Time: 4m)*

**TV 4** THE POINT – 1971, ABC (C) – Harry Nilsson wrote the music and lyrics, as well as the basic story, for this charming animated fable about a little boy named Oblo who doesn’t fit in because his head is round, unlike all the pointy-headed people around him. He’s banished, and sets out on a series of adventures, because he doesn’t have a point – but this full-length telemovie cartoon, animated by Fred Wolf, sure does. “Me and My Arrow” came from this TV special, but I prefer this very strange number: “Think about Your Troubles,” a song about, among other things, a decomposing whale. *(Time: 2m 15s)*

**TV 5** CONNECTIONS – 1977, PBS import (C) – James Burke hosted and wrote this fascinating science and history series, in which he traced the “connections” among various events and ideas. This opening episode, inspired by the New York City blackout that paralyzed most of the city earlier that year, had Burke asking a series of questions about what viewers would do if the electricity never came back on. And every question gets a little more terrifying... which explains why, in time, his powerful (and powerless) hypothetical spawned more than one modern horror movie. *(Time: 4m 3s)*

**TV 1** ST. ELSEWHERE – 1982, NBC (C) – Arguably the best drama series of the 1980s, this series, eventually overseen by Tom Fontana and Mark Tinker, ended with a finale every bit as incendiary as the cut-to-black ending of *The Sopranos* decades later. Dr. Westphall (Ed Flanders) returns to St. Eligius Hospital, with his autistic teen son Tommy (Chad Allen) in tow, at the invitation of former mentor and colleague Dr. Auschlander (Norman Lloyd), only to discover that Auschlander has died suddenly. In Auschlander’s office, Westphall listens to Auschlander’s beloved opera music while Tommy looks out the window at the unseasonable snow – then the scene shakes, and shifts, and suddenly we’re in another reality altogether, with Flanders playing a construction worker, Lloyd his father, and Chad as the autistic boy, staring at a snow globe, which turns out to house a miniature of the exterior building of St. Eligius. **See also:** the snow globe from *St. Elsewhere*, ON EXHIBIT. *(Time: 2m 27s)*

**TV 2** WHO AM I THIS TIME? – 1982, American Playhouse, PBS (C) – This early production of one of TV’s all-time best anthology
series adapted a Kurt Vonnegut short story about a meek man and
woman who became totally transformed by the roles they played in
community theater. It took great acting to bring the story’s idea to
life, and this production had it, thanks to a couple of young
performers named Christopher Walken and Susan Sarandon. See
also: a letter from, and artwork by and of, Kurt Vonnegut, ON
EXHIBIT. (Time: 3m 52s)

TV 3  THE COSBY SHOW – 1984, NBC (C) – This Bill Cosby
sitcom changed the face of TV in the Eighties, shifting it to an era of
TV comedy in which father did know best. And it did so with a
smile, with a knowing sense of responsibility to present positive
role models, and with occasional brilliant set pieces – as this
Season 2 one, in which the family gives the grandparents an
anniversary gift of a lively bit of lip-synching. Headphones definitely
preferred. (Time: 2m 35s)

TV 4  THE SINGING DETECTIVE – 1986, BBC / 1988, public TV
(C) – Still, in my opinion, the best drama ever written especially for
television. Dennis Potter is the author, and he suffered in real life
from the painful skin disease he gave to his pulp-fiction-writing
novelist, Philip Marlow (played to stunning perfection by Michael
Gambon). No single clip can reflect the levels of true drama,
surrealistic fantasy, and musical mayhem that make up this
astounding miniseries – but this one, showing us one of Philip’s
descents into hallucinations, comes close. See also: Potter’s The
Singing Detective and Pennies From Heaven TV posters, ON
EXHIBIT; Potter’s final TV interview, conducted as he was about to
die, in Exhibit 15 (TV 4). (Time: 4m 15s)

TV 5  JOSEPH CAMPBELL AND THE POWER OF MYTH WITH
BILL MOYERS – 1988, PBS (C) – Bill Moyers interviewed
mythologist Joseph Campbell, who distilled a lifetime of learning
and teaching into this series of inspirational discussions. This is the
point where Campbell advises people to “follow your bliss” –
something I finally realize, thanks to this exhibition, that by
becoming a TV critic, I’ve been doing all along. (Time: 2m 11s)
Bianculli's Personal Theory of TV Evolution

Exhibit 15

TV 1 TWIN PEAKS – 1990, ABC (C) – David Lynch, partnering with Mark Frost, made a TV series so singularly strange, so utterly memorable, and so flat-out unique that other, lesser series have been compared to it ever since. Now we have word that Lynch is reviving Twin Peaks for the new century, and I can’t wait. Meanwhile, here’s a glimpse of the Red Room, courtesy of a dream by Dale Cooper (Kyle McLaughlin) that puts his older self in Another Place with an older Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) and a mysterious dancing man (Michael J. Anderson). (Time: 4m 18s)

TV 2 THE CIVIL WAR – 1990, PBS (C) – This is the nonfiction miniseries that made Ken Burns a household name, and has fueled his empire of fascinating filmmaking ever since. The Sullivan Ballou letter that closes out Episode 1, and is presented here, was such dramatic dynamite that Burns has kept a copy of it folded in his wallet, as a private talisman, ever since. See also: Ken Burns’ copy of the Sullivan Ballou letter, ON EXHIBIT. (Time: 3m 32s)

TV 3 NYPD BLUE – 1993, ABC (C) – Steven Bochco, David Milch and Mark Tinker all collaborated on this envelope-pushing cop show, which tried to combat the newfound freedom of cable TV by presenting more mature subject matter, images and language. This was evident from the start – in fact, from the opening scene, featuring Dennis Franz as rogue cop Andy Sipowicz. See also: the original NYPD Blue precinct sign, ON EXHIBIT. (Time: 3m 52s)

TV 4 DENNIS POTTER: THE LAST INTERVIEW – 1994, public TV import (C) – Conducted by Melvyn Bragg for England’s Channel 4, this interview with Dennis Potter, the writer of such TV miniseries masterpieces as Pennies from Heaven and The Singing Detective, was recorded only three months before his death from pancreatic cancer. He was in such pain that he swigged liquid morphine during the interview, yet managed to talk not only coherently, but also lyrically, about art, TV, life, death – and the beauty of the blossoms outside his window. See also: Potter’s The Singing Detective and Pennies From Heaven TV posters, ON EXHIBIT; Potter’s The Singing Detective, on Exhibit 14 (TV 4). (Time: 3m)

TV 5 THE WEST WING – 1999, NBC (C) – Aaron Sorkin’s political drama hit the ground running, and provided a level of acting, writing and directing that spearheaded what will, or should, come to be known as The Platinum Age of Television. This clip is from the pilot, with Martin Sheen making his first entrance as a fictional, but admirable, President of the United States. (Time: 4m 10s)
Exhibit 16

**RANDOM BRILLIANCE IV**

*Time: varies*

**TV 1**  *THE SOPRANOS* – 1999, HBO (C) – David Chase’s HBO cable series demanded that dramas made for cable should be considered not only equal to series made for broadcast TV, but superior to almost all of them. The opening credits set the scene, and the mood, and James Gandolfini, from his very first therapy session as Tony Soprano with Lorraine Bracco’s Dr. Melfi, hammered it home. *(Time: 4m 25s)*

**TV 2**  *CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM* – 1999, HBO (C) – Larry David, co-creator of *Seinfeld*, had lightning strike again with this equally brilliant and groundbreaking comedy series, in which he plays an exaggerated version of himself. And nothing demonstrated the audacious bravery of *Curb* than to build an entire season around Larry becoming the latest star of the stage production of Mel Brooks’ *The Producers* – only to have it revealed, at the end, to be a scheme by Mel Brooks and his wife, Anne Bancroft, to cast the worst actor they could find to finally end the play’s Broadway run. *(Time: 1m 50s)*

**TV 3**  *MAD MEN* – 2007, AMC (C) – Matt Weiner’s period drama put the AMC network on the map, and made Jon Hamm, as smooth but mysterious ad executive Don Draper, a star. And when the writing and acting mesh as well as they do in this scene, in which Don proposes a new name, and campaign, for a Kodak slide projector, it all seems inevitable. *See also: Mad Men* Barbie dolls, ON EXHIBIT. *(Time: 3m 50s)*

**TV 4**  *BREAKING BAD* – 2008, AMC (C) – If *Mad Men* put AMC on the map, Vince Gilligan’s *Breaking Bad* expanded the territory tremendously. This series gets my vote as the greatest TV drama series ever made – as stunning at the end as it was at the start. Here’s the start, introducing us, in a very dramatic flash-forward sort of scene, to Bryan Cranston as Walter White. *See also:* the original *Breaking Bad* scene-by-scene writers’-room breakdown of the series finale, ON EXHIBIT. *(Time: 4m 10s)*

**TV 5**  *THE GOOD WIFE* – 2009, CBS (C) – Currently the best drama series on broadcast network television, created by Robert and Michelle King and starring Julianna Margulies, is so superb that it can present one of the best scenes of the year – any year – without its star even being included. It focuses on the final courtroom case by Josh Charles’ Will Gardner – and if you’re a season behind on this show, maybe you should avert your eyes. But why are you behind, when a show is this good? *(Time: 4m)*
TV 1  LOUIE — 2010, FX (C) — Louis C.K.'s comedy is as hard to describe as it is enjoyable to watch. I marvel at the level of acting, and writing, and at the willingness to take risks to achieve mood, not just get laughs. Here's a perfect example, but you'll need headphones. It's the one where Louie has been seeing a woman in his building who speaks no English — but when he introduces her to his daughter, the two women instantly find a common language. (Time: 2m 57s)

TV 2  JUSTIFIED — 2010, FX (C) — Graham Yost's expansion of a character from an Elmore Leonard short story has proven so potent that Leonard himself, before he died, contributed to the series and wrote a new story about U.S. Marshal Raylan Givens. Timothy Olyphant plays him with just the right amount of cockiness and menace, and in this scene, enters a dangerous situation outnumbered by two potential killers, only to have one of them suddenly, and literally, disarmed. (Time: 4m 10s)

TV 3  THE WALKING DEAD — 2010, AMC (C) — This has become cable's most-watched drama series, and more popular than most broadcast dramas, as well. And no wonder. From the moment the hero, Sheriff Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln), awoke from a coma into a terrifying new world, this series hasn't stepped off the gas, or held back on the tension. See also: a Walking Dead DVD special collector's item. ON DISPLAY. (Time: 5m 55s)

TV 4  TRUE DETECTIVE — 2014, HBO (C) — For the first season of this new anthology drama series (with each year presenting a different story), True Detective started off giving meaty starring roles to Woody Harrelson and Matthew McConaughey — the latter of whom won an Emmy. This early scene is when the two cops were paired on what turned out to be the start of a very grisly murder case. See also: a personalized True Detective “evidence box” and hanging “ornament,” courtesy of HBO. ON EXHIBIT. (Time: 1m 32s)

TV 5  THE SIMPSONS — 2014, Fox (C) — It was seeing Stanley Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange, when it was released in theaters in 1971, that made me want to be a critic, because I read everything I could find about that film, in an effort to understand why I found it so disturbing, yet so impressive. (Final Answer: It's okay, sometimes, to be both.) So it's fitting, as the latest and last entry in this personalized TV WALL, that I end with part of a segment from “Treehouse of Horror XXV” on The Simpsons — a superbly detailed parody of Kubrick's futuristic masterpiece, called, of course, “A Clockwork Yellow.” See also: the Christmas special that launched...
The Simpsons as a full-length show, in Exhibit 3 (TV 4); and a ridiculous number of Simpsons cels, swag, plates and other collectibles, ON DISPLAY. (Time: 3m 3s)