

● "DON'T

BELIEVE

THE HYPE"

●
An exploration of style and form in informational television and their relationship with content.

● DAVID JORDAN

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

'DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE'
An exploration of style and form in informational
television and their relationship with content

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:
THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN
& COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR DEGREE

FACULTY OF DESIGN
DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

BY
DAVID JORDAN

MARCH 1989

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION		4
CHAPTER ONE	Children's Programming	6
CHAPTER TWO	Documentary Programming	10
CHAPTER THREE	Feature Programmes	15
CHAPTER FOUR	News	21
CHAPTER FIVE	Current Affairs	30
CHAPTER SIX	Youth Orientated Programmes	36
CONCLUSION		42
FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES		45
BIBLIOGRAPHY		47

INTRODUCTION

Television conveys to the viewer a range of impressions indicating something about the nature of programmes, whether this be specific information or an abstract concept, through a grammar of designed visual services and music, and in the way in which they are arranged through editing. This is as true for individual programmes as for television channels in general. This stylistic language is used as a legitimate means of increasing the accessibility of subject matter. In the past these individual aspects were not fully appreciated however. For example the work of the graphic design department was considered only as a way of labeling programmes rather than as a fully fledged component of the production process and finished product.

Through experience, innovation and technological advances within the medium and the influence of other media such as cinema, the facility within these areas to enable the development of a more accomplished finished product has given rise to a modern awareness of style within the medium and a consequent appreciation of it. This together with the development of a new aesthetic, within other media, has combined to produce a shift from content (and the servile role of the visual services) to an emphasis on style which can be compared to the genre of the art film, some of which have been accused of losing sight of content by an over emphasis on the cinematic form. Television entertainment has utilised this and programmes such as 'Miami Vice' who owe their popularity more to visual style and music than to any characterisation or story are an example, and indeed are as much successful types of entertainment as many of these art films are highly memorable aesthetic pieces.

Television however provides not just entertainment but information in one guise or another. The medium like any other conveyor of information naturally colours its output in a way which renders it different from reality, usually as a result of various practical drawbacks such as the two dimensionality of the screen and its limited size. But programme makers have a duty to ensure that this is kept to a minimum with as faithful a representation of reality or a truth being conveyed as possible. Yet other concerns effect the way in which this information

is conveyed apart from a wish to fulfill the programmes primary remit and these are exemplified by an apparent preoccupation with packaging and production of content to the apparent detriment of the dissemination of the information.

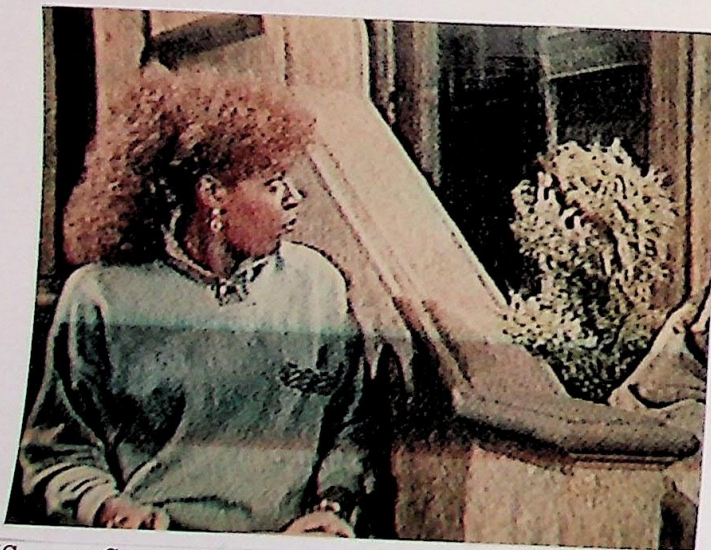
To demonstrate these trends I have analysed six television genres in which they appear to a greater or lesser extent with the use of specific programmes as examples. These are mainly of Irish or British origin but are set in the wider context with reference to output from farther afield.

CHAPTER ONE

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING



1 'Dempsey's Den' (RTE) Ian Dempsey, RTE Radio 2 discjockey co-presents childrens programmes on RTE Television with two puppets.

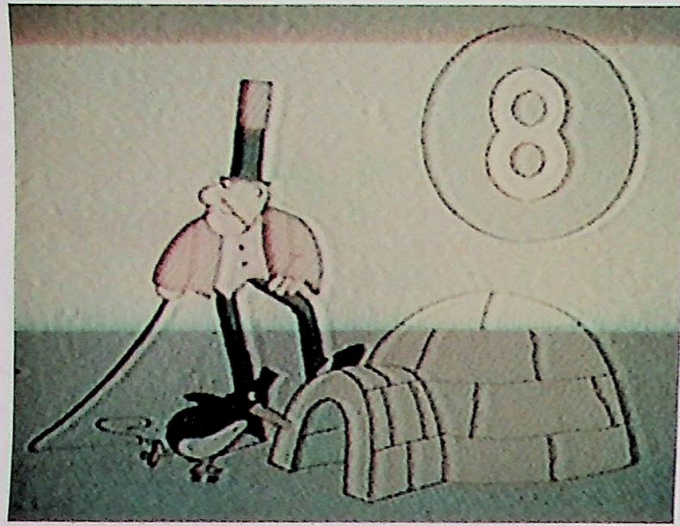


2 'Sesame Street' (CTW). Puppet and human characters interact.

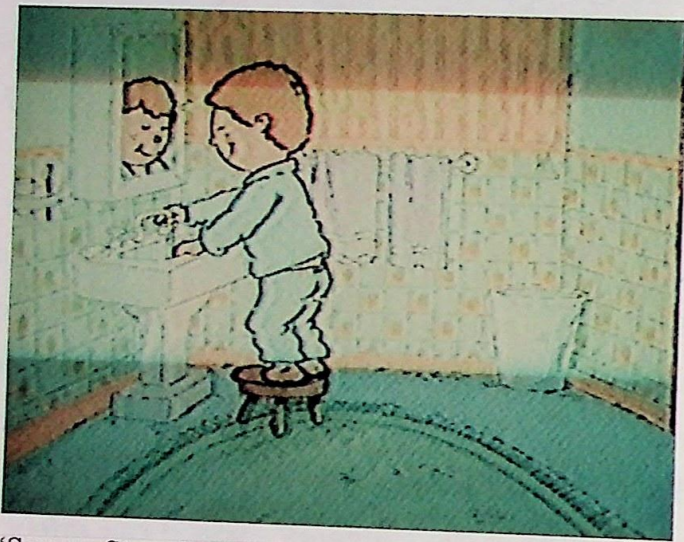
Switch on the television in the late afternoon or on a Saturday morning and undoubtedly you will have entered a nether world of childrens programming where perpetually bright and happy young people (generally with a background in disc-jockeying for radio programmes) introduce programmes to cater for a range of age groups from the illiterate and innumerate to highly educated and inquisitive young people. All the programmes have in common a form which reflects the ongoing quest to cater for a short attention span with a wide range of mental and visual stimuli. Television naturally attracts the very young thanks to its constantly moving and changing images irrespective of whether the content is understood or not. Nevertheless even the very young soon become fastidious about what they will and indeed what they will not watch.

The highest proportion of scheduling is made up of programmes whose purpose is principally that of entertainment. Naturally enough though an awareness of the opinion forming nature of all aspects of the world in which a child interacts dictates that the makers of television specially aimed at the very young must be aware of this and be seen to reflect in the content certain views which society sees as being desirable. Accordingly a 'Masters of the Universe' cartoon can safely depict sexism and violence once the character at the end of the programme is in the position to be able to show a moral in the story such as how co-operation won the day.

The use of cartoon and puppet characters is common to much programming for younger viewers, even those which seek to contribute to education. Under the aegis of public service broadcasting, networks supply an ammount of didactic based childrens programming which operates outside the schools television system, during the times that mainstream children's television is broadcast. During these times children are usually in the position to make their own decisions on what to watch and in these circumstances producers feel the need to rely on means such as the use of puppet characters to sugar the pill so to speak, of



3 'Sesame Street' (CTW). Still from animated insert to teach the number eight.



4 'Sesame Street' (CTW). Still from animated insert designed to teach abstract concepts.



5 Still from an animated insert broadcast during 'Bosco' (RTE) designed to teach the sounds of letters in the alphabet.

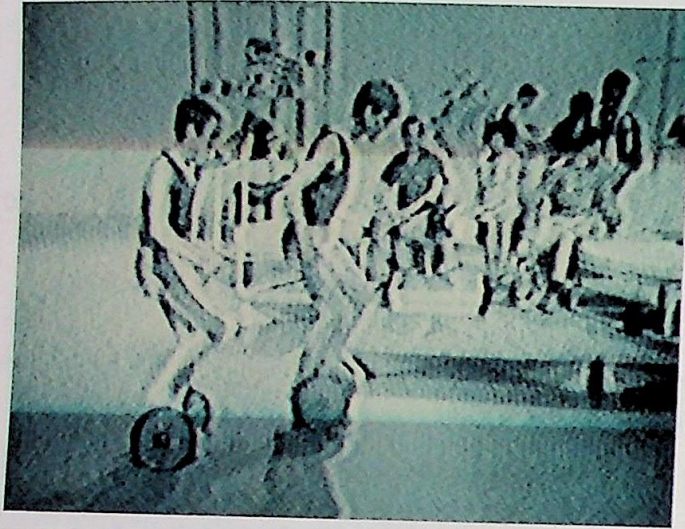
the education content. The classic example is 'Sesame Street' the U.S. 'Childrens Television Workshop' production, a programme largely funded by government agencies and private charitable foundations, which numerous others programme producers have used as their model.

Research showed that a certain format would appeal to young children and accordingly it consisted of an interaction between puppet and human characters to comically illustrate the use of numbers and the alphabet.¹ The comedy and appealing aspects inherent in the expert puppetry of Jim Henson was echoed in the animated inserts which punctuated the purposely fast pace. The racially balanced mix of presenters and of children in the studio environment and in filmed inserts, together with the highly developed characters which the puppets became, was also used to present abstract concepts and exercises in problem solving.

The format with its sheer variety and pace was certainly succesful in so far as it was popular with children and found appeal beyond the economically disadvantaged ethnic and racial minorities in the U.S. to which it was originally aimed. This was even to the extent of exerting a worldwide influence, as the pronunciation of the letter 'Z' by those under thirty in this country would attest. In the modern version the same format is followed religiously even if 'Kermit the Frog' has gone on to better things. The programme length has been curtailed to one hour, yet it is still broadcast daily thanks to the utilisation of the library of inserts which have been produced over the years.

In the exposition of rudimentaries such a format, as is also used to a limited extent on 'Bosco' (RTE), is tolerable within the limits of its own context. However in modern educational programmes aimed at a slightly older audience such as 'Panic Stations' (ITV), more complex concepts about the workings of the physical world are presented, and in a modified form. The commercial climate in which they are broadcast, even in this area, is one in which the channels cannot risk losing ratings.

In 'Panic Stations' the 'Spitting Image' like puppets and their comic interaction account for a large proportion of the programme, leaving those sections whose function is to explain ideas or theories neither the time nor the atmosphere in



6 'Blue Peter' (BBC) A still from a 1960's programme.



7 'Blue Peter' (BBC) A still from a 1980's programme. In twenty years the format of the programme has remained the same.

which this can take place on little more than a superficial level. The puppet sequences do not deal with issues raised in the educational sections but rather serve as a link and an interest sustain between them. However such deficiencies in which a programme begins to lose sight of its didactic remit as it relies to an increasing extent on its form is not likely to have any real detrimental effect in itself. It is unlikely that a child would have had to rely on such a programme to find out specifics such as why a hot air balloon rises or would have any practical use for such knowledge. But that is not the point. In the wider context of education where similar techniques are not used children whose interest was maintained by such means would find it difficult to concentrate or would not want to concentrate on something which could be inherently boring. These televisual techniques are never used to teach mathematical theories but rather to dramatise historical events complete with period costume or else exciting natural phenomenon with props and special effects. In short the education is limited to visually stimulating subjects.

Magazine programmes for the slightly older young viewer have long been in the tradition of 'Blue Peter' (BBC) and many similar programmes have come and gone over the years such as RTE's 'Youngline'. Despite shortcomings in its middle-class image perpetuated by the presenters and the production style together with an unchanging, unfashionable graphic style, 'Blue Peter' did deal with a range of entertaining and informing subject matter which could not have been accessed anywhere else. If anything rather than hindering the content, the visual style and its components found themselves left behind by the content. This is highlighted when viewed in comparison with a newer programme such as 'Splash' (ITV) in which for example the opening titles sum up the range and depth of the content covered, while suggesting the contemporary style in which they are treated (Fig. 8). A programme such as 'Joe-Maxi' (RTE), due to budgetary constraints, perhaps finds itself in the same situation as 'Blue Peter' with interesting and informative subjects being discussed while the format struggles to keep up. However these sorts of programmes acted as the roots for the development of magazine and current affairs programmes of real relevance to an older age group who formally had found little on television applicable to their everyday concerns. A major difference was in the way which producers now



8 'Splash' (ITV), opening titles.



9 'Neighbours' (Grundy TV) Australia, still from the opening titles.

viewed the subject - not as television for older children but for younger adults. This awareness on television of 'youth' will be more fully discussed in a later chapter.

The most recent revolution in the way that children watch television has not been the use of the remote control or the extra choice of channels, but the appeal that 'adult' programmes hold. In former years children's interest in the television waned as soon as the early evening news began but now such dramas as 'Neighbours' (Grundy TV, Australia) are as popular with very young children as with their parents or older brothers and sisters. This phenomenon raises the question as to whether the intellectual level of children has risen or whether such adult drama has developed attributes appealing to children, such as those mentioned above. If this is the case then to what extent does this trend hold true for information programmes, in a world which has seen the 'Sesame Street' 'Muppets' become stars in their own right amongst adults?

In these programmes the plot often deals with emotion and personality in a way which appeals to children, and in a way which is only slightly less simplistic than on 'Sesame St.' Yet in both cases, children should be discerning enough to realise that this is the case and so to treat the plot as fiction. It is much more likely that they learn how to interact on an emotional level from their actual interaction with other children and with authority figures. Therefore these aspects of programmes are watched by the very young purely on an entertainment level and could only be treated as such by children who realise that the subject matter is fiction. Otherwise they would definitely be emotionally scared by the upheavals which the characters in these soaps go through. In fact children are capable of understanding more complex plots with a wider range of ingredients than that which is presented to them in their own schedules. The trend is to sanitise the treatment of some subject matter and thus bullying, which actually happens in the school yard, is not often portrayed in drama for children which depicts the school yard situation. Even in classic fairy tales, like Penocchio and Cinderella, in which violence, death and horror actually occur, the modern dramatisations of such features are diluted so as not to damage the impressionable and fragile minds of the young. The least that children deserve is neither a sanitised, 'adults know best', television service nor its use as a hard sell medium by manufacturers.

CHAPTER TWO

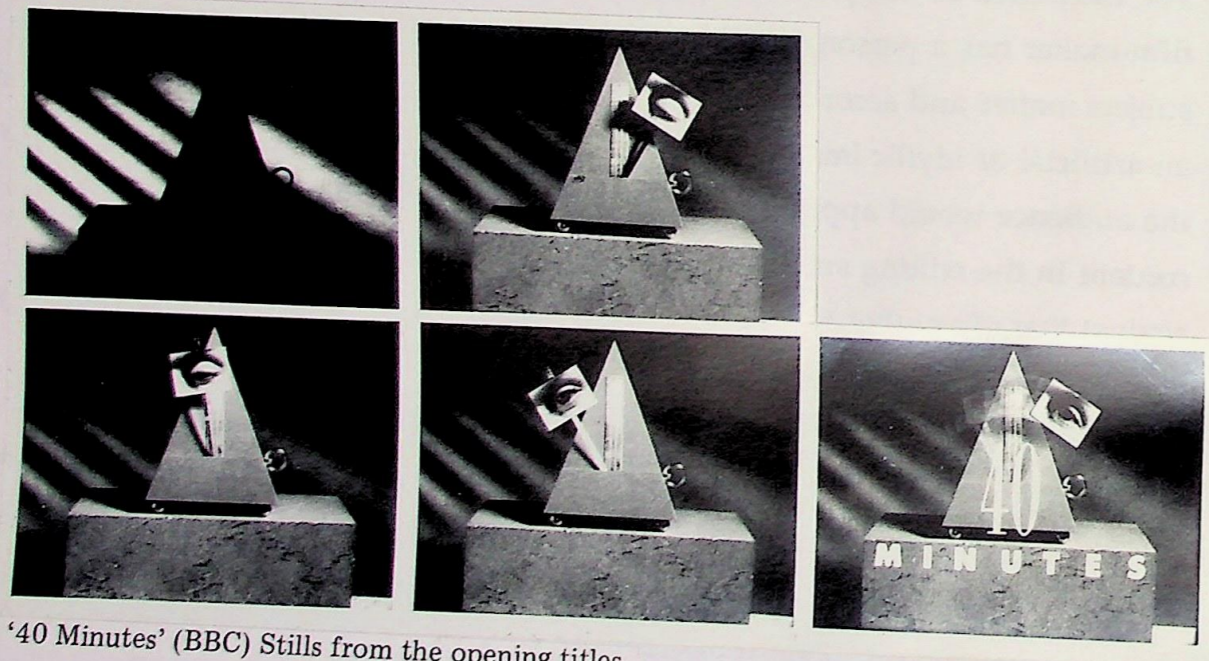
DOCUMENTARY PROGRAMMING

The main stay of British documentary television are 'series' such as 'World in Action' and '40 Minutes' which address different subjects on a weekly or a monthly basis. In these circumstances one theme is explored with the intention of conveying an authoritative grasp of the subject in question to the viewer in which context and background are explored. Hence the audience are put in a position to form an opinion where otherwise they would not have been. These programmes by the nature of the background research and preparation necessary, usually months in advance, consume extensive investments of time and resources. This is even more true for the more intense version of the documentary, in which one subject is explored to a much more comprehensive extent over a number of weeks. These one off 'serials' can take years to prepare and allow in depth and wide ranging exposition in which argument and counter argument can be presented, with background and effect explained. They are as relevant for subjects as diverse as politics, culture, or even nature study, and that before the environment became such a live issue.

The drawback of this production format has often been that the documentary film-maker has a personal interest or at least a strong personal opinion on the subject matter and accordingly can be tempted even if unconsciously, to produce an artificial or idyllic image of that which he or she would appreciate or thinks the audience would appreciate. This could be undertaken by the manipulation of content in the editing suite where somebody's opinion could be juxtaposed against that of another to produce the impression of a meaning not intended by either interviewee, or by taking two images out of context to a similar end. Eventually the subjective reflection of reality or balance of opinion on a contentious issue is lost. This is a much more subtle effect than the obvious and conspicuous means used by the 'father of documentary' - Robert Flaherty in the 1930's where the subject matter was a figment of his imagination, loosely based on a romantic ideal. Yet modern documentary on television can be directly traced



10 'World in Action' (Granada), Stills from the opening titles.



11 '40 Minutes' (BBC) Stills from the opening titles.

back to these beginnings.

Documentaries in Britain have had to use reconstruction in many situations to properly show the actions and the nuances of motivation which a verbal description could not fully describe. In court proceedings of controversial cases which have had implications beyond the particular circumstances being addressed, this procedure has been extensively used, especially when transcripts and other relevant data has been to hand. Such an example has recently been the dramatisation of the British Crown's prosecution against a London art gallery proprietor and an artist, for outraging public decency by including two freeze dried fetuses in a piece, as broadcast in the Channel Four arts documentary series 'Signals'. The press and television reports did not fully explain the limited extent to which the defense could use witnesses to describe the artistic merit of the sculpture or even to describe it as a sculpture. Such subtleties of what the judge ruled as admissible had not been explained in other modes of reporting but the reconstruction did elaborate on such points.

During a recent experiment in the United States cameras were allowed into a court room to televise, not just a run of the mill case, but one in which all the ingredients of melodrama were present plus some more. Love, death, and drugs all featured in the live daily broadcast of the 'Steinberg Trial' in which a man was accused of causing the death of his adopted daughter while on a drug binge with his lover (Fig. 12). It attracted great audiences and showed the workings of the judicial system in that part of the world, but it soon became nothing more than a spectacle for the audience and served no other function. The reconstruction of the British case was one which concerned the function of art, the use of a controversial technique to provoke thought (which is ironic when considered in the context of this discussion), and real issues effecting the way in which we can express ourselves. American television makers in this particular instance had the opportunity to provide the same function except on a first hand basis without the need for a dramatised reconstruction, by broadcasting a courtcase with real implications. Instead it was sacrificed to achieving high ratings with sensation and very little else. At the very least the courtcase should have been treated in a way sympathetic to the memory of the dead child and to the defendant who had not yet been found guilty.

The tradition of reconstruction techniques naturally led some years ago towards



12 'Steinberg Trial' The man tried on live television.
of the murder of his step-daughter

programmes in which reporters, captions and presenters disappeared altogether leaving the programmes looking more like pieces of drama than documentary. 'Faction' was feared by the establishment when it first emerged on the basis of honesty and authenticity, and just for challenging the neatly delineated televisual forms of the time. Indeed the format could have presented dubious ideas but only in the ways which drama and forms of entertainment could always have done and continue to do. But for the most part it was used to further a social conscience and to present ideas and situations from the real world which could not have been within reach of a mass audience in other circumstances.

The broadcast of 'Elephant' on BBC2 illustrates that the form still causes controversy in 1989. The film showed the cold ritual killings of people in Northern Ireland one after another in twelve minute vignettes, for the duration of the programme without any comment or dialogue. The actual killings were based on real murders and sought to bring the reality or unreality of the situation, as unreal as "an elephant in your sitting room",¹ to the viewers in Britain in a way the newscasts can no longer do and to comment on the numbing effect of the violence. Predictably enough it was criticised for portraying violence, by those too blinkered to look beyond the portrayals of death to see the intended function of the programme.

Yet the power to manipulate that which is a subjective reality is all too easy on television. It can have dubious effects when it claims to represent reality in a way which is flawed and therefore likely to influence opinion in a way which is inconsistent with some form of the truth. However once the viewer realises the situation or is informed of it, the effect of faction can be no more damaging than a straight documentary. Screening that part of an interview which supports one argument is as artificial as dramatising a reality from a certain viewpoint to the exclusion of another. The art style in which Errol Morris' recent film 'The Thin Blue Line' is shot supports his overall premise that a man named Randall Adams was wrongfully prosecuted for murder in Dallas. The result of a film which includes music by Philip Glass, and presents free monologues by the prosecution witnesses in the case is one which shows them as 'wacky' and inconsistent, thus completely undermining their testimonies. The stylistic reenactment of the murder scene together with an exclusion of presenters and graphic stills has

combined with the other constituents of the film to convince the relevant authorities that Adams should be set free. And yet the question begs nonetheless that just because it appears that in this case the man was wrongfully convicted and that the American film-maker Errol Morris has integrity, can a film-maker be trusted to use the techniques to convince us that something is the truth. It is not unreasonable to think that such artifice could be used to free a deserving prisoner or even to mould our opinions into a form not comensurate with the truth.

But this does not preclude the presentation of a personal theory by a film-maker on television to support a theory or personal opinion but rather the use of artificial ways to promote it.

These means can also be used to create an appeal amongst a possible audience irrespective of actual content or the subjective opinion of a producer. The 'Thames Television' six part series 'Crime Inc.' was a documentary on mobster and gang violence in the United States. The opening titles combined still frames of dead people and gorey parts thereof with an exploding Statue of Liberty to signify the collapse of American society (Fig. 13). Rather than suggesting the explanation and interpretation inherent in the content, it concentrated instead on attracting the ghoully voyeur in us all.

Yet techniques like these can be utilised to further quite noble motives, such as increasing the accessibility of a subject to those who otherwise would not be interested in such a programme or in being informed on such a subject. 'Q.E.D.' (BBC) which covers a diverse range of science subjects usually in the conventional method of a mixture between film with narration and interviews has treated the subject of a comparison of the level of intelligence between male and female in an unorthodox manner.² It was presented in a game show format which the programme treated in a tongue and cheek manner with audience participation and a wacky and jokey presentation style. The audience took part in tests which had obviously been rehearsed to find results previously established. There could be no sponteneity because the programme had to reflect a preconceived norm. If the games and tests were so obviously artificial than ultimately the lack of credibility transferred onto the results of the tests and the information itself. Together with this, the documentary function was ceded to a preoccupation with luring those whose staple diet of television is made up of popular soaps and and

13 'Crime Inc' (ITV) Stills from the opening titles showing the 'subtle' images used.



real game shows, to watch something they would not normally wish to. A documentary can clothe its content to make it as presentable and desirable as it wishes but it should not go as far as disguising the content. The side effect of these efforts results in the information coming out second best. Apart from planting the notion that a certain issue exists, within the minds of the viewers, the format allowed no room for a comprehensive explanation of the results found or of their importance or relevance to everyday life. In fact this particular programme served only to alienate those who were seeking information and patronised those who were not.

CHAPTER THREE

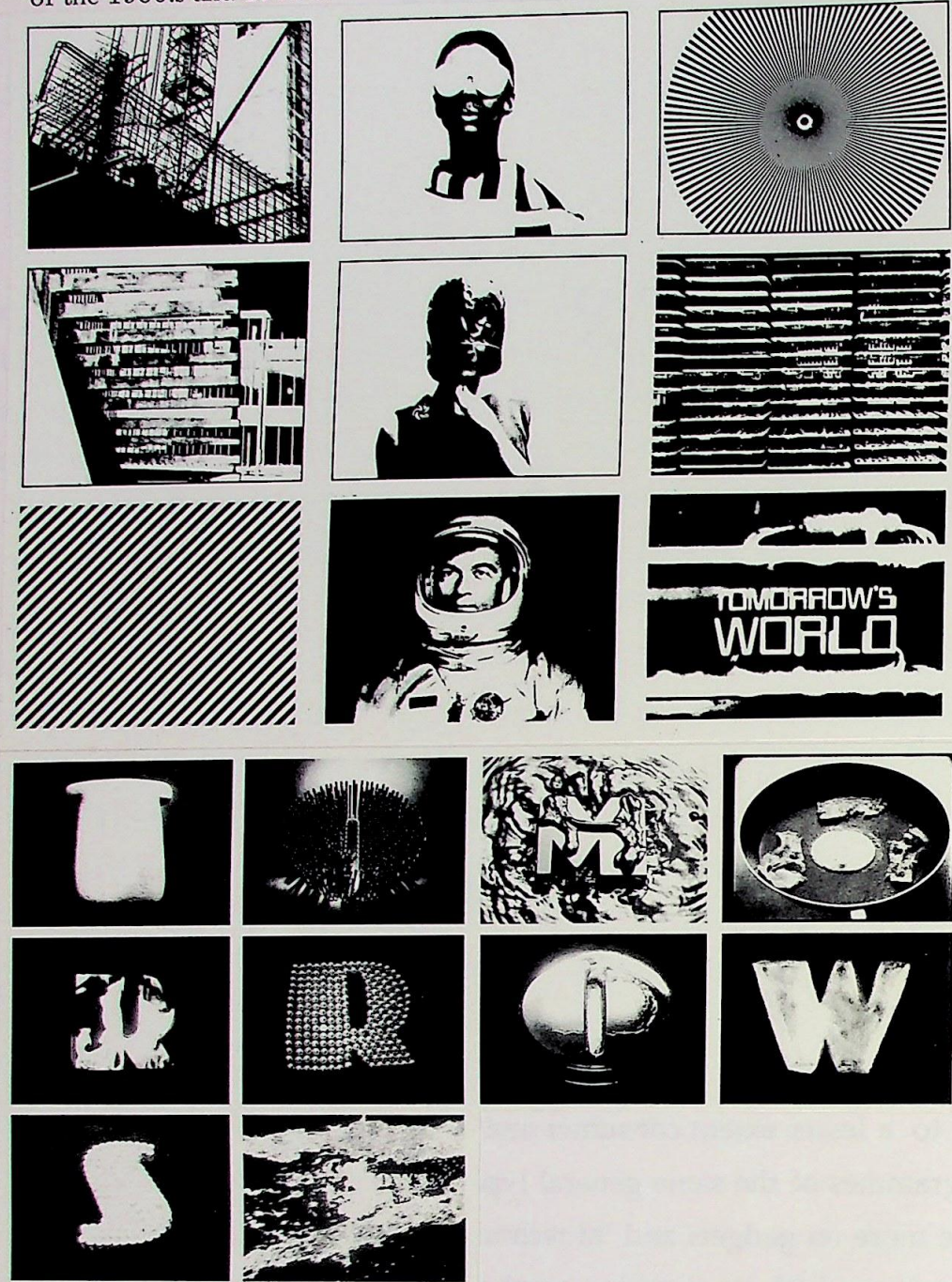
FEATURE PROGRAMMING

'Feature Television' is usually a term used to cover informational programmes which do not fit into the the categories of documentary, news or current affairs and is often the largest department within television stations. Into this provence falls the science programmes on television or to be more precise the use of science as subject matter outside the area of formal education i.e. programmes which are not aimed exclusively at those studying for examinations or following a curriculum and which do not generally relate to the everyday world. 'Popular Science' programmes potray aspects of science which relate directly or indirectly to how we live our lives and to the physical environment in which this takes place. They respond to our natural inquisitiveness about how things work which in itself could be related to our thirst to understand the meaning of life and how or why we ourselves exist. 'Tommorow's World' (BBC) has during its long history concentrated on current technology and particularly advances which could become a part of 'tommorow's world' from areas of science which affect all areas of life, from medicine to new safety features in car brake blocks. There is a common emphasis on advances which will further our way of life through safety features or to a lesser extent consumer and luxury goods.

Other programmes of the same general type such as Austalia's 'Towards 2000' concentrate more on gadgets and 'hi-technology' with a slant towards the consumer culture, with its ensueing emphasis on the new, and that which is better than what came before, and yet it still informs, but by pandering to people's preoccupation with change and constant improvement.

In presenting these subjects, prop's and explanatory graphic stills are extremely important as a method of explaining complex ideas clearly and succinctly - as important as the narration of the presenters. But the trend even in 'Tommorow's World' is towards a state in which these aspects are over emphasised to the detriment of that which they are intended to support and encourage. The presenters are often engaged in comically demonstrating or introducing a feature

14 'Tomorrows World' (BBC), Stills from the classic opening titles of the 1960.s and 1970's.



15 'Tomorrows World' (BBC) Logo from the opening titles of the 1980's series.



to the extent that they act as performers rather than presenters. They still do get around to explanation but could the Christmas programme (in a game show format) in which 'tv personalities' answered true or false questions on the application of new inventions after demonstrations of a range of seemingly unlikely and humorous applications of the gadgets by the presenters, point the way to the future? The present programme is still primarily that of an information conveyor but the weight of the designed visual services has moved subtly away from that which supports the content, aids access and generally co-ordinates an aesthetic identity, to a state in which design exists for its own sake without any relation to the subject matter. Looking at the examples of the memorable titles (Fig. 14) which have been used over the years, it is clear that they have been entirely apt - in terms of suggesting the nature of the content, increasing its accessibility and supplying an aesthetic shape and form to the programme. They have always been up to date, showing influences of the current 'op' and 'pop' art trends of the time or modern animation techniques. However the present title (Fig. 15) is memorable now for its service to fashionable trends with the use of computer generated images and movement, rather than with any relationship with the content. Apart from supplying a designed shape to the programmes, it could be as applicable to a chat show or panel game. It responds to the expected clichés of modern television with the computer generation, pastel colours, and type which does not stand in its own right but as a poor rip off of the 'style magazine'school of typography. Altogether the programme is a mere shadow of its former self.

Programmes dealing with art and media have often by the nature of their subject matter, been aware of their own visual identity and of the need to emphasise an aesthetic standard, while not alienating the content or any prospective audience from it. In the treatment of visual subject matter its character dictates the style of imagery for that specific feature. But finding ways of presenting the written word presents an awkward challenge to programme makers seeking potent illustrations. There is a temptation to film abstract images in exotic locations just to keep the eye occupied while a voice over narrates the words. In these situations television just becomes radio with pictures stuck on. The visual components become relegated to being superfluous distractions.

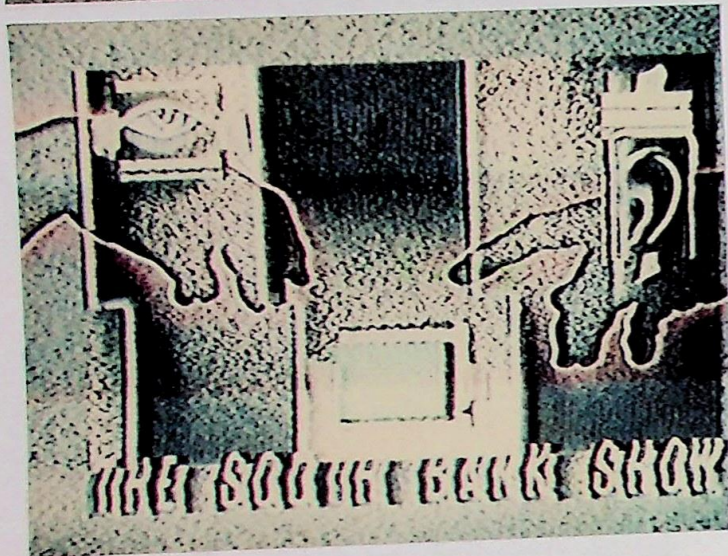
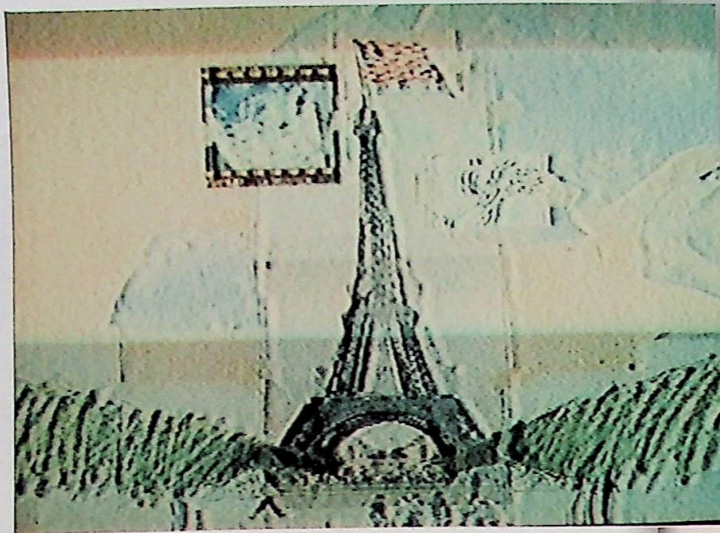
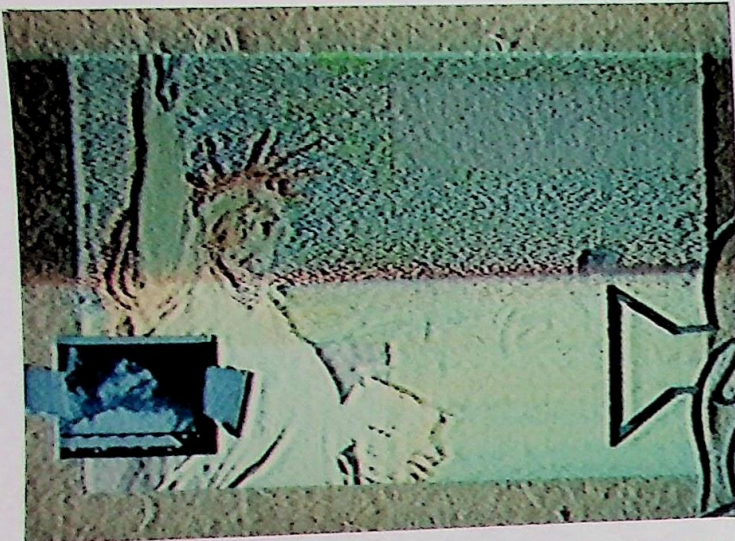


16 'South Bank Show' (LWT), stills from opening titles designed in 1986.

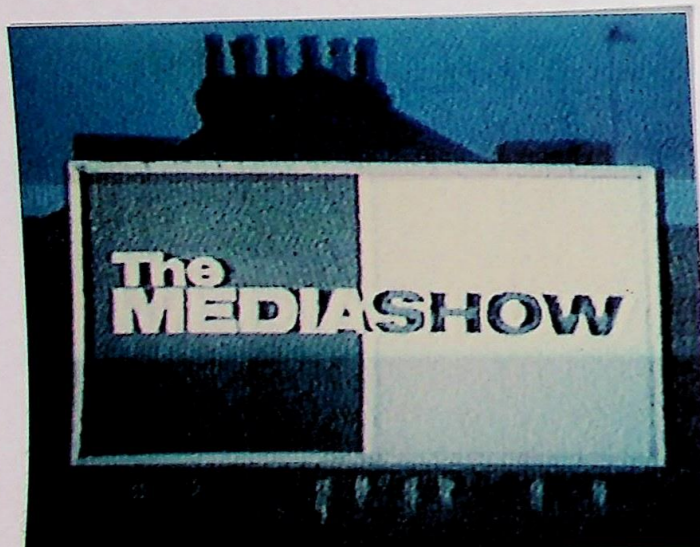
Most of these programmes are broadcast at off-peak times; 'The Late Show' (BBC2) at 11.15 pm and the 'South Bank Show' (LWT) 10.30 pm and as yet they do not have to be obsessed with looking interesting and attracting an audience for reasons other than presenting actual subject matter. The opening titles of 'The South Bank Show' down through the years have shown that this aspect of its character can be witty, humorous and completely in harmony with the nature of the programme as a whole (Fig. 16). They have all had a common starting point (a detail from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel) and been treated in a similar collaged and animated way with music, summing up the range and depth of the subject matter conveyed in the programme.

Perhaps such a programme and its success has encouraged the making of more specialised arts and media programmes such as 'Ghosts in the Machine' (C.4) which featured examples of video art or the multiplicity of programmes on television whose actual subject matter is television, for example 'Down the Tube' (RTE), or 'Open Air' (BBC), a daytime open access programme. When a primarily entertainment programme like 'Saturday Night Clive' (BBC2) which features examples of 'bad' television from abroad or closer to home, such as unfair advertising or American tabloid television in a humorous way, can include many references to the future of broadcasting in Britain in the light of deregulation, censorship and new satellite channels then it is certainly serving the public interest. But the genuinely humorous way in which it is presented unfortunately might serve only to whet the appetite of viewers to experience first hand the sort of television examples shown for themselves, rather than realising its shortcomings. A clip of Morton Downey Jr shouting and goading the audience and participants of his show almost to violence and certainly to a state of confrontation can be funny when viewed out of context but the realisation that it is part of many peoples normal television diet certainly drains the situation of any humour.

The search for visual imagery is not just confined to programmes featuring the written word but also those which feature the spoken word. Programmes of whatever type which feature people talking can tend to look boring and certainly scorn is often poured on the 'talking head' interview for that reason. Artificial



17 'South Bank Show' (LWT), stills from the latest version of tiles from Pat Gavin, designer at LWT.



18 'The Media Show' (C.4), still from the opening title from this show, one of the many arts and media programmes now on television.

means are usually used in this situation especially when the feature is being shot on location with one camera. A shot of the interviewee is alternated with that of the interviewer nodding even though this is not occurring in real time but spliced together from two different shots from the one camera in the cutting room. Yet where a live discussion is taking place on a quite specialised subject even with a number of cameras the powers that be often feel that additional visual or aural imagery is needed. A case in point was the channel 4 'Uncertain Truths' series and one particular programme which featured the eminent philosopher Sir Carl Popper and a colleague in a face to face discussion, shot on location in a stately home. While the two men, seated in armchairs before an unlit fire conversed, the camera shots roamed around the room from ceiling to floor, concentrating on abstract shadows and patterns on the walls.¹ At one stage the shot moved to the window and out into the garden beyond. During a pause in the discussion a droning, wailing voice sighed in the background. The relationship between the production style and the subject matter was extremely dubious and served only as a distraction from the complex ideas (if boring to some people) being debated. Just because critics would tend to praise beautifully lit and composed photography or an audience to watch it, should not encourage the situation in which the viewer or even the programme maker begins to conclude that the message is secondary to the style.

In discussion programmes interesting guests contribute to the success of these programmes and thoroughly entertaining results often ensue. Where serious issues are discussed the tendency is increasingly towards using ordinary people with wildly differing views which will produce a spectacle of argument and controversial opinions. Relegated to obscure times and channels as a result go, programmes like 'After Dark' (Channel 4) in which real ideas are discussed and light features are not high on the agenda. Broadcast in the depths of the night as an open ended discussion show i.e. it goes on as long as the participants can stay awake, it supplies informal discourse in an uncharged, relaxed atmosphere. This is not supplied however in 'UK Late'. A verbal gladiatorial stance is encouraged in this programme, with the inclusion of participants who like to quarrel, like ex hippies against ex punks. The format of this programme is like that of a similar slot in 'Night Network' (ITV), the nighttime magazine show, and is set in a dingy, loud nightclub, an apparent attempt to have the image of the programme equated



19 'Ghosts in the Machine' (C.4) Stills from the opening titles of one of the few programmes to give video art a platform on television.

with youth and 'good' design. In the 'Night Network' version there is almost a free for all amongst the those taking part, as cameramen with hand held cameras roam around getting a good shot of the action.

Another manifestation of this style of verbal interaction as screened on television during the British mid-morning schedules are 'Kilroy' on BBC1 and 'The Time, The Place' on Independent Television. The format takes its cue from American programmes such as 'Donaghue' (now rebroadcast in this part of the world in the late night schedules) which has been on the air for many years and in which a live studio audience discuss a subject as diverse as the problem of a receding hairline to the problems of being effected by a mental illness. Some order is maintained since the boom microphone is not used and so if a member of the audience wishes to speak then the presenter has to be near with the hand held microphone, for them to be heard.

The British versions are pretty much the same, the only difference being that the American audience is always more ready to join into the discussion than a British one. However such a format which elicits wildly differing opinions with claims and counter claims does not extract any considered view from those taking part, or any reflection or consideration. The habit of asking people to tell their personal experiences to help the audience understand an issue is a thin disguise to provide cheap emotional gratification. Yet all these examples are but child's play in comparison to the new breed of programmes in the U.S. where the confrontation extends sometimes beyond the verbal level and certainly beyond the the logical level to that where physical violence has actually erupted on occasion. The 'Morton Downey' show exemplifies this new breed with the bullying techniques of its charismatic presenter.

Although we have not seen the influences of it in Irish broadcasting yet, we certainly are hearing it. The 'Gerry Ryan' radio show is going in that direction and in it the barriers between fact and fiction, entertainment and information has well and truly been broken down. The least we deserve as an audience is to know which is which, and not to think that we are being informed when we are not.

It cannot be forgotten that even entertainment programmes include implicit or explicit information. The ability of aspects of television which would normally be linked to form rather than content to alter opinion or underline existing opinion

20 'After Dark' (C.4) - a relaxed studio discussion.

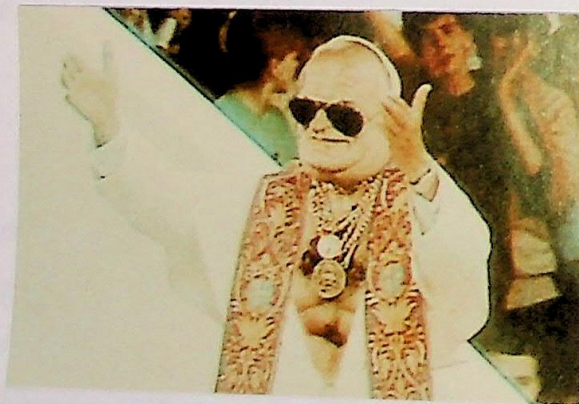


is strong. Satire on television particularly uses form as content to convey points of view. Former British Liberal Party leader, David Steele, could have blamed his lack of popularity and eventual downfall to a major extent on the 'Spitting Image' (Central) television programme and his weak portrayal in it. While Margaret Thatcher's popularity has undoubtedly been strengthened by her portrayal as being strong and even ruthless.

Esther Rantzen's 'That's Life!' show (BBC) is promoted as a mix of real life humour with consumer advice and is immensely popular in Britain. The point of view of the programme would seem to be that there is nothing wrong with presenting functional information in a humorous context. Young children and animals who can do tricks (often the same tricks) are featured together with items as diverse as that on the unsubstantiated claims made for a product to reduce body fat, or the supply of badly fitting artificial limbs by the 'Health Service'. Apart from the dubiousness of this format the treatment of such individual items as that of the fake medical preparation can become blurred between seriously serving the public interest and at least in this case making an entertaining joke out of a test of the product. This particular item was reported to the 'British Broadcasting Complaints Commission' by the makers and suppliers of the herbal preparation. Interestingly the commission rejected most of the complaint since the programme did show that the product could not have worked as was claimed but its report did conclude that "the way in which the test was presented by 'That's Life!' was unfair."² That is exactly where the programme falls down. Its noble aims come to nothing because of the way in which it presents its subject matter not the subject matter itself. Incidentally in this case the 'test' to find out if the preparation could reduce body fat, took place in front of the studio audience in an atmosphere of ridicule on "five professional entertainers whose stock in trade was their fatness."³

It is a curious fact that the design aesthetic used in these situations rarely lead the way in terms of design but instead react to the styles cultivated and developed elsewhere from whence they are modified for the needs at hand. Innovation in the whole design area rarely occurs on television with notable exceptions even though it is the widest and most far reaching source of design.

21 'Spitting Image' (Central), stills from the opening titles from a programme which has power, through the way it portrays people to modify opinion.



CHAPTER FOUR

NEWS



22 'BBC News' logo

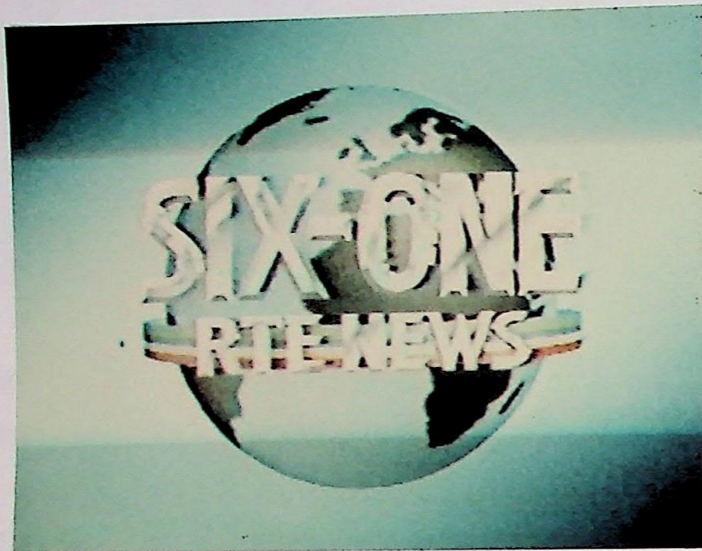
News generally attracts the most reliable percentage of television viewing, if not the largest in terms of numbers for while individual series' and soaps may come and go news programmes consistently feature strongly in the 'Tam Ratings'.¹ Indeed this is hardly surprising since most people use television as their primary source of news. The medium can supply a spontaneity and speedy reaction time which the print media cannot offer. Its visual content has obvious benefits over radio as a means of conveying the reality of something which the spoken or written word would be unable to express, while the power of the image is strong in terms of provoking reaction in a way which could not be achieved in any other way.

The production of such programmes is extremely expensive since the utilisation of presenters, journalists, production staff and technicians is added to by the necessary contribution of reports from the scenes of news 'happenings' by journalists and film crews. The investment of these resources dictates that bulletins must have effect not only in their coverage of the subject matter but as a reflection of the station. As such the news programmes act as flagships of the networks. The added burden of conveying such an image is compounded by the fact that the early evening news often acts as the impetus to switch on the television for the evening and if that particular programme can sustain interest then perhaps the viewer will stay with that station for the remainder of the evening. Although the advent of the remote control has made this less likely, any advantage which a station can hold to get an audience into a habit of watching a particular news broadcast and perhaps the subsequent programmes cannot be ignored. The main evening newscasts are under the same pressure since a familiarity with the particular programme would act as a spur to change the channel on which it is being broadcast and the programme itself is an original production of the network and not some bought in foreign 'soap opera'. The commercial channels have actually begun to discourage channel changing by the

coordination (even by rival channels) of the timing of advertisement breaks and by advertisers themselves increasing the level of entertainment value inherent in the narrative form of individual commercials. The ultimate effect of these trends are that viewers are being treated as consumers rather than as an audience. The way that they are being addressed during the advertisements and during the programmes themselves are becoming more alike.

RTE Television news has undergone a recent upheaval timed to coincide with the launch of the second channel as 'Network 2' in late 1988. Apart from the new graphic images for particular bulletins the formats of the bulletins themselves have developed as well. There have also been the addition of extra 'headline' newscasts at regular intervals on 'Network 2'. The programme in which the most marked change has occurred is RTE 1's early evening news now dubbed the 'Six One News'. It has replaced the conventional fifteen minute news and the half hour regional news programme which followed it, with an hour long programme which begins at six o' clock. In terms of content and the sort of features covered, little has changed. The mixture of domestic and international items remains the same as before together with the inclusion of provincial stories from the regional news gathering teams. Even the news for the deaf survives in this prime-time slot.

So what has changed? Well apart from a new graphic identity which covers opening titles, music, logotype and the informational graphics, the presentation style has moved from that of a news reader who is divorced from the subject matter and merely a tool through which it is communicated to a system in which the journalist and the newsreader are one person with the newsreader often reading his or her own words and being in the position to undertake interviews and to supply credible background to stories. The programme now relies on one person to do this, Sean Duignan, the former chief political correspondent of RTE News with a wide range of journalistic and presentation experience (Fig. 24). The recurrence of his face fronting the programme and his style and personality gives it a reliability which is purposely cultivated. In former times due mainly to a lack of resources particularly in terms of finance but also of talent there was an interchange in this department and in others of personnel which often amounted to the same results occurring except that this was a side effect of



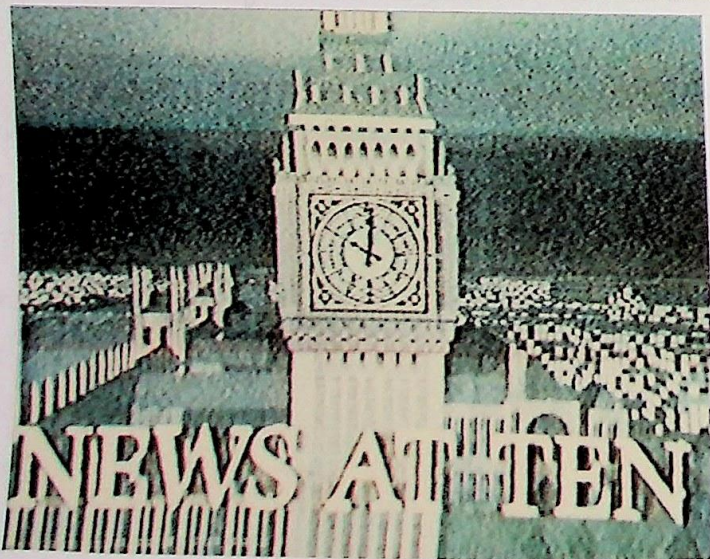
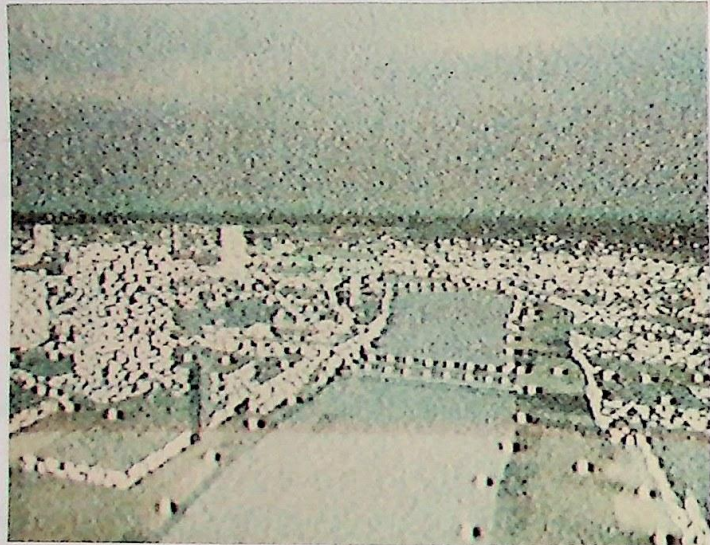
23 RTE 'Six-One' News, still from the opening title.



24 Sean Duignan presenter of 'Six-One' news.



25 'Eye Witness' (NZ TV) The use of the televisual cliché is world wide. The city skyline on a New Zealand news programme.

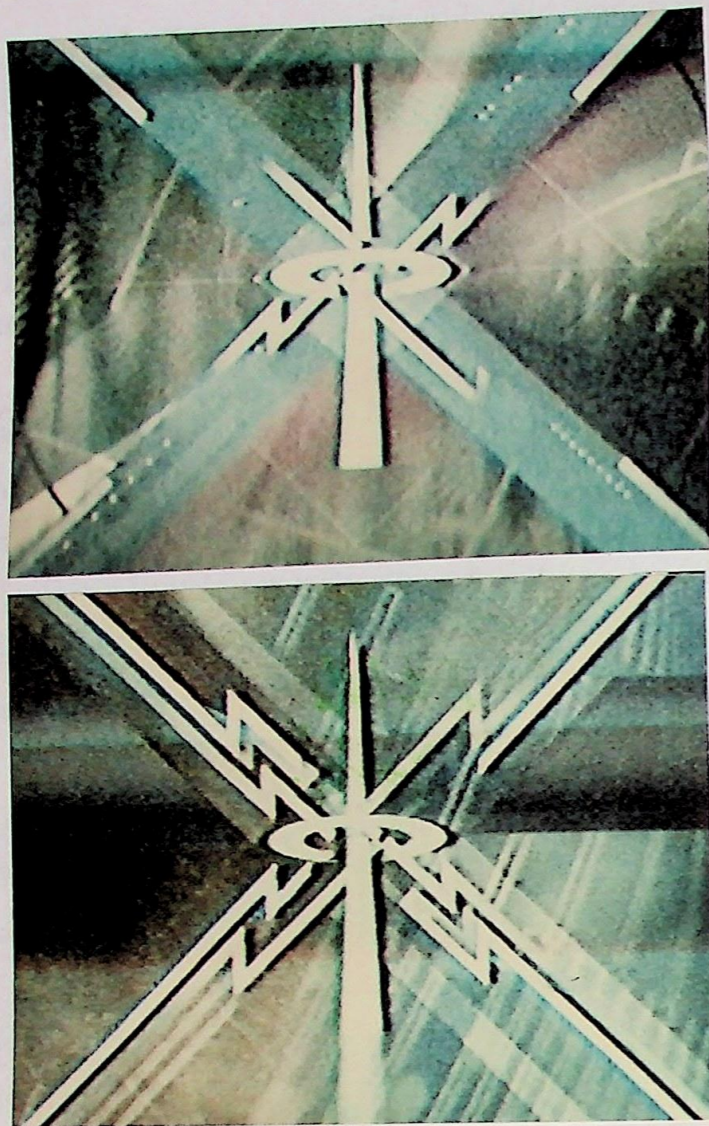


26 ITN 'News at Ten' opening title stills including city skyline.

constraints rather than a positive policy. Now however it does seem part of a policy in which a personality presenter is as much a part of the programme image as the designed aspects. Sean Duignan's background lends authority to the newscasts which is echoed in other stylistic ways, from the subtlety of the use of a heavy block serif type on the logo to the choice of a particular shade of blue in the studio while his apparant natural indecision holds the wide ranging programme together.

Apart from lending credibility to the programme and its content it also carries out the same function by implication for the stration in general. The viewers are also made to feel empathy and even familiarity, by the personal touch of presenters - salutations to the individual viewer and the friendly first name interaction between presenters. To what extent this departure is linked to the future advent of a third channel in Ireland and the competition that it will bring or the continuing distraction from RTE by British channels (to which many turn especially for foreign news) is uncertain. But the trend itself is nothing new. In the United States especially, personality presentation has been the norm since the time of Walter Cronkite and other such anchor men. But in Britain the change has been no less apparent. With a more acute degree of competition between ITN and BBC News, production style has ben less subtle and resources have been poured into these flagships of their individual networks. With a responsibility to accurately and impartially report happenings of importance, competition through pride or purely commercial concerns have dictated that both services have undertaken their news gathering functions seriously and earnestly and the results stand up well in comparison with other news services.

In their pursuit for relative success and popularity amongst audiences the journalistic treatment of subject matter has been effected. Often it is to the extent of a parochial outlook which results in the report on a human disater in Asia stating that it is thought that no British were injured. This sort of thing is merely primed by a cultural stance and viewpoint which is ethnocentric (or even 'home counties' centred). Of course there are glaring exceptions to the rule where reports from sensitive areas can show signs of bias, but at the soft end (if no less damaging end) it is characterised by an effect on the choice of subject matter such as the happy anecdote about a wounded furry animal, a sick child or a member of the Royal Family which invariably ends the bulletin. However an increasingly



27 BBC 'Nine O'Clock' news, stills from opening titles.

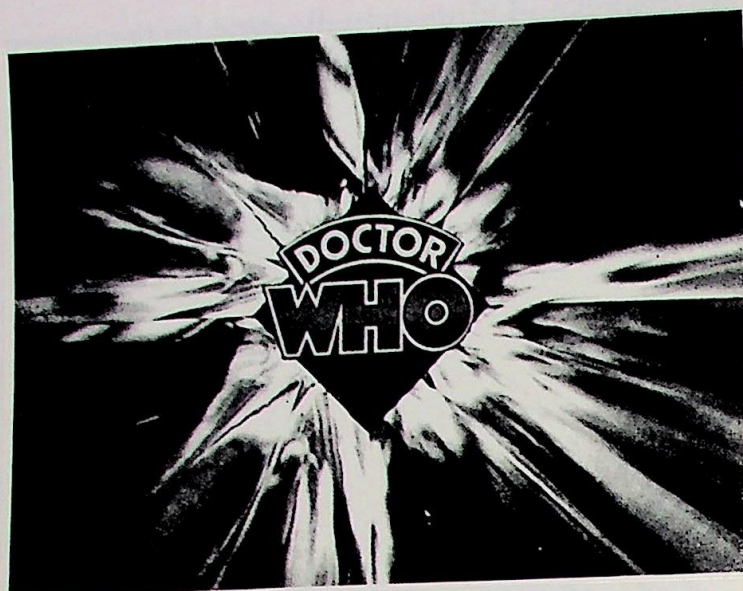


28 BBC Newsreel titles from the 1950's.

direct effect on how features are treated and ultimately digested by the viewer is in the explicit preoccupation with production style and programme image.

The technological advances over the last ten years which have given rise to the electronic graphic workshop where image and type can be endlessly manipulated into an information still or animated sequence has had the side effect of initiating a sameness about the graphic output of news departments all over the world. This feeling is not diminished by the recurring images used in the titles such as globes, maps, capital city skylines and throbbing marshal music (Fig.s 25 & 26). Such advances which have done away with cut and paste maps and the unsubtle use of type has made the information much easier to absorb in a single well composed and coloured frame. But the scope of the 'paintbox' and other gadgets has made this area one which can be availed of more easily to convey abstracts of image and identity over and above the primary functions of information conveyance and suggesting an identity which accurately reflects the subject matter.

As an anodyne to the recurring clichéd imagery and general international bland look, the News and Current Affairs division of the BBC in its review of that department included a revamp and coordination of its various programmes, with special attention paid to the nine o' clock main evening news. The man chosen was the guru of corporate and presentation television graphics - Martin Lambie Nairn, whose claim to fame has been the Channel Four logo and identity sequence and more recently the Anglia Television indent and logo. Perhaps his most memorable work has been his influence on the presentation department of Channel Four. Coincidentally he has also been separately commissioned to act as consultant to the presentation division of the BBC thus ending this relationship with Channel Four and giving him a major influence on the whole BBC's visual identity as conveyed through on screen graphics. Getting back to the news itself the result of his work has been a departure from the crome and reflective type imagery look of late (Fig. 27). The finished title combines a symbol which harks back to the BBC newsreel animation of the 50's (Fig. 28), which itself bore close resemblance to the RKO title of the time, with a treatment reminiscent of an opening title for the 'Dr. Who' programme (Fig. 29) and German symbol design of the 1920's and 1930's. It invokes a sense of history and tradition, but this nostalgic trustworthiness does not quite fit with the modernistic way (if not modern way) in which it is treated. And yet as a change from the swirling globes and revolving



29 'Dr. Who' (BBC), the latest news opening bears a resemblance to the titles of this programme.



30 BBC 'Nine O' Clock News' a presenter with the office background seen behind him.

logos it is a fresh and welcome exception. The emphasis on trustworthiness is underlined by the studio setting in which a mixture of modern office equipment and computer clutter vie for attention behind the presenters (Fig. 30). One always wonders if those who are supposedly working at their desks in the background will suddenly start waving to the camera or trying to break through the perspex window which divides them from the studio proper. Apart from the distraction that such thoughts could evoke, the purpose of this studio set up is presumably as a means of subliminally demonstrating the hardworking and serious effort which went into the news gathering and production - a way of suggesting the activity of those who are normally the backroom staff. But its artificiality tends to undermine this purpose - the real behind the scenes journalistic work is never shown let alone the the studio environment behind the camera.

The front room staff, those in front of the camera, underline this seriousness with the distinguished looking older male presenters (who were probably field correspondants in their younger days) as they could be equated with credibility, experience and generally with the hard content of the news. The female newscasters, usually younger and reasonably good looking could be equated with emotion, subtlety, drama and more so with the form of the programme rather than with the content. This age discrepancy is also probably as much a result of the fact that young looking men look less confident than women of a similar age, but this does not account for why there are so few older women presenters. To offset the possible esoteric associations of this style there is a deliberate degree of friendly banter between the presenters especially towards the end of the programme even to the extent that one newscaster winks to the audience as he bids them goodnight. The function of all this camaraderie is to encourage the audience to identify with the presenters and make them seem like one of us, the populus. In this situation it is no wonder that Marmaduke Hussey, chairman of the BBC's board of governors, described the news presenters as "top class performers".² Neither can it be surprising that in this climate the BBC News can be perceived to be going the same direction as TV AM. That station began with ideals to provide a backbone of "up to the minute news"³ and ended up going down market to find its audience, with a resultant reliance on feature material such as sport, health and beauty (categorised together in the same illogical way as sex and violence), and consumer issues.



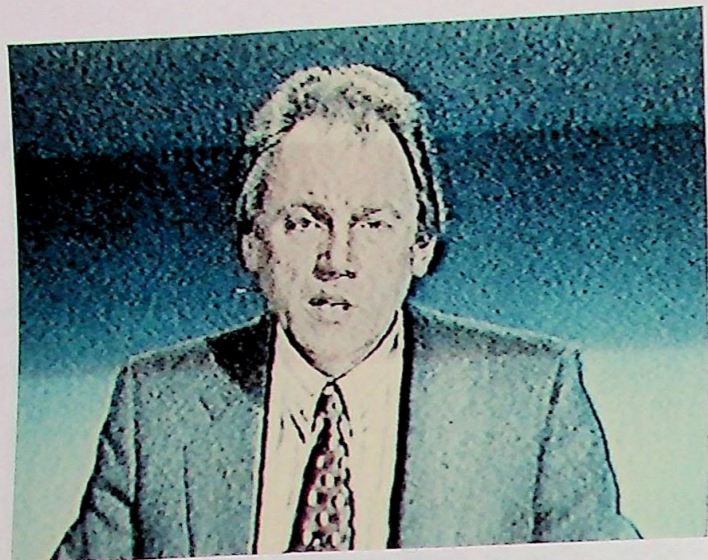
31 BBC 'Nine O' Clock News' Informational graphic still.



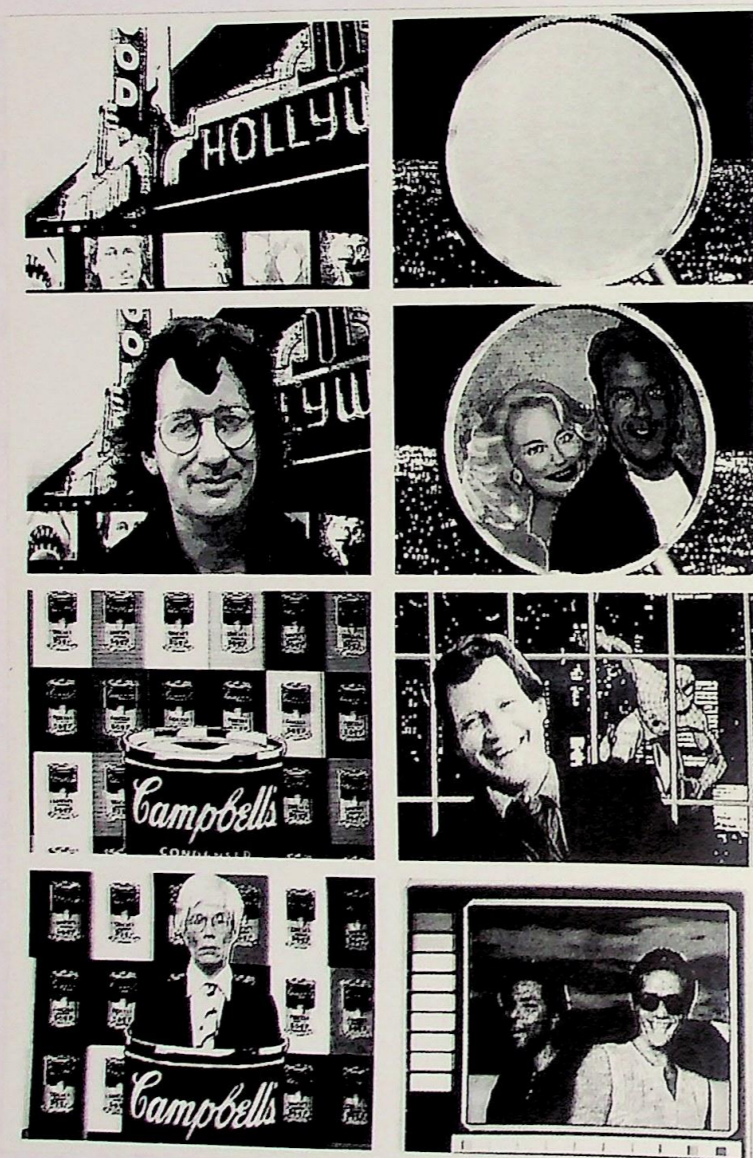
32 RTE, 'Weather Forecast' graphic still, generated on a 'Pluto' Computer.

The treatment of informational graphic stills on the BBC 'Nine o' Clock News', within the 3:4 confines to which all designers on television are bound, demonstrates an individuality and uniqueness through the use for example of relatively small serif italic roman type in a medium which up to quite recently could not broadcast such frail and subtle images at all because spaces within the letters would fill in and the thin serifs on the type disappear with the whole lettering becoming illegible (Fig. 31). This simplicity and understatement is underlined by the absence of bright colour and has not developed in isolation. The unconscious and conscious borrowing of styles and techniques occurs all the time. This style has been widely used in advertising especially the printed variety as a mental trigger for sophistication. In advertising for cosmetics and related goods such streamlined and generally clean and simple looks have been extensively experimented with as a marketing ploy. This ultimately developed from the new wave styles which arose from punk and as a reaction against the flaccid styles of the 1970's. The use of an aesthetic style from wherever it originates can be justified as an aid to communication of specific subject matter and creating an ambience for a programme. Although when it has previously been coopted by advertising, a medium not renowned for its upstanding or integrity, to be used to dress up a major source of information through which many make the judgements that dictate the way that they conduct their lives, it is to say the least disquieting.

All the major news bulletins now have in common an extensive weather forecasting facility with varying degrees of graphic backup and presentation technique. With such information basically coming from the same source and the same data it is only through the presentation of this information that the various networks and the viewers can differentiate between the forecasts. Apart from the actual information on what weather is expected we are also treated to a mass of technical data and graphic information of isobars and fronts, all of which means little to most of us. People need to know and want to know how the weather will effect them tomorrow not why. It is a strange paradox that in the main body of the news the amount of scene setting and background is minimalised while in the weather forecast more complicated and comprehensive reports are developing with references to the weather conditions all over the world not just where the



33 'Channel Four News', presenter Peter Sissons.



34 'Headline News' (Atlanta, USA). Stills from a title for 'Who's News', show a preoccupation with personality features on this 24 hr. 'all-news' television channel.

viewer would have any likelihood of being, and with as much emphasis on past weather conditions as with those expected. Only in reports from election counts is there a similar degree of graphic symbology used. It must have some link with our preoccupation in this part of the world with our climate and with information which will actually effect individuals every day.

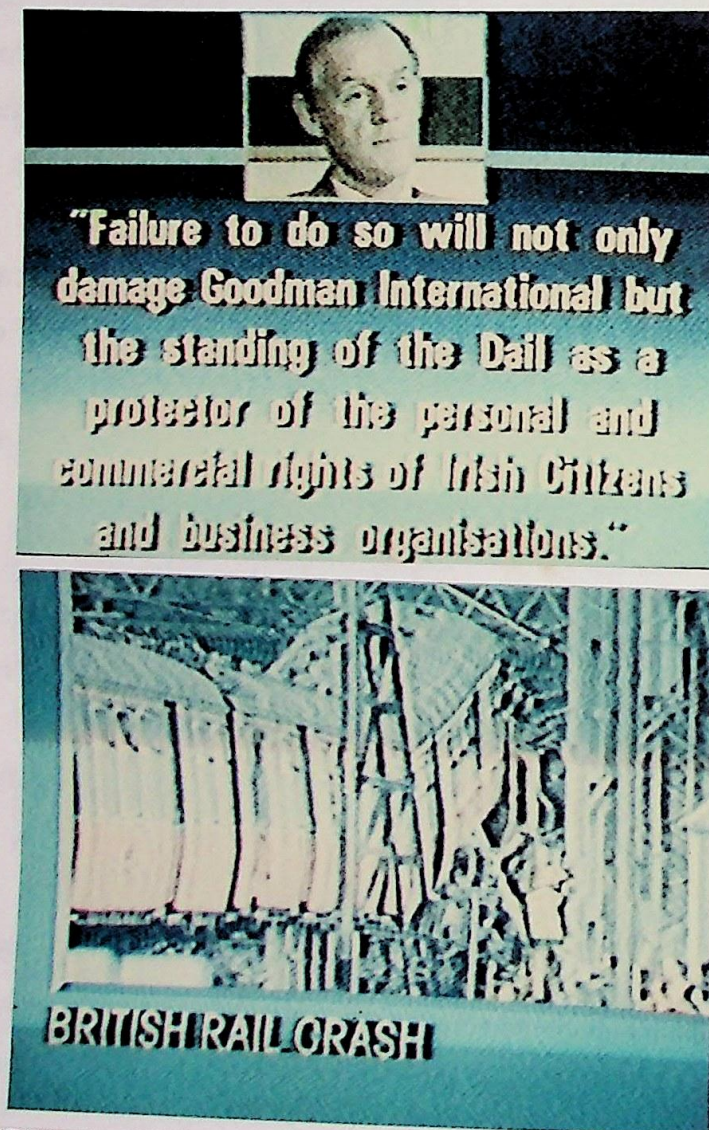
ITN's Channel Four News has developed a distinctive approach to news broadcasting since its launch in 1982. On a channel which promised innovation in form and content it sought through this section of ITN to increase the attention paid to specialist areas such as the British economy, technology and even the arts, combined with the usual revelation of recent events. Its most obvious innovation has been characterised by an obvious difference in form with an extended length of one hour - fifty minutes of news and a ten minute section in which a speaker is invited to comment on a subject of his own choosing. This length was very unusual for a programme broadcast on weekdays at a peak time of seven o' clock - six years before RTE's 'Six-One News' appeared, especially for a programme which does not cover the exclusively regional stories which RTE does, since the regions in Britain have their own provincial news and magazine shows every day. The extra time offered allows a scope to offer analysis and the comment of experts which can add a depth of illumination and understanding not to be found elsewhere. The availability of a means to explain the background and significance of an issue on television is difficult to find. On a medium which prides itself on its immediacy and speed it is often necessary to turn to the quality press to get an overview or considered context about a story or issue. Yet this programme comes close to providing such an overview.

In terms of its content the programme also emphasises foreign news in a way which would suggest that Britain is not the centre of the universe, and utilises its own network of foreign correspondants. Interviews are conducted with 'experts' and others, which back up the individual features covered. In terms of presentation the cult of the personality presenter strikes again. Peter Sissons the former presenter of the one o' clock daytime news transferred to the Channel Four news at its inception (Fig. 33). Again with a journalistic background common to many ITN presenters such as Sandy Gall and Peter Snow. Mr. Sissons is in a position to both present the programme smoothly and professionally while extending his expert knowledge to quiz interviewees when the opportunity arises.

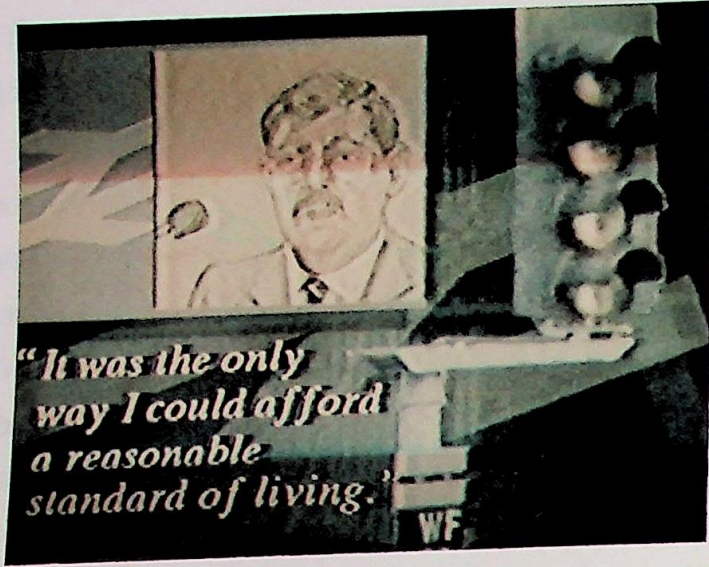
At first glance this style owes much to the American experience than the British tradition of stony faced, dinner-jacketed announcers but the impression which modern US news presenters convey as witnessed on the 24 hour CNN news channel is one in which the image comes first, the hype is foremost, and a good story comes before the hard news. This impression is not sustained to the same extent when the European examples as experienced on these islands is examined. However what the future holds is unclear. There is an uneasy feeling that if RTE had the financial resources they would go down this road. Perhaps the BBC news has already begun this the journey with the ITN 'News at Ten' not far behind. If the adage that good typography is that which is not noticed could be used to gauge the communication quality of the whole programme then the 'Channel Four News' would definitely be the winner. For the use of type on the RTE news is so big and ugly that it could not be ignored, while the BBC's 'Nine o' clock News' uses typography which could warrant stylistic acclaim by those not familiar with that style's routes, and is so nice and pretty that it could not be ignored. Yet while the 'Channel Four News' and its use of type is functional and unobtrusive the extended format tends to turn off some viewers` who are familiar with and used to short and snappy newscasts, two minute pop songs, images which last an average of two seconds, and even the thirty second advertisements which include a full narrative. In this case the clichéd use of computer generated chrome and dynamic titles to appeal to a progressive image and to attract an audience does not square with the quality of the content (Fig. 37). Instead of this diminishing the effect of the graphics however it serves only to diminish the effect of the subject matter, making it appear staid and boring in contrast.

Whatever about the negative effects of the personality presentation style it has recently had practical drawbacks for Peter Sissons. The personal identification which an extremist organisation made with him when he interviewed the Iranian Chargé d'Affaires in London resulted in death threats against him which probably would not have occurred if the interview had been undertaken by one of the usual legion of faceless forgettable reporters.

But the Channel Four News does differ in a more practical way from the usual genre of news and even comes close to the style of current affairs at times with its concern for issue related subjects. It can be contrasted with the general trend on television towards the style of news reporting inherent on modern pop music



35 'RTE News', graphic still, showing a lack of finesse or ingenuity in composition.



36 'BBC Nine O' Clock News', shows a subtle use of type and image in an informational still.

radio stations in which reporting consists largely of two minute headlines and very little else. Those listening to such stations however are in a position to change the channel if they wish, to stations such as RTE Radio One or BBC Radio Four on which they can be sure to find programmes which will elaborate on the full story. But television viewers are not in the same position. 'All news' television channels are limited to satellite and cable sources and are only available to a small percentage of viewers as yet. But even here the subject matter on 'Sky News' or Ted Turner's CNN station tends towards stories rather than news. Human interest, emotion and even sensationalist treatment are seen as necessary since these stations do not have more main stream programmes in their schedules. While this is the case the necessity for the genre of current affairs on mainstream television is all the more important.

37 'Channel Four News', Stills from opening titles complete with chrome reflective type.



1

1

CHAPTER FIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS

Current affairs is perhaps the purest form of news exposition on television because it mirrors the traditional intercourse of news by word of mouth. Print and radio reporting developed from these oral customs but television with its visual character contributed to the nature of news conveyance on that medium developing into a bulletin board with pictures. The subject matter covered in current affairs broadcasting tends towards news related issues and stories rather than that which is included in documentary programmes i.e. features which are less specifically concerned with up to the minute happenings and events but instead address more abstract themes which may have come to the fore as the result of news events.

Current affairs with the emphasis on currency allows explanation of the background to and significance of events not available elsewhere. An otherwise isolated catalogue is backed up by the analysis and comment of experts and it ultimately serves to promote a considered illumination of issues and their effects. In this form of news where instantaneousness is superseded by explanation the tendency has been for a conservative format. Topics are covered soberly and in depth and such features are underlined in all aspects of the programme, indicating qualities of journalism and credibility. Such reliability has been emphasised for example by the use of an opening title which utilises an effect to mimic the classic printing technique of embossing on a rich textured paper as in BBC's 'Question Time'. These programmes have never attracted mass audiences but neither have they been relegated to ghetto times or ghetto audiences. But at the same time pressure has not been on them to attract large numbers but to concentrate on the dissemination of the information. This sort of programme is exemplified by RTE's 'Today Tonight', the stations equivalent to the BBC's 'Panorama'. This prestigious programme is characterised by a level of professionalism which is often lacking from a station which operates under a limited budget and this standard of proficiency can be generally ascribed to the high journalistic standard and particularly to the slick presentation ability of those

who front it. Experience is a common factor amongst the in-studio presenters and this has often been gleaned outside television i.e. from university lecturing, radio news and from the press. This authority figure feeling is emphasised not just by the repetition of their faces but to the format in which they appear week in week out.

The informational stills for the programme are produced on RTE's one 'Quantel Paintbox' which is also utilised for news graphics and for most of the on-screen output for all the other departments. As such the results tend to be functional and less aesthetically motivated as they might be. Without the use of explicit graphic imagery to conjour up more abstract impressions which have less to do with creating the right mood or setting for the subject matter but about communicating that which is perceived as the correct image which will appeal to the expectations of the audience. Reliance has therefore to be put on more subtle production techniques which are often cinematic in nature. The techniques range through the whole list of technical facilities available from such areas as sound, lighting and music. The choice of shot used is not just that which will show the subject in the lens. Apart from the natural tendency to to get a good aesthetic composition it is also often felt necessary to use similar procedure to those already mentioned in relation to documentary. An obvious example is the reconstruction complete with dramatic shots, echoes, shadows, and even the old favourite of following the subjects footsteps from a worm's eye view. These methods might appeal to a visual aesthetic gratification but it does not add anything to the subjective impression of the reality of what might have happened. In fact it only serves to create expectations of a good story and diminishes the genre's function to expose the truth beneath the screaming headlines and the differing opinions of those immediately effected by the event or issue in question.

In a feature which the 'Today Tonight' programme ran on the infamous alleged leader of the major Dublin criminal gang this function was not served. The treatment of the man in question, Martin Cahill had, from the time when he came to the media's notice, been characterised by a concentration on the feats accomplished by the gang and the manner in which they took place, especially those which showed daring and courage rather than the nitty gritty crimes which took place from behind the barrel of a sawn off shot gun. The programme consisted of a wide ranging survey of his history and record with particular

38 'Weekend World' (LWT), stills from the opening titles of this highly praised current affairs programme.

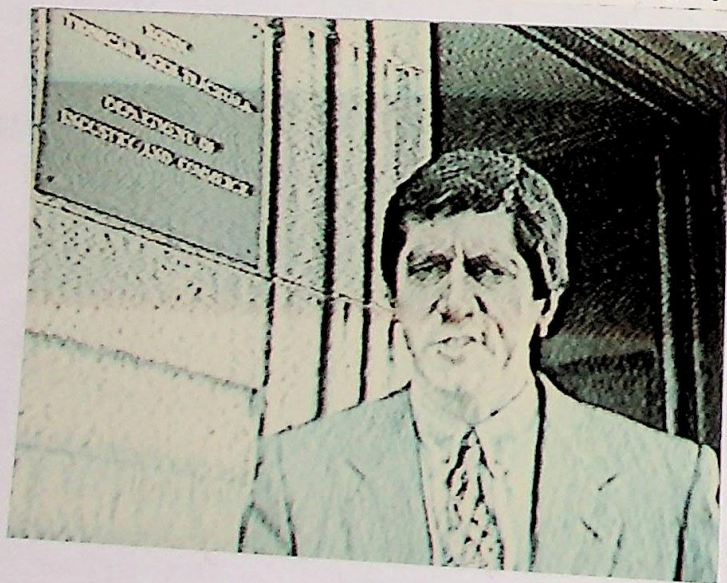


1

1

reference to the sort of crimes discussed above, including the daring robbery of the 'Beit' paintings from Russborough House and also the robbery of court files from a government building. The highlight was an interview with the 'General' (as he had then been dubbed by the media). The way in which it was undertaken showed that the reporting team never expected to actually carry out a conversation since the form it took was that of the team following Cahill around for a day: out from his house, into the labour exchange and up the street. All the while challenging him to answer their allegations, in the style of "have'nt you been responsible for..." and with the lack of an answer being its own answer. The expected result was to be a televisual confrontation and indeed the audience got their share of that but not from Cahill. In an earlier part of the programme 'colleagues' of the 'general' were interviewed in the same way eliciting the usual response - a punch in the direction of the camera and an expletive to the microphone. Martin Cahill however, did not react in this way. With his hand over his face he courteously answered the questions of Tommy O'Brien in a humorous and entertaining way. Asked about the twenty four hour surveillance regime on him he claimed not to notice, even though it was pointed out to him that there was a special branch car only feet from where they stood. Asked about his business, he claimed to be a private detective. The result was a charade, if an entirely entertaining one, in which there was no elucidation on the subject of his alleged leadership of a vicious criminal gang. In fact the 'general' was so astute that he utilised the very same techniques as those used by 'Today Tonight', to portray himself as good humoured and creating an image of himself which appealed to the audience. The flaws of the reporting technique were shown but nobody noticed. The programme expected to show the cliché of the hoodlum and instead gave the criminal leader the opportunity to exercise his media personality and to modify the impression given of him. Later the press fell into the same trap when at a court hearing Cahill showed up wearing Mickey Mouse boxer shorts outside his trousers. The following day's editions all published the great photograph of this sight with the report on the court proceedings coming second in the billings. Interviews such as that on the pavement are not the norm in current affairs. The norm is in fact the painstaking face to face interview between the presenter and another person or else a discussion in which the presenter acts as an intermediary. There are a number of drawbacks to these formats apart from the sheer boring

39 'Today Tonight' (RTE), The conventional reporting style is seen in this shot.



nature of the talking heads interviews related in the 'features' section. The presenter is under a certain pressure to ask the right questions, keep the interview moving and end up with the desired information from the interviewee. The standpoint of the interviewer is usually with that of the public interest in mind. In that situation it is easy to cast the interviewee as the villain of the piece or as saviour to the cause. Questions are framed in a way which expects a definitive negative or positive response, nuances of intention, or conciliatory noises are not encouraged.

In discussions the form of intercourse is even more unreal with a presenter acting as chairman and being in the position to move the discussion in the direction he or she wishes. This may be the direction which will best serve an understanding of the issue but it can also be unconsciously used to aid the promotion of a point of view to the extent of bias against another. This point may be the presenter's idea of audience opinion but it can only be a subjective impression of what an individual viewer's point of view may be, or how it can be modified. To an increasing extent the discussion is set up between those of a differing opinion, not to help the audience make a judgement on which is right - if either, but to cause conflict between those taking part in the discussion and thus making good visual television. BBC's 'Newsnight' is prone to this regularly with encounters such as that set up between representatives from the new British satellite channels to argue over the quality of their respective channel's signals and nightly with politicians who argue whether a policy is right or not.

Current affairs programmes with their concentration on news events cover subjects which are inextricably linked to politics and as a result the politicians who are in the position to right the wrongs or explain why certain wrongs were not righted before, are often the subjects of current affairs interviews. The nature of party politics and its treatment on television means that a certain balance of opinion has to be maintained which is all the more strictly adhered to at election time when viewers' information on who to vote for comes almost exclusively through the media and in particular the television. With particular reference to politicians' participation on current affairs programmes it is worth making a few points.

It is all too easy for interviews with politicians to end up as a confrontation in which there is little more than an exchange of mutual insults, accusations and

very little answering of specific questions. The presenters seek to glean information but politicians these days are aware of the power of the media and themselves are professional communicators. It is more important to appear to make the best impression, beat the rival and throw in a few emotive phrases to appeal to the symbolic interests of the audience/electorate. For audience's at these times do not worry about the day to day injustices in their countries but rather about feeling a strength and pride in the notion of nationhood and belonging. Thus you had the 'Falklands' factor in Britain and talk of the 'American Way' in the United States. Of course the form of television is manipulated by the media managers to convey these feelings, with sound bites for the news. But when appearing on current affairs programmes the politicians are more at risk of giving a less clouded impression of themselves and their failings. This could explain the reluctance of our government press office at the moment to allow RTE to interview ministers unless the programme makers agree to certain conditions.¹ These include not having opposition party members present during the interviews. The government would claim that a one to one interview is a better way of getting information than through an encounter between two rival politicians. This may be right to a degree but when the balance shifts to the position that the government can control the form of interviews then they are in a much stronger position to control the image which they can portray. Such complaints have been voiced for as long as television itself has reported the activities of politicians and will go on doing so for as long as television continues to include such subject matter as an integral part of current affairs. But the gradual trend in the United States has been towards broadcasting in which only the carefully packaged sound bite or photo opportunity is carried on the news, and only scandal and sensation is reported in current affairs.

The old methods of reporting are becoming old hat. Any threat which may have been perceived as resulting from the techniques mentioned above have been dissipated by audience awareness of them. The obvious answer for programme makers, especially those on the other side of the Atlantic, has been to change the actual content to that which will interest the viewer more, with the consequence that features of a titilating and voyeuristic nature have become common place. This is being combined with all the old production tricks already described. 'A Current Affair' - a U.S. example would concentrate on death tinged with scandal

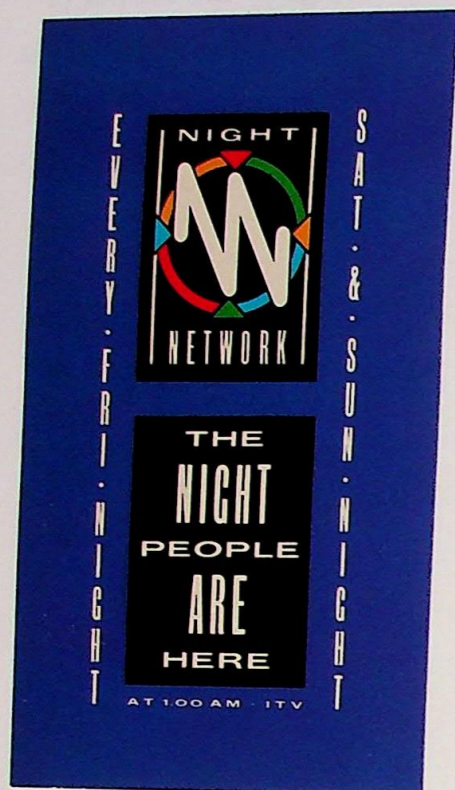
40 'Eye Witness' (LWT), An informational graphic still from this new current affairs programme.



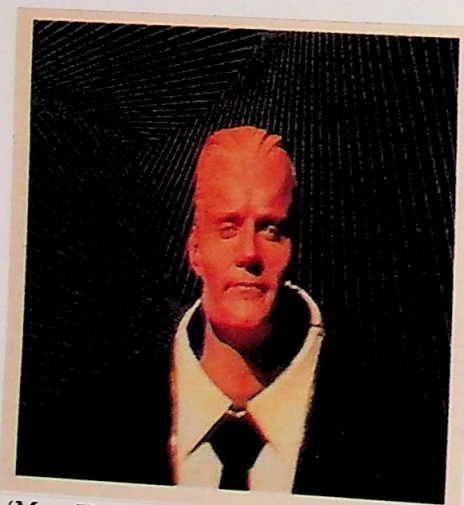
even to the extent of reenacting in a tele verité style the mode in which the subject died or was killed without regard for the feelings of relatives.

In Europe this has not occurred to the same degree although it is happening. The advent of 'Eye Witness' to replace the political discussion programme 'Weekend World' would attest to this, but the difference between it and the new breed of American current affairs programmes has been its challenge to the format of coverage which owes more to youth television than to the American example.

CHAPTER SIX
YOUTH ORIENTATED PROGRAMMING

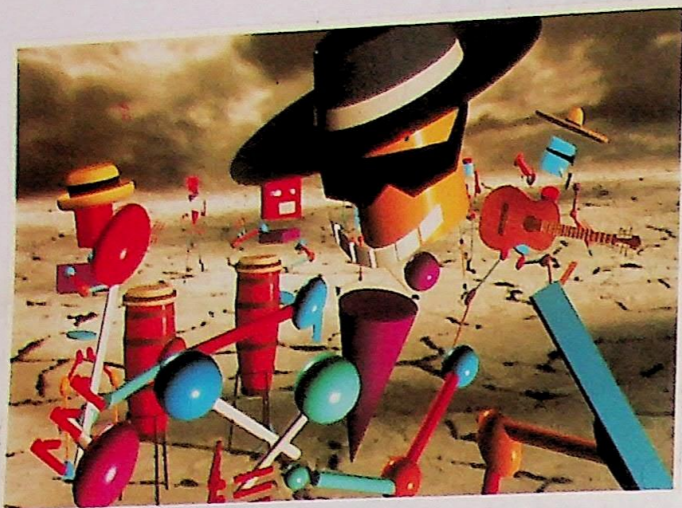


41 Advertisement for the 'Night Network' (ITV), the magazine youth programme on British Independent Television.



42 'Max Headroom' An actor designed to look like a computer generated character.

Although the teenage audience has always tended to view television less than other age groups, the early 1980's saw an awareness grow of their special needs and tastes. Consequently a number of magazine and current affairs programmes both here and in Britain began to cater for topics of particular relevance to the young. The advent of Channel Four and its commitment to minority interests acted as a catalyst to the production of such programmes on all networks. The appearance of alternative comedy and music such as Channel Four's 'Saturday Night Live' and 'The Tube' pointed to the use of popular culture as subject matter. Indeed this was as true for the visual imagery. Naturally enough a wide range of programmes were covered on this revolution corresponding to mainstream types of output, such as chat shows like Jonathon Ross' 'The Last Resort', and comedy with an alternative comic bent and innovation in form, such as 'The Young Ones' and 'Saturday Night Live'. Serious music programmes were included with 'The Tube' as an early eighties example. The use of such aspects of popular culture was relied on not just as subject matter but indeed as a source of visual imagery. The character of 'Max Headroom' even appeared as both - a televisual personification, part human- all computer (Fig. 42). The background from which they borrowed or adapted this imagery was that of album covers, street fashion, the typography and layout of the British style magazine, and naturally the very iconography of television itself such as test cards and pixels. While this imagery was used experimentally in the early 1980's at this stage, as illustrated in the difference between 'The Tube' and a modern music programme 'Wired' its application is becoming too constructed. 'The Tube' appeared chaotic, it had live music, it did not take itself or its imagery too seriously. 'Wired' however is a planned package. The live element of the format is sacrificed to filmed reports and clips from around the world, even the excruciatingly complex computer generated opening titles are so contrived that any relationship it might have had with content is lost to an excuse to exercise the capabilities of the computer used (Fig. 43).



43 Still from the opening title of 'Wired' (BBC).



44 Logo for 'Network Seven'. 'Network' is obviously the buzzword for youth, Max Headroom appeared in programme called 'Network 23', there is also 'Night Network' and 'Network 2', as RTE's second channel is now called.



45 Logo of 'Assorted Images', an independant design company.

The use of this imagery has not just been limited to programmes of entertainment features but to those in which serious subjects of relevance to the young are explored. The most memorable example from this field has been Channel Four's 'Network Seven'. It was first mooted as a kind of independant station transmitting news and views pirated from the airwaves. Eventually the constraints of cost meant that it became a more straightforward news orientated youth programme. But in terms of its visual impact and format it ways quite different from anything seen before.

The result of Channel Four's utilisation of independant productions has been the use of commercial design consultancies to do the job that the inhouse television designers would have undertaken in the past. This has been a major contributing factor to the look of these programmes. In the case of 'Network Seven' the group which successfully pitched for the job were 'Assorted Images' a company at the vanguard of British design. Malcolm Garret the principle force behind 'Ai' has himself made a major contribution to modern graphic design through his experience of record cover design during the early 1980's.¹ This contribution has continued to a great extent in design for the arts and television.

The format of 'Network Seven' has consisted of bite size chunks of news which generally concern sensation, scam or manipulation even in the treatment of subjects of particular relevance to the young. The features have ranged from child prostitution in Bangkok, cosmetic surgery, death row inmates and gay weddings to the subject of exorcism, all in seven minute segments. Meanwhile captions carrying additional information appear on screen over the filmed images. As a voice over vies with these visual ingredients, ticker tape like type runs across the bottom of the screen announcing that the current feature will terminate in two and a half minutes and that 'is art porn?' will follow. The production style succumbs to the abstract cinematic techniques which likens the image to the grainy effect gained from the use of 16 mm film, while the slow motion and solarised sequences are comparable to that of pop music promos. The use of cinema verité/tele verité techniques even in situations where they are not even necessary result in odd angles and fast cuts which are mirrored by the sound effects of echoes and distortion.

The young presenters in the corner of a caravan and junk cluttered warehouse chatter to the camera while the real interest is happening centre screen in the



46 Graphic Still from 'Network Seven' (C.4)



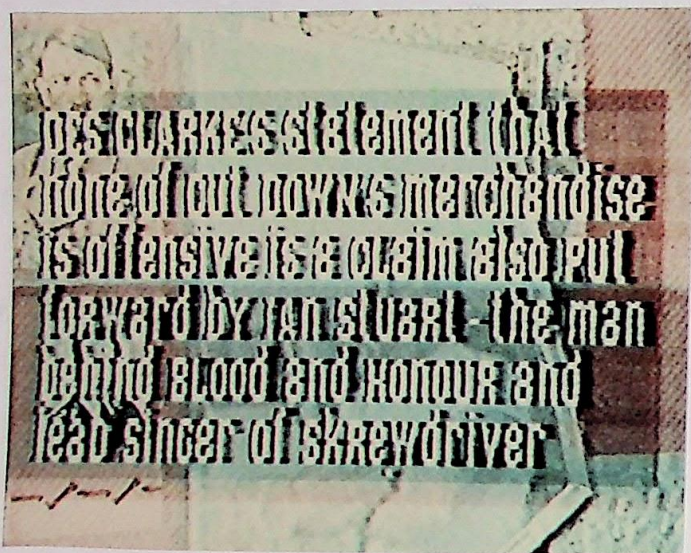
47 Interview style used in 'Reportage' (BBC)

graphics. While it aims to be innovative and exciting it appears to assume that younger people (those under thirty) have no attention span and so the information has to come from four different sides at the same time and at a dizzying speed. But if the span of their attention is not long then its quality must be superlative, because one would need such a span to properly assimilate that which would leave a normal head reeling. Who cares about the victims in the news stories if there is not the time to do so. Ironically the quality of the graphics has been superb even if it has used artificial devices to appeal to the young, such as computer commands and menu bars. But it did pioneer full screen graphics and the ticker tape movement which has extensively been used on programmes which aim to appeal to this audience. However the use of such graphics must be called into question when it seeks to promote dubious subject matter or even more so a format which colours the assimilation of such matter.

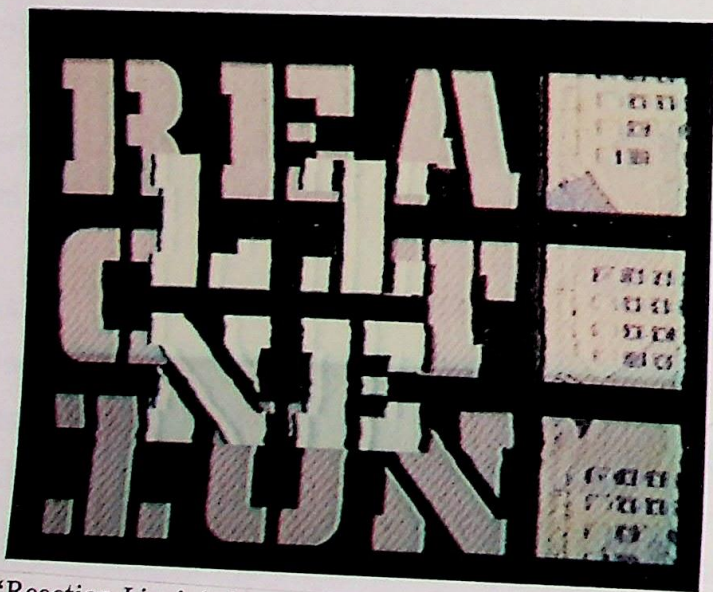
This formula has been carried on by Janet Street-Porter, former executive producer of 'Network Seven' in her first production for the BBC, 'Def II'. It continues the youthful, sophisticated graphic imagery of 'Network Seven' but not quite to the same boundaries. The 'Def II' label covers a range of youth programmes from music shows to re-runs of childrens programmes which would have been watched by the audience when they were children such as 'Andy Pandy' and 'The Clangers'. Naturally it includes a bi-weekly current affairs programme under the title of 'Reportage'. The graphics produced by inhouse BBC designers are of the same innovative nature (even if this innovation is owed to 'Network Seven') responding to the high technology, and popular culture image. They reproduce the full screen graphics made famous by 'Network Seven', using computers to attain the artificially generated, multi layered feel, which is ironic when it is realised that the original 'Assorted Images' graphics were actually produced by conventional means on a drawing board and put in front of a camera. Apart from the graphics which are the strongest aspect of the format, the way in which people are interviewed, the setting and background against which presenters present, are in keeping with the overall feel. Interviewees, dressed as casually as the hip presenters, sit on the edge of desks as if they have just come in for a chat with their mates (Fig. 47). Introduction to features are shot in black and white with a presenter so close to the camera that his or her image is distorted. The background is an office cluttered with desks and files supposedly adding to



48 Presentation style used in 'Reportage' (BBC)



49 Informational graphic still from 'Reportage' (BBC)



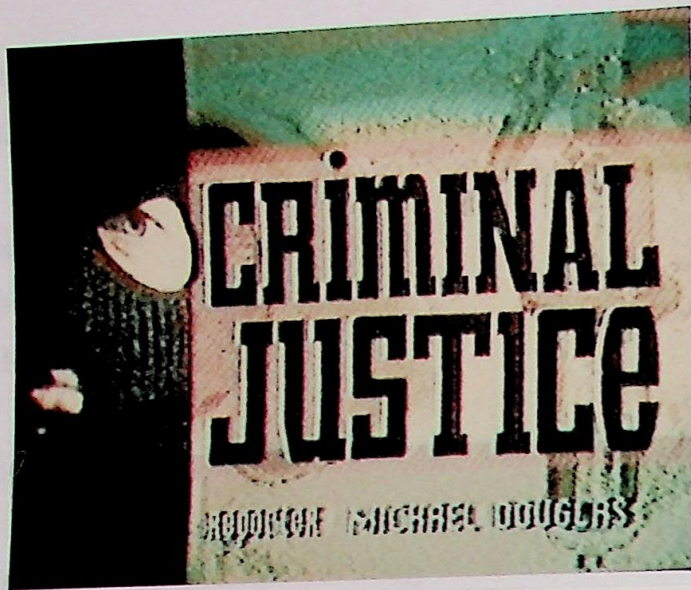
50 'Reaction Line', informational still from 'Reportage' (BBC)

the seriousness and well researched nature of the content (Fig. 48). The actual content is less sensational than 'Network Seven'. It covers real issues which may have cropped in the news, allowing context and analysis. It even probes long running issues which may be no less important because they are no longer making the news. A recent feature covered the plight of junior hospital doctors in Britain and their problems with long shifts. Unfortunately the rapid 'thru-put' (sic) of such subject matter in its five minute segments does not allow for extensive treatment of a subject. Even apparent contradictions can occur with the amount of material covered and the fact that each feature is compiled by a separate journalistic team. The programme does encourage audience participation with phone-ins and reaction lines although it does not have an open format studio which 'Network Seven' can avail of and which allows a less disjointed conjunction between features, and also allows an actual physical audience participation.

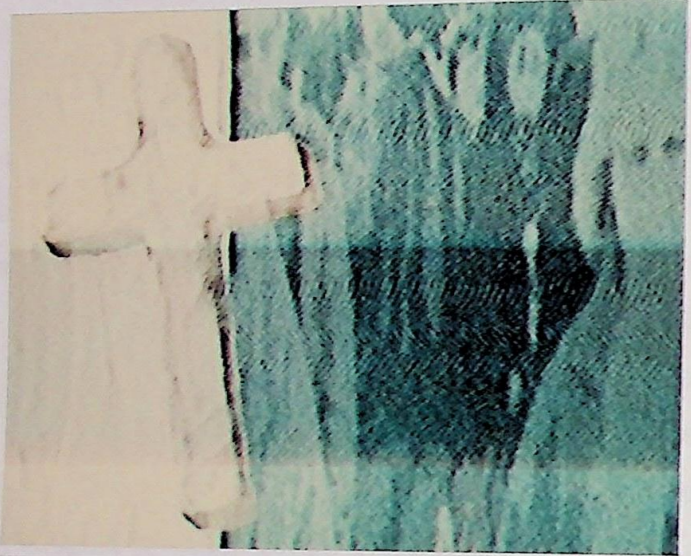
The barrage of information and the break-neck format, broken up rather than enhanced by the designed aspects and production quirks do nothing for the power of the viewer to interpret the information conveyed, whether it be all news as on 'Reportage' or news mixed with informational subjects which could become blurred with entertainment as in 'Network Seven'.

There is uncertainty as to whether 'Channel Four' will commission a further series of the 'Sunday Productions' programme. Yet if they do not, it will more likely be caused by controversy elicited by the subject matter tackled, such as how automatic bank telling machines could be robbed, than by the original way in which they are treated. Despite obvious deficiencies in the programme, its results must not be allowed to restrain networks from taking the chance to produce innovative material on the basis that it might cause controversy. If however this particular show does not reappear then its influence will continue through programmes of a similar nature and through its far reaching, direct and indirect effect on more mainstream types of programming.

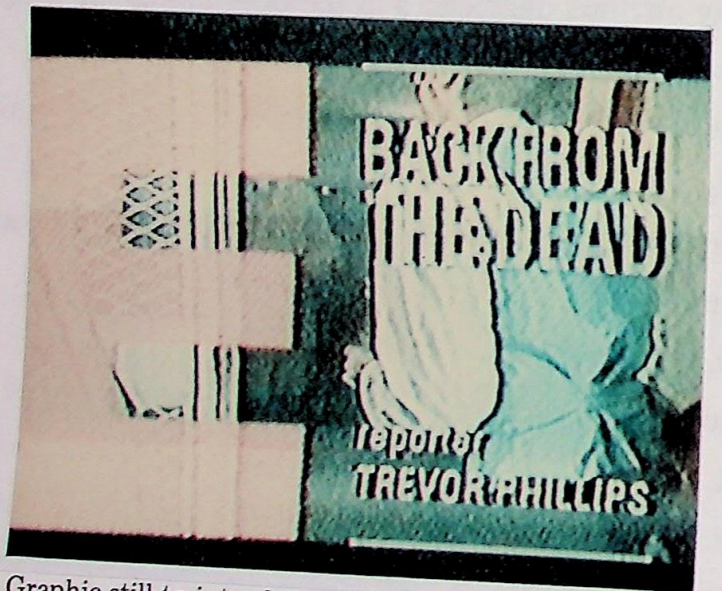
The ITV networked current affairs programme 'Eye Witness' is the newest mainstream programme to show the direct effect. Jane Hewland, Controller of features and current affairs at London Weekend Television, who herself once was a producer of 'Weekend World' replaced that highly acclaimed programme with a reliance upon political interviews of little relevance to the populace, with 'Eye



51 Still from 'In Good Faith' (RTE), a religious programme which uses the multi-layered style.



52 'Criminal Justice', graphic still to introduce a feature in 'Reportage' (BBC)

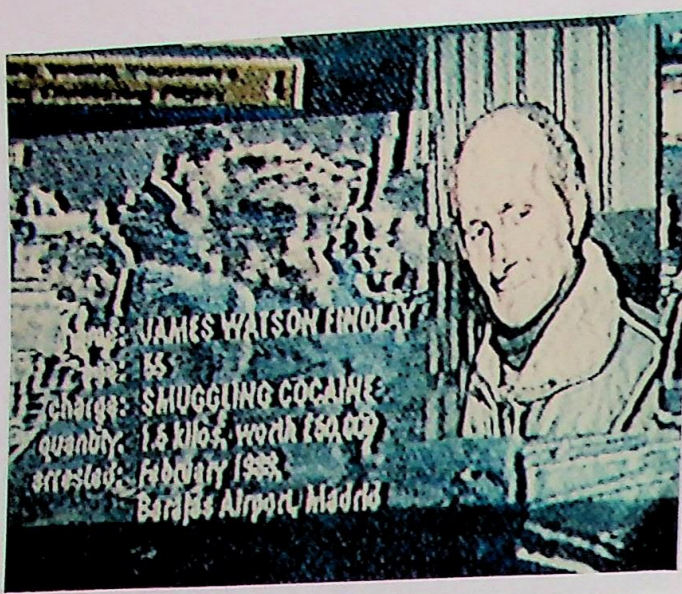


53 Graphic still to introduce a feature on an 'aids' victim in 'Eye Witness' (LWT).

Witness', because it was apparently perceived as being too boring.² Scheduled at Sunday lunchtime, a time usually reserved for current affairs programmes on all the networks such as 'On the Record' with David Dimbleby on BBC 1, its format bears striking resemblance to the youth/current affairs programmes already discussed. In terms of graphics where there is an immediate resemblance with the use of full screen graphics which otherwise would have taken the form of a simple subtitle. They are replaced with trendy type and images to look as if they were generated by a computer. The results could be interchangeable with those on 'Network 7' and 'Reportage' (Fig.s 52 & 53). The format of short features of between eight and twelve minutes duration this time - slightly longer than the two youth programmes mentioned - are still extremely short when subjects need background or extensive explanation. Broadcast at a time when serious 'adult' issues are discussed, the imagery in the programme notwithstanding the use of a similar format, also borrows the aspects associated with youth and with overtones of high technology even employing young, preppie presenters, (all under the age of thirty) even if they are attired in suits and dresses instead of casual street fashion. The set looks like some modernist living room with windows, a bank of tape and video machines in the background, shiny chrome anglepoise spot lamps and even a drawing board on which are casually strewn a few sunday papers (Fig. 55). The programme's logo is not quite to the same aesthetic standard as the internal graphics but who cares, it is only there to create an impression, not of the content, but of appeal to the audiences appreciation of those things associated with design. It claims to have the same standard of content as other current affairs programmes but in a more inovative form , more illustrative and with a better commentry.

Yet the content cannot remain unaffected by the form, especially form for forms sake. The content is being dictated by the form, issues have to be as interesting and emotive as the graphics to fit into this format. Therefore there is not a feature on the state of the health service but a focus on the plight of a newborn baby who had to be ferried across the country to receive the life saving treatment; not a feature on 'aids' but on the plight of a cute little New York girl who has contracted the 'aids' virus through her mother, who in turn contracted it through her sexually promiscuous former husband.

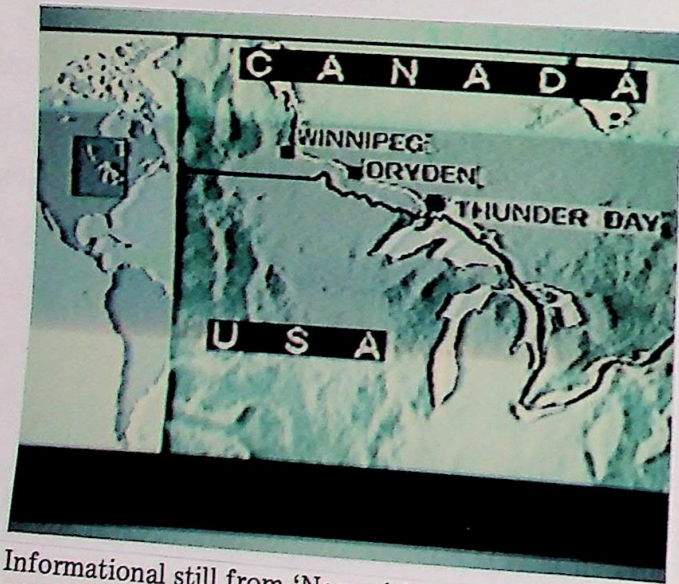
Informational programmes before this had shown signs of these influences if not



54 Informational graphic still from 'Eye Witness' (LWT)



55 Presentation style and studio background in 'Eye Witness' (LWT).



56 Informational still from 'Newsnight' (BBC) with the multi-layered feel of the youth programmes, and also used in the BBC 'Nine O' Clock' news.

to the same extent. The BBC News and Current Affairs shake up resulted in similar trends in the programme 'Newsnight' broadcast on weeknights. The content has not been unduly effected as yet but the visual aspects common to the above programmes are apparent here too, especially in the use of the full screen graphics.

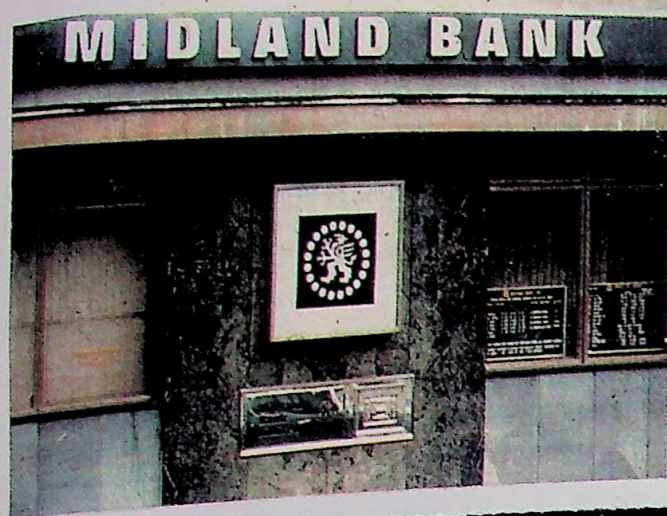
The co-option of a youthful image, a modern designed feel, even by programmes not aimed exclusively at an under 25's audience seems strange. That television, even informational television manipulates its form for the sake of popularity can be understood but the advent of the youthful image in mainstream television is difficult to credit. They hardly feel under threat from minority youth programmes of which 'Reportage' is but one. There is no evidence to suggest that this style has suddenly become popular with a mainstream audience. The only clue as to why it is used is in the similar cooption of all things design orientated as a marketing ploy in advertising and in retail graphic identities. There logic would seem to be that if it works in marketing then why not use it in this type of television. Ironically though, the day of the yuppie has past. All things designed have become equated with a lack of substance, an absence of content. Even the legitimate use of design is becoming debased with a similar reflection on content. The derogatory terms of 'trendy', 'style', and 'design' are being used in conjunction with programmes such as newsnight with the perceived standard of the content being reduced by association.

CONCLUSION

Television has always been an ephemeral medium, not thought worthy of serious consideration by critics from the literary tradition, and when considered worthy by them, it has only been in relation to a threat to culture and morals. Never the less the medium has become an inherent part of people's lives, as a focus point of popular culture, a source of entertainment and the principle instrument through which people seek information. The character of this information is not just limited to the strictly functional, such as what the weather will be like tomorrow, but also that which people need to know to feel part of the world in which they live and to find a reference for their status and existence within society.

The service which television provides was not suddenly created as an autonomous entity but developed over the years. In terms of technology the quality of colour and definition, although far from perfect now, bears no relation to the tiny black and white flickering image of the 1930's. Apart from these changes the subjects tackled have been expanded as have the ways which they have been produced. The modern, advanced methods of production mean that programme makers have at their disposal a range of services which gives them a freedom, mitigated only by budget and technical ability, to produce a more finely honed version of their initial idea than could ever have been before, and to manipulate content even more.¹

Even when such facilities were not available, those that were enabled producers to provide challenges to the existing forms of the times. Yet their motivation for the most part was to enhance the subject matter, and ultimately to make it more accessible to the viewers. Though as has been demonstrated, the tricks learned were regularly used on information based television output, not just to make a better presentation but to attract an audience who would otherwise not be interested in the programme. If the outcome was the broadening of access to a programme without any detrimental effect on the content, then all would be fine - even the Christ figure of the Bible couched His sermons in the form of parables. But often the content itself is undermined or else the way in which it can be digested by the



57 Midland Bank frontage.



58 New look Midland Bank frontage.



59 RTE 2/Network 2 logo.



60 'Debenhams' logo.

viewer is undermined, the repercussions of which in areas such as news are too important to be overlooked. Side effects such as this are not just limited to the way that television itself is viewed, but effect the attention span of audiences which renders other media and art forms redundant. Who wants to read a whole newspaper when television supplies an abridged version, or watch a cinema film let alone an opera? Even the video machine makes it easy to fast forward and skip over the boring bits, while the remote control makes it easy to graze on television output. The viewer needs only to sit in front of the monitor to let the output wash over him to the exclusion of other media. In these circumstances stations have a duty, if not to provide a full range of information, then at least to present what they do, in an unadulterated form.

The link with commercial concerns has been a major factor in the way that the forms of television have evolved, even that which is based on a public service remit. Finance is always the final consideration. Consequently the sort of changes which have occurred in the retail sector, with reference to the design revolution, which has made banks look like boutiques (Figs 57 & 58), have found their way onto television. Advertisements punctuate the programmes of commercial stations selling lifestyle and feelings. The trend in retail marketing however has been to sell style and design, and it is these visual buzzwords which are used to window dress a content which often has no relationship with such styling.

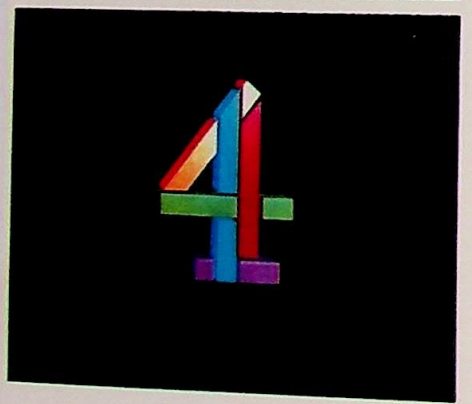
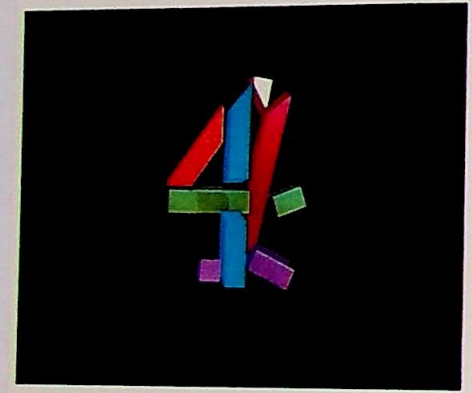
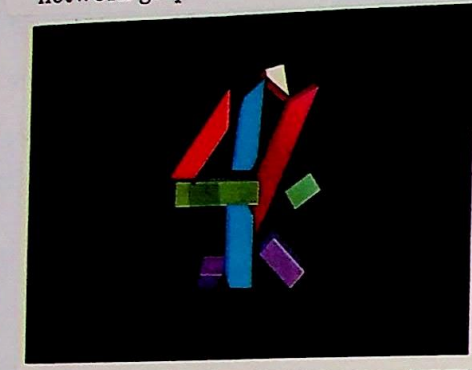
However true this may be, RTE can still claim that 'Network Two' has increased its audience share since its relaunch after being plain old 'RTE 2'. The brush stroke device in the logo is supposed to represent sensitivity and modernness, and is used in exactly the same way on the 'Debenhams' department store logo (Figs 59 & 60). This ploy which has also resulted in 'Radio 2' being renamed '2FM' is reasonably innocuous when wishing to appeal to a younger, progressive audience, but when informational programmes themselves are effected with their own images being modified, then the information itself is at risk. Commercials, indents and even presentation graphics, interrupting what otherwise would be an intergral broadcast does nothing for the flow of information.

While the new aesthetic which characterises the style of these televisual images might be seen as part of its mannerist phase the style still has a distance to run and in what state it will leave the face of television is unclear although it has been generally responsible for a much needed graphic revamp in network identities it

61 Presentation graphics from Channel Four, a station which does pay



62 Channel Four logo, Design consciousness has given us this classic network graphic identity.



63 Scottish Television logo, a modern style perhaps unsuccessfully applied to the emblem of Scotland, the thistle. Ironically it was designed by the same man responsible for the Channel Four logo- Martin Lambie Nairn.



has had its failures (Fig. 63). It might appear facetious to be precious about such a throw-away medium as television, except that the information carried on that medium is not a throw-away commodity and should not be treated as such. Information is not just a consumer durable to be packaged with 'TAM' ratings, and advertisers' appreciation in mind. However the future from the point of view of a public service ideal is not rosy. Unfortunately even networks such as the BBC which do not have to rely for a major proportion of their income on advertising still tend to broadcast material which is the same standard as their closest rivals, and with deregulation of independant companies the financial base on which these stations will run is not very solid and possibly not extensive enough to provide the same standard of programming as has hitherto been available. RTE is not immune to these concerns, whether they like it or not they are in competition with the British channels and will have the added problem of an independant third channel in Ireland in the near future. The only bright outlook is the tendancy towards more specialised programming but this is reliant upon the audience being an advertisers market. The aural component of the 'Network 7' opening titles now becomes even more pertinent. It includes the repetition of the phrase, "Don't believe the hype"- A phrase which takes on a more profound relevance as we enter the 1990's.

Children's Programmes

- 1 Beverley Clarke, *Graphic Design in Educational Television*, p.90.

Documentary Programmes

- 1 A reference to a saying in the North of Ireland concerning the surreal nature of living in a virtual war zone.
- 2 As broadcast on BBC 1 on 8.2.'89.

Feature Programming

- 1 As broadcast on Channel Four 18.1.'89.
- 2 *BBC Annual Reports and Accounts*, p. 38.
- 3 Ibid.

News

- 1 *BBC Annual Reports and Accounts*, p. 67.
- 2 'See For Yourself' (BBC) 6.1.'89.
- 3 Eric Crostan ed, *IBA Guide to Independant Broadcasting* , p.23.

Current Affairs

- 1 *Irish Times*, 27.2.'89. p.4.

Youth Orientated Programmes

- 1 Catherine McDermott, *Street style*, p.68.
- 2 *The Economist*, p. 106-107.

Conclusion

- 1 Douglas Merrit, *Television Graphics*, p. 36.

SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 29, 34 & 61 are reproduced from 'Television Grapics', D Merrit.

Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 15, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56 & 59 are photographs from video tape of live broadcasts.

Figure 21 is reproduced from 'Creative Review' Vol 8, No. 12.

Figure 60 is reproduced from 'Creative Review' Vol 9, No. 25.

Figure 43 is reproduced from 'Graphics World' No. 75.

Figures 44 & 46 are reproduced from 'Graphics World' No. 73.

Figure 57 & 58 reproduced from 'Designer' Autumn '88.

Figure 45 is reproduced from 'Assorted Images' compliments slip.

Figures 41 & 42 are reproduced from 'The Face' No. 100.

Figures 38, 62 & 63 are reproduced from 'Robinson Lambie Nairn' client brochure.

Figure 22 reproduced from 'The Graphics Guide', R Montague.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Assorted Images information sheet*. London: Assorted Images. 1988.
- BBC Annual Report and Accounts 1987-88*. London: BBC, 1988.
- Blackwell, Lewis. "Do not adjust you set". *Creative Review*. Vol. 8, No. 12 (December 1988), p.14-15.
- Channel Four Television, An introduction to*. London: Channel 4. 1987.
- Channel Four Television Company Limited Report and Accounts*. London: Channel 4, 1988.
- Clarke, Beverley. *Graphic Design in Educational Television*. London: Lund Humphries, 1974.
- Conrad, Peter. *Television, The medium and its manners*. Boston, USA: Routledge and Kegan, 1982.
- Croston, Eric ed. *IBA Guide to Independant Broadcasting*. London: IBA, 1983.
- Economist, The* (London). Vol. 310, No. 7586 (January 21 1989)
- Fiske, John & Hartley, John. *Reading Television*. London: Methuen, 1978.
- Hurrell, Ron. *Television Graphics*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1973.
- Irish Times* (Dublin). 27.2.'89.
- McLoone, Martin & McMahon, John, *Television and Irish Society - 21 years of Irish television*. Dublin: RTE/IFI, 1984.
- McDermott, Catherine. *Street Style, British Design in the '80's*. London: Design Council, 1987.
- McDermott, Catherine. "Tele-visuals". *Graphics World*. No. 73. (Jul-Aug 1988). p. 12-18.
- Merrit, Douglas. *Television Graphics, from pencil to pixel*. London: Trefoil, 1987.
- Montague, R. *The Graphics Guide, for producers in news and current affairs*. London: BBC, 1988.
- Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death, Public discourse in the age of showbusiness*. London: Heinman, 1988.
- Shanfield, Robin. "The Shape of Things to Come". *Broadcast*. November 1983. p.20-22.
- Smith, Anthony. *The politics of Information*. London: Macmillan, 1978.
- Whitley, Nigel. *Pop Design, Modernism to Mod*. London: Design Council, 1987.
- Zeith, Herbert. *Television Production Handbook*. California, USA: Wadsworth, 1984 ed.