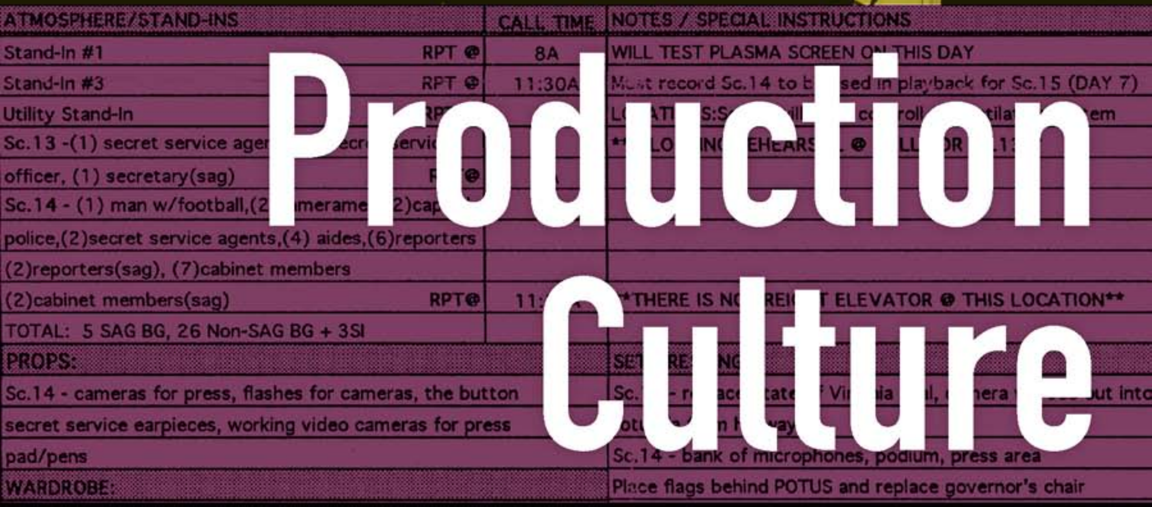
JOHN THORNTON CALDWELL

Production Culture



ATMOSPHERE/STAND-INS		CALL TIME	NOTES / SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS
Stand-In #1	RPT @	8A	WILL TEST PLASMA SCREEN ON THIS DAY
Stand-In #3	RPT @	11:30A	Must record Sc.14 to be used in playback for Sc.15 (DAY 7)
Utility Stand-In			
Sc.13 -(1) secret service agen			
officer, (1) secretary(sag)			
Sc.14 - (1) man w/football,(2			
police,(2)secret service agents,(4) aides,(6)reporters			
(2)reporters(sag), (7)cabinet members			
(2)cabinet members(sag)	RPT@		**THERE IS NO FREIGHT ELEVATOR @ THIS LOCATION**
TOTAL: 5 SAG BG, 26 Non-SAG BG + 3SI			

PROPS:

Sc.14 - cameras for press, flashes for cameras, the button

secret service earpieces, working video cameras for press

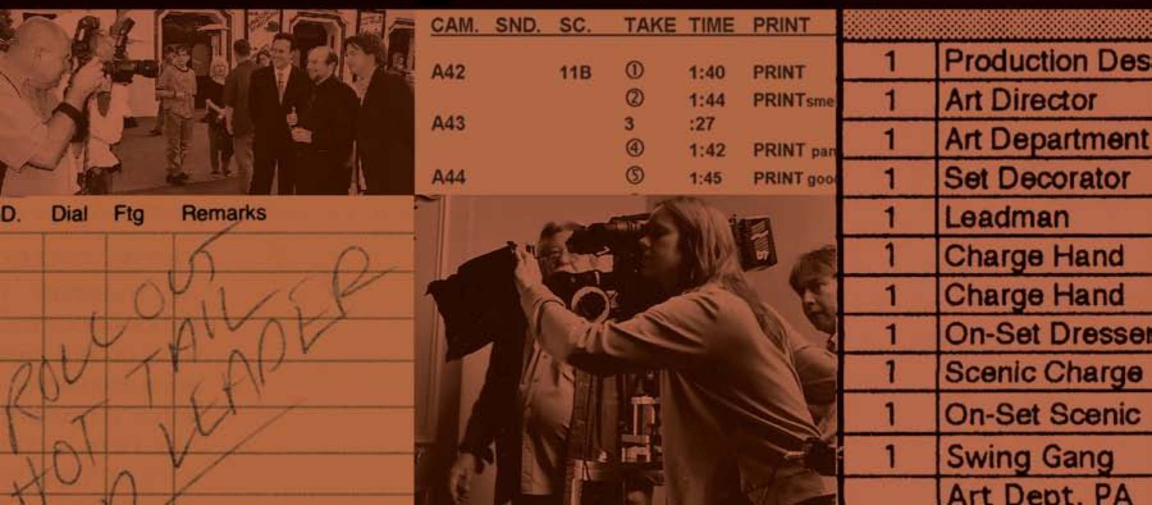
pad/pens

WARDROBE:

Sc.14 - bank of microphones, podium, press area

Place flags behind POTUS and replace governor's chair

INDUSTRIAL REFLEXIVITY AND CRITICAL PRACTICE IN FILM AND TELEVISION



CAM.	SND.	SC.	TAKE	TIME	PRINT
A42		11B	①	1:40	PRINT
			②	1:44	PRINT
A43			3	:27	
			④	1:42	PRINT
A44			⑤	1:45	PRINT

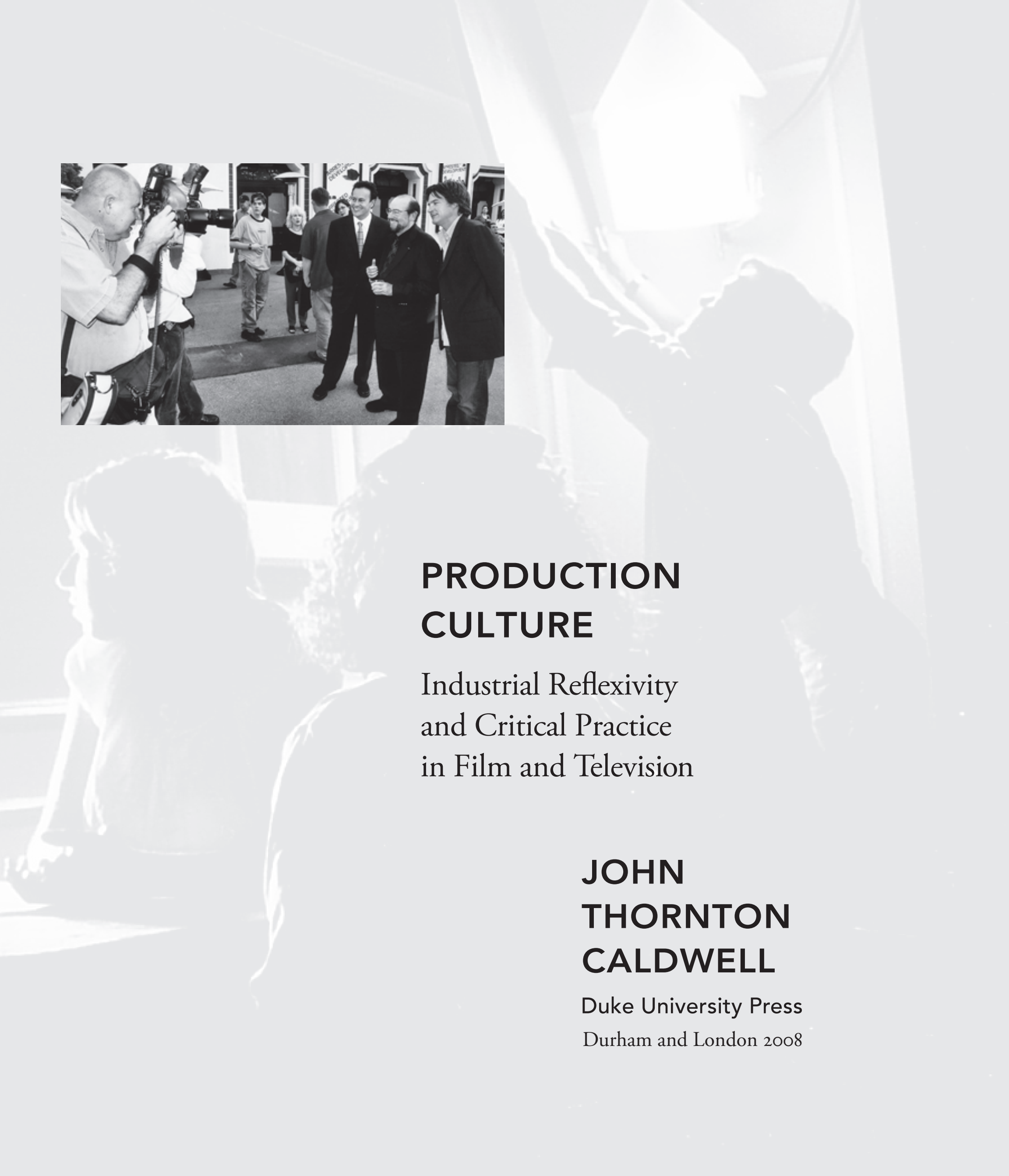
1	Art Director
1	Set Decorator
1	Leadman
1	Charge Hand
1	Charge Hand
1	Scenic Charge
1	On-Set Scenic
1	Swing Gang

Dial Ftg Remarks

ROLLOUT
HOT TAIL
LEADER

Production Culture

CONSOLE-ING PASSIONS
Television and Cultural Power *Edited by Lynn Spigel*



PRODUCTION CULTURE

Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television

JOHN
THORNTON
CALDWELL

Duke University Press
Durham and London 2008

© 2008 Duke University Press
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by Jennifer Hill
Typeset in Adobe Garamond Pro
by Keystone Typesetting, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
appear on the last printed page of this book.

Contents

vii Acknowledgments

1 Introduction
Industrial Reflexivity and Common Sense

37 Chapter 1
Trade Stories and Career Capital

69 Chapter 2
Trade Rituals and Turf Marking

110 Chapter 3
Trade Images and Imagined Communities (Below the Line)

150 Chapter 4
Trade Machines and Manufactured Identities (Below the Line)

Chapter 5 197
Industrial Auteur Theory (Above the Line / Creative)

Chapter 6 232
Industrial Identity Theory (Above the Line / Business)

Chapter 7 274
Industrial Reflexivity as Viral Marketing

Conclusion 316
Shoot-Outs, Bake-Offs, and Speed Dating (Manic Disclosure/Non-Disclosure)

Appendix 1 345
Method: Artifacts and Cultural Practices in Production Studies

Appendix 2 362
A Taxonomy of DVD Bonus Track Strategies and Functions

Appendix 3 368
Practitioner Avowal/Disavowal (Industrial Doublespeak)

Appendix 4 370
Corporate Reflexivity vs. Worker Reflexivity (The Two Warring Flipsides of Industrial Self-Disclosure)

Notes 373

Works Cited 433

Index 445

Acknowledgments

This book began as a series of five public lectures at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, and at the University of Bergen, Norway, in May 1996 and September 1997 entitled: "Liminal Industry: Ceremonial Rituals of the Production Culture," "Iconography of the Technical Culture: Local Knowledge, Demos, and Testosterone," "Textual Practices of the Marketing Culture," "Critical Production Practice: Screen Theory of the Programming Culture," and "Multichannel Branding and the Migratory Patterns of Industrial Texts."[1] I thank Jostein Gripsrud for his invitation, and Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Lennard Hojbjerg for the opportunity to inaugurate with these lectures the yearlong multidisciplinary research initiative at the University of Copenhagen in 1997 entitled "The Humanistic and Psychological Study of Visual Media and Visual Cognition." These essays were subsequently updated and presented at a number of universities and conferences internationally from 1997 to 2003. Some of the general ideas of these papers —on branding, the digital sweatshop, masculinity and gendered technologies, liminal professional rituals, worker anxieties, outsourcing, and industrial reflexivity—appeared in short form, excerpted, or adapted as part of other studies in *The Encyclopedia of Television* (1997, 2003), *Electronic Media* *and Technoculture* (2000), *Emergences* (2001), *The New Media Book,* (2002), *Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook* (2002), and *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality* (2003).

These essays, albeit revised extensively to incorporate and address recent developments in film and television, were also presented between 1996 and 2005 at the University of Oslo, Norway; Aarhus University, Denmark; Siegen University, Germany; University of Stockholm, Sweden; University of Teipei, Taiwan; Shanghai University, China; University of Warwick, England; Birmingham University, England; Wesleyan University; Dartmouth University; University of Southern California; University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; University of California, San Diego; University of California, Santa Cruz; University of California, Berkeley; Ohio University; Northwestern University; the Console-ing Passions Conference on Television, Media and Feminism (Notre Dame and Milwaukee); and the Society for Cinema Studies Conference (Ottawa, San Diego, Chicago, Washington, and Denver). For their invitations, valuable feedback, and provocative questions on those and other occasions, I gratefully thank Elizabeth Traube, Tain-Dow Lee, John Fullerton, Jan Olsson, Mark Williams, Nick Couldry, Karen Riggs, Herman Gray, Lynn Spigel, David Bordwell, James Bennett, Tom Brown, and Charlotte Brunsdon.[2] Others along the way provided valuable editorial advice on various projects: Anna McCarthy, Tara McPherson, Toby Miller, Horace Newcomb, Sherry Ortner, Karen Brodkin, and Jeffrey Sconce. In many ways the book at hand builds on my earliest research on "low theory" and "industrial semiotics" in film/video cultures of production, which was published in *Cinema Journal* in 1993, *American Television* in 1994, and *Televisuality* in 1995. The book at hand provides the opportunity to update, expand, and bring together the Copenhagen and Bergen papers in a unified and integrated way for the first time, even as they were originally conceived and publicly presented.[3]

I would like to thank several presses for allowing me to extensively revise and reprint here updated versions of the original papers: "Industrial Geography Lessons," in *Mediaspace*, ed. Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (Routledge, 2003); "Convergence Television," in *Television after TV,* ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Duke University Press, 2004); "Probe Technologies and Deep Texts as Industrial Geography Lessons in the Age of Digital," in *Allegories of Communication* (John Libbey, 2004); "Welcome to the Viral Future of Cinema (Television)," *Cinema Journal* (fall 2005); and "Critical Industrial Practice," *Television and New Media* (May 2006).

I am especially grateful to Ken Wissoker, for his interest and support in the project; to Courtney Berger and Justin Faerber, for their editorial assistance; and especially to the two anonymous reviewers of this manuscript. Their insightful challenges and extensive suggestions—on several successive drafts —made this book far better than it would have been otherwise. The reviewers also convinced me that the manuscript I "completed" in 2005 was actually two books posing as one, which means that portions of the original project will appear elsewhere. Many thanks to my colleagues at UCLA—Nick Browne, Janet Bergstrom, Teshome Gabriel, Doug Kellner, Steve Mamber, Denise Mann, Kathleen McHugh, Chon Noriega, Sherry Ortner, Steve Ricci, Vivian Sobchack, Barbara Boyle, and Robert Rosen—who created a rich environment in which to pursue this research over the past eight years. I also benefited immensely from my experience on the faculty at UCSD from 1996 to 1998, where my production teaching and film studies research on production gained immeasurably from exposure to the cultural, ethnographic, political-economic, and sociological methodologies and work of my colleagues Phil Agre, Susan Davis, Daniel Hallin, Robert Horowitz, George Lipsitz, Chandra Mukerji, Daniel Schiller, Michael Schudson, and Ellen Seiter. I hope that my Northwestern advisor and mentor Mimi White and my professors Jack Ellis, and Chuck Kleinhans, will each see their own influence as well, for they did indeed inform this manuscript in fundamental ways. The anthropologist Bill McKellin kindly allowed me to observe his extended ethnographic fieldwork among the Managalase, and this proved to be a formative influence in my own research fifteen years later. Sadly, I am not able to thank two individuals in person: the late George Custen and Lisa Kernan. George taught me a lot about the classical Hollywood system and helped me publish my first book. Lisa and I shared many good discussions about behind-the-scenes film knowledge after I discovered her recent book *Coming Attractions* and before she passed away this summer. She was the ideal of what an educator, scholar, and activist can and should be.

Only after sixteen years of college-level teaching in film/video production and the visual arts was I fortunate enough to earn an appointment at a doctoral research university. This position has allowed me to work with Ph.D. students over the last few years, whose dissertation committees or research continuously stimulated and challenged my own thinking. Many thanks in this regard to Miranda Banks, Daniel Bernardi, Gilberto Blasini, Erica Bochanty, Vincent Brook, Michael Clarke, Rebecca Epstein, Chiara

Ferrari, Tarleton Gillespie, Bambi Haggins, Felicia Henderson, Erin Hill, Jennifer Holt, L. S. Kim, Paul Malcolm, Katynka Martinez, Maria Munoz, Vicki Mayer, Ross Melnick, Candace Moore, Catherine Saulino, Sudeep Sharma, Sharon K. Sharp, Beretta Smith-Shomade, and Eric Vanstrom. Since 1999, a yearly seminar I have taught at UCLA entitled "FTV201: Media Industries and Cultures of Production" has provided the setting in which the research for this book was systematically tested, debated, and refined. I am grateful for my many productive conversations with these graduate students and others: Joshua Amberg, John Bridge, Stephen Charbonneau, Adam Fish, Colin Gunckel, Cecilia Hastings, Robert Hernandez, Ali Hoffman, Victoria Meng, Daren Overpeck, Mary Samuelson, and Laurel Westrup.

Finally, thanks to a group of friends who kindly helped me make sense of things over the years: David Brokaw, David Clausen, Dante D'Ambrosio, Joe Davis, Stan DeWitt, Chuck Dickson, Robert Finney, Devora Gomez, David Johnson, John Pudaite, Jose Sanchez-H., Joel Sheesley, Eric Stedfeld, Brian Stein-Webber, Mary Stein-Webber, Mike Stracco, Gregory Taylor, and John Walford. Their assistance and friendship will always be much appreciated, even as memories of our times together fades. My family, of course, provided fundamental forms of support and personal encouragement during the writing of this book, especially Thekla E. Joiner and my parents Paul and Ruth Caldwell. I dedicate this book to my three children—Otis John, Julia Thornton, and Stephen Joel—and not just because of my recurring penchant "for connecting everything to everything else" but because they were always a part of everything that I saw and heard and thought about as I wrote and rewrote *Production Culture*.

> The guiding principle is the same: societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations. One only has to learn how to gain access to them.
>
> —Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight"

> Everybody is hyper self-aware. We live in a post-everything universe.
>
> —Josh Schwartz, executive producer of *The O.C.*

Introduction

Industrial Reflexivity and Common Sense

This book explores the cultural practices and belief systems of film/video production workers in Los Angeles—not just those of the prestige producers and directors but also those of the many more anonymous workers, such as gaffers and grips, in Hollywood's lower castes and crafts. Fieldwork for a study of this sort is complicated by the fact that film and television today reflect obsessively back upon themselves and invest considerable energy in over-producing and distributing this industrial self-analysis to the public. Once considered secondary or backstory phenomena, industry self-analysis and self-representation now serve as primary on-screen entertainment forms across a vast multimedia landscape. Stylish on-screen metacommentaries now pervade the worlds of both viewer and producer.[1] The fact that the new industrial narcissus places so much of this self-consciousness on the screen, outside, and in public makes traditional scholarly questions about a "behind-the-scenes" or "authentic" industry "inside" seem rather beside the point.

Critics and theorists have traditionally hyped reflexivity and deconstruction of this sort as indications of vanguard cinematic agitation or critical audience resistance. Management experts, however, would probably deem such practices as merely sound corporate promotional and marketing strategies.[2] Although in this book I examine both style and marketing dimensions, I also argue that industrial reflexivity needs to be understood as forms of local cultural negotiation and expression as well, for the lived production communities that create films, programs, "making-ofs," behind-the-scenes docs, DVD bonus tracks, show-biz reports, and cross-media film/TV franchises. I recognize that film and television are far more than either industries or groups of media corporations that simply manufacture entertainment or compete as part of a national economy or international cultural marketplace. While film and television are influenced by macroscopic economic processes, they also very much function on a microsocial level as local cultures and social communities in their own right. Film and television, in other words, do not simply produce mass or popular culture (a much-studied perspective for over seven decades), but rather film/TV production communities themselves are cultural expressions and entities involving all of the symbolic processes and collective practices that other cultures use: to gain and reinforce identity, to forge consensus and order, to perpetuate themselves and their interests, and to interpret the media *as* audience members. In the end, I hope that the reader of this book will agree that the picture of the worlds of workers that I offer in these chapters proves to be as critically provocative and culturally significant as the on-screen content of prime-time programs and widescreen films that critics and theorists traditionally analyze.

Far from involving rote or merely intuitive work, many film/television workers (including those in the manual crafts) critically analyze and theorize their tasks in provocative and complex ways. Knowledge about the industry, whether approached through industrial documentation or personal interviews, is usually highly coded, managed, and inflected. For this reason, I have tried to avoid two familiar scholarly traps: attempting to "directly" analyze the social group and limiting my analysis to on-screen forms produced by the social group.[3] Instead, I have paid particular attention to any available evidence of the social group's own entrenched interpretive frameworks and self-analysis. Throughout the chapters that follow, I also insist that this "culture as an interpretive system" approach always be seen as fully embedded in the play of power and politics.[4] Because insider knowledge is *always* managed; because spin and narrative define and couch any industrial disclosure; and because researcher-practitioner contacts are always marked by symbiotic tensions over authenticity and advantage, media studies must avoid limiting research to a clean menu of disconnected methods: textual analysis, reporting, interviewing, economic analysis, or ethnography. In this book I argue that the complicated layers of public relations management at work in every layer of the production cultures of Los Angeles mean that researchers would benefit by questioning the value of overt or intentional explanations (especially unsolicited ones). Strangely, the industry itself is cynical about the veracity of its own educational disclosures, sometimes likening them to the overly earnest and therefore highly suspect sort of "help" offered by used car salesmen.[5]

My decade-long research for this book leaves me with at least one nagging hunch, a kind of "inverse credibility law": the higher one travels up the industrial food chain for insights, the more suspect and spin-driven the personal disclosures tend to become.[6] The producers and executives I interviewed who've learned to converse "spontaneously" in tightly crafted prefab sound bites prove this point dramatically. By habit, many speak from corporate "scripts." For this reason, shifting emphasis to the industry's "deep" texts, rituals, and spaces sometimes offers a very different picture of film/television, since such things are seldom offered as official public explanations—big statements, that is—about "what production means." One of my aims here is to find and suggest concrete ways by which media studies might reconsider its methods in the face of an industry that is increasingly preoccupied with workaday forms of critical and cultural analysis that are at some points privately exchanged and at other times publicly dramatized. This regularized "outing" of embedded production knowledge occurs within two broad cultural registers: first, in private or bounded disclosures to production personnel themselves (of the sort I examine in the next few pages and in chapters 1–5); and second, in public disclosures to the viewing audience (via the reflexive, on-screen genres I examine in chapters 6 and 7). Each register brings distinctive challenges to media scholars. The four sections that follow introduce key perspectives of the book as a whole: first, a discussion of methods and precedents; second, an examination of trade and worker talk; third, a consideration of deep texts and artifacts; and fourth, a discussion of the scope, limits, and implications of the book.

The stars are about to collide.
STUDIO 60
ON THE SUNSET STRIP
10PM MONDAYS

By fall 2006 NBC makes media's critique of itself unremarkable. Here, *Studio 60* brings prime-time reflexivity nationwide, even to this tagged industrial railyard adjacent to the refineries in Wilmington, California. *Photo © J. Caldwell, 2006.*

AN INTEGRATED CULTURAL-INDUSTRIAL ANALYSIS

Throughout this book, I utilize an integrated cultural-industrial method of analysis. My approach is synthetic, and I examine data from four registers or modes of analysis: textual analysis of trade and worker artifacts; interviews with film/television workers; ethnographic field observation of production spaces and professional gatherings; and economic/industrial analysis.[7] I have attempted whenever possible to keep these individual research modes "in check" by placing the discourses and results of any one register (textual, ethnographic, interviews, and political economy) in critical tension or dialogue with the others. This method of cross-checking proves useful when interrogating production practices where, for example, the rhetoric of studio press kits does not jive with explanations provided by production craftspeople; or when demo tapes used to market equipment conveniently elide or gloss labor issues raised through more macroscopic industrial analysis or spin; or when sunny disclosures in interviews with producers are contradicted by cost-saving new technologies that displace and stress production workers. The integrated methodology used here, although perhaps larger than the traditional "tool kit" employed in textual or stylistic analysis, still very much fits within a critical film and media studies tradition. In some ways, my approach also responds to the anthropologist George Marcus's proposal for "situated, multi-locale" field studies that integrate microsociological cultural analysis with macrosociological political economic frameworks.[8] In other ways, this book follows Paul Willis's call to find and articulate examples of critical theory embedded within the everyday of workers' experience—that is, through the pursuit of a kind of indigenous cultural theory that operates outside of academia.[9] I have been particularly drawn to this idea of "theorizing from the ground up" as an alternative to conventional approaches.

My project is also less about finding an "authentic" reality "behind the scenes"—an empirical notion that tends to be naive about the ways that media industry realities are *always* constructed—than it is about studying the industry's own self-representation, self-critique, and self-reflection.[10] This approach is less informed by traditional anthropology and its functionalist explanations than it is by the "interpretive" anthropology of Clifford Geertz. Both methodologies depend upon fieldwork, but Geertz builds his model on hermeneutics rather than on an explanation of direct social function. As Geertz states: "The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to *read over the shoulders* of those to whom they properly belong."[11] Following the philosopher Paul Ricouer, Geertz argues that the ethnographic problem is not about "social mechanics" but about "social semantics," which for him means systematically treating "cultural forms . . . (as) texts, as imaginative works built out of social materials."[12] Like Geertz, my project aims to "look over the shoulder" of film and television workers in terms of the "interpretive" nature of their practices. But beyond this I also hope to suggest how these industrial "critical" or "theorizing" artifacts, rituals, and mediated forms of reflexivity express an emerging but unstable economic and social order in Hollywood.

Although critics seldom acknowledge film/video workers as theorists or ethnographers, these workers do in fact produce "self-ethnographic" accounts and daily deploy what I define as *critical industrial practices.*[13] As for definitions, this three-part concept signifies trade methods and conventions involving interpretive schemes (the "critical" dimension) that are deployed within specific institutional contexts and relationships (the "industrial"

dcast and beyond

Production workers continuously reflect on the production task and its technologies. Here, software designers discuss the digital replication process. Los Angeles, June 2001. *Photo © J. Caldwell.*

environment) when such activities are manifest during technical production tasks or professional interactions (labor and "practice"). Approached this way, for example, critical industrial practices include the general framing paradigms that writers and producers use to conceptualize and develop screen content for film and television (industrial aesthetic theory). The rubric also references incremental forms of analysis that directors and editors stage and deploy over time during the production or postproduction process (critical analysis as production management). Critical industrial practice also informs and governs production work worlds such as those of camera crews. As part of craft habit such crews rigidly segregate and atomize worker tasks, even as they network worker communication, in more holistic ways. Camera-crew work assignments still follow a Taylorist industrial logic, where each worker is assigned a discrete physical subtask or routine (to pull focus, to load mags, to clean the gate, to operate, to move, to measure, to scrim or flag). Yet camera-crew interactions and trade communications also function at a higher level as Geertzian cultural expressions that work to make sense of the overall image-making enterprise. Together, directors of photography (DPs), operators, assistants, gaffers, and grips in effect comprise what the sociologist Bruno Latour terms "actor-networks."[14] Craft workers (actors) follow trade conventions to collectively move the production along, using networks that "distribute cognition" across the group as part of industrial habit.[15]

These interactive forms of cognition during a shoot suggest that scholars should look beyond the standard split between film "theory" and film "work," and consider how film industrial practices, technologies, discourses, and interactions also involve critical analysis, theoretical elaboration, and aesthetic sense making. My research in this book can be described as a cultural studies of both industrial film/video theorizing (a cognitive and social activity) and production (a cultural practice). Such study asks how collective theorizing (conventionalized sense making) is animated in practitioner tools, trade artifacts, and social behaviors in film/television's industrial culture. In various chapters I also will return to another recurring theme by suggesting how self-ethnographic discourses and cultural theorizing can be understood alongside broader developments and threats—including digital technologies, runaway production, and globalization—now faced by the film/video production community in the United States. To more fully understand "film's production of culture" today means looking more closely at "the culture of film/video production," especially as its conventions and craft habits are threatened.

Here I should note some provisos and definitions concerning scope, media specificity, and method. First, although I pose some generalized conclusions about film/video production in the chapters that follow, such references should not be taken to stand for "the industry" in a totalizing or unified sense. Such a monolith does not exist, even though the term industry *is* deployed monolithically in popular and trade presses as a rhetorical convention. Hence, in this book I use "production culture" in a plural and generic sense (as a collective of discrete constituent cultures and subcultural parts). While "the industry" label may be significant ideologically and rhetorically, the term covers over a great cultural heterogeneity and diversity of economic and trade interests. The fact that in Southern California alone there are now approximately 250,000 workers directly employed by the film and television industries means that cultural heterogeneity and institutional specificity must ground the analysis of any one area.[16] For this reason, in the chapters that follow I typically examine very discrete sectors of the production community (camera support technologies and their users, trade show

Camera crews, like this one directed by the DP Lazlo Kovacs, ASC, "distribute cognition" across segregated craft subspecialties and interactively function as "actor-networks."
Photo © 2004, J. Caldwell.

rituals, etc.). I have tried to foreground a range of specificities (labor sector, technologies, program genres, etc.), types of data considered (trade publications, interviews, observation, etc.), and various institutional limits (geographical, economic, and market scope) when explaining various industrial practices. My research, for example, has been limited to and localized in and around the Los Angeles area. It has involved a combination of fieldwork, interviews, textual analysis, and historical and archival research carried out between 1995 and 2005. It has primarily but not exclusively dealt with below-the-line and trade practices rather than management.[17] And it has focused on rather traditional forms of film and video production rather than online, dot-com, cyber practices or computer programming. Even the many discussions of "digital media" in the various chapters that follow should be understood within the context of motion picture and television production in Southern California rather than as an index of Silicon Valley or the dot-com/high-tech sector in New York.[18] The latter arenas provide very different contexts and social formations for analysis, with fully developed research traditions and critical literatures of their own.

Second, the production sector in Los Angeles area (and as I frame it here), involves the interaction of personnel from *both* film and television. This overlap is especially true among workers in below-the-line crafts.[19] The notion of a common labor pool also describes workers in some programming genres and technical categories more than others.[20] The careers of most screenwriters and producers, for example, tend to be more closely restricted to either film or television, not both (although this is changing). Yet the writers' union (WGA) and producers' guild (PGA) officially represent personnel from both film and television.[21] Therefore, to talk about industrial cultural theorizing for below-the-line cinematographers, editors, and gaffers means examining both film and television.[22] This cross-media working relationship, furthermore, now reflects higher-order interactions involved in the corporate sphere as well, given the multimedia "repurposing" practices of the new, multinational media conglomerates (Time-Warner/AOL/Turner/HBO, Viacom/CBS/MTV/Paramount, etc.). Given the extensive changes in both the production and viewing of contemporary film and television, it is very difficult to talk about film studies today without also considering cinema within the diverse contexts of electronic media. While film producers still mouth the old cliché that "it's all about putting butts in the seats" (of theaters), less than 15 percent of feature revenues now comes from theatrical box office income. Beyond Hollywood's persistent cultural rhetoric, the electronically mediated home now functions as the most economically strategic site for both television reception *and* film consumption.[23]

Studying worker beliefs and industry reflexivity within these two qualifying contexts brings distinctive challenges. The specter of industry's educational disclosure as hard-sell manipulation, which percolates in studies throughout this book, evokes the sadly familiar rhetoric of mutual contempt that marks an apparent gulf between film/television, on the one hand, and intelligence/objectivity, on the other. The screenwriter William Goldman's classic taunt that "nobody knows anything" in Hollywood asserts that intellectual incompetence rather than critical acumen defines the industry, even as it adds self-loathing to the industrial mix.[24] Yet industry missives dismissing intellectuals have their own history as well. *Variety* mocked the anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker's comprehensive 1950 ethnography *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* as the naive musings of an outsider: "A dull and tedious tome. . . . Downright silly. . . . Most of it could have been put together by any Hollywood correspondent in two weeks."[25]

Regardless of Powdermaker's important insights, her crime quite simply was that she was an outsider asking her own questions rather than Hollywood's. The skewerings of Goldman and *Variety* are part of a history of rifts, write offs, and denigrations whenever anyone tries to "seriously" study Hollywood or when industry producers or "players" pose publicly as prescient theorists. Part of this rift is based on anxieties about who knows what in Hollywood, and what (if anything) can be known about the place. Another part results from an overdetermined cultural "mystique" that continues to invoke the industry's decades-old quasi-medieval authority about how the industry works, what it means, and what "really" goes on "behind the scenes."[26] The trades regularly question the motives and legitimacy of anyone analyzing film/television. Oddly, even academic books that are overtly "deferent" to industry creators are criticized by the trades as "naive" reworkings of "network press releases" transcribed by scholars who apparently don't know that "most producers are also salesmen . . . creating their own mythology . . . with joy."[27]

Dismissals of this ilk, however, function as cultural posturing as much as disinterested analysis, especially within the broader context of workaday gossip and "dissing." In this cynical milieu, everyone in Hollywood is on the make, every account is spin or back stabbing, and every contact is exploitation in the making. Even "insider" analysts are ripped if they betray "outsider" motives. Nicholas Kent flays the veteran trade writer Paul Rosenfield for "hyperventilating" while interviewing ("worshipping") Dawn Steel in her office.[28] Some academics can indeed pass muster if they demonstrate secret-society membership.[29] Yet other serious film/television theory scholarship gets ripped mercilessly. As one executive producer intoned: "That's just elitist psychobabble. It sounds like it was written by a professor of malapropism. That has no bearing on the real world . . . of what film is really supposed to be about."[30] Before leveling this damning broadside against academics, the journalist citing it had first carefully established his own legitimate personal credentials—that is, as a "real" screenwriter and producer. Trade reviews frequently challenge both production research and journalistic analysis over issues of authorial identity and legitimacy vis-à-vis the industry.[31] Legitimizing one's industrial identity can be accomplished via first-person self-disclosure or third-person "outing."[32] Significantly, self-disclosures also serve as the very way that industry wannabes and up-and-comers learn to work cocktail parties and receptions or hustle agents or producers in order to "take a meeting."[33] While the media scholar may disclose past media experience to demonstrate legitimacy, the industrial informant will calculate the value that an academic interrogator may have for the informant's own career or professional fortunes. Such informants are, after all, well versed in evaluating and scanning nametags while "working a room" or a market in order to quickly move and gauge the career mobility potential of any new acquaintance. The "any news is good news" approach to PR does not fully explain informant requests to go "off record" or threats made to deny disclosures after interviews. Yet industrial informants know that scholars now ply their wares on an extensive, multimediated public sphere, one that includes many of the same publishing and public forums frequented by their own studio or company marketing department. The extensive array of critically demanding industrial activities that I have researched for this book, however, puts industry's habitual posture of intellectual contempt into some doubt.

Placed within these parameters, readers will discover that this book dialogues with and draws from several interrelated disciplines, including sociological cultural studies,[34] the sociology of work,[35] interpretive anthropology and performance studies,[36] institutional theories of art,[37] political economy,[38] and new technology research.[39] Although my research involved a series of ethnographic observations done over a ten-year period, I do not consider this book necessarily anthropological (in part because of the cross-sector, cross-industry scope of my project). Somewhat out of frustration from the start, one of my goals was simply to consider whether better terms and categories might be formulated to describe and explain new and emerging production practices that have not been adequately theorized (or in some cases recognized). I do hope that by attempting to describe new developments with more precise terminology this book may at least have some pre-anthropological and pre-social science value. That is, more convincing terms are clearly needed simply to describe recent changes in production, including the trends I introduce in the chapters ahead: migratory labor and churn, outsourcing's bid culture, speed shooting and hyperproduction, the digital sweatshop, the director/producer as bible, masculinized tools and worker masochism, gendered production space, industrial contact zones, studio tracking boards and countertracking boards, criticism as stealth marketing, branding as industrial viral practice, and the collapsed workflow caused by the "DI" (digital intermediate). Such concepts and descriptive terms from film/television studies may have some preliminary utility for scholars in other fields, including cultural sociology and the emerging field of "media anthropology," as they turn toward contemporary film and television production as sites for ethnographic research.[40] This recent turn toward cultural studies of industry builds on a provocative set of earlier interventions that we would do well to reconsider.

The early scholarship on Hollywood that began in the 1940s with the work of the sociologist Leo Rosten and the ethnographic anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker established useful precedents for fieldwork and methodologies focused on the film production culture in Los Angeles.[41] Yet in the decades that followed their insights were largely disregarded by academics who showed greater interest in a wide range of mostly nonindustry conceptions of cinema (film aesthetics, director studies, national cinemas, film and culture, psychological aspects of film, film and ideology, etc.). This nonindustrial inclination in film studies held until the early 1980s, when the industry was "rediscovered" on two fronts: first, by *historians* using archival methodologies; and second, by two books that directly took on the challenge of researching the lived cultures of *contemporary* Hollywood.[42] Horace Newcomb and Robert Alley's important book *The Producer's Medium* and Todd Gitlin's *Inside Primetime* both appeared in 1983 and were based on extensive interviewing with practitioners as well as fieldwork in Hollywood.[43] Yet the two books provide contrasting case studies in how academic theory can inflect even interviews with very different ideological meanings. It is useful to compare the two books in terms of a methodological distinction that some anthropologists and linguists make in studying cultures.[44] By synthesizing and intercutting numerous interviews together under the general framework of cultural hegemony, Gitlin framed personal interview disclosures as examples of how dominant culture manages and controls the daily decisions made by film/television practitioners. In Gitlin's approach, cultural theory is deployed to decode and reinterpret local practices and personal explanations as corporate expressions.

Newcomb and Alley's approach, by contrast, shows greater deference to the personal explanations and general propositions provided by their interview subjects. Yet they too sketch out a theoretical scheme (albeit more general than Gitlin's hegemony model) to orient their interviews. Newcomb and Alley adapt Victor Turner's more benign theory of "liminality," which they use to explain the television producer's role in helping to make prime-time television a "public forum" for American culture at large.[45] While Gitlin's producers negotiate and act out capitalist imperatives passed down to industry via dominant cultural interests, Newcomb's producers essentially function as active participants and members of the American *mass audience.* While my work uses negotiation of the sort that Gitlin invokes, and adopts the notion of producers as cultural interpreters that Newcomb proposes, I must explain worker activities as an outgrowth of something less monolithic than a dominant capitalist system or macroscopic than a mass culture forum. One reason my approach is necessarily more delimited and bounded than either Gitlin's or Newcomb's is that they were examining industry executives during the height of the three-network "broadcasting" era when "least objectionable programming," "average Nielsen families," "economies of scale," and a mass audience were realistic industrial goals *and* assumptions of audiences and critics alike.

My analytical task, by comparison, is to make sense of film/video workers who function as part of a very different "postnetwork" industrial world defined by different tendencies and categories, notably "narrowcasting," "niche" demographics, "tiered" programming, "economies of scope," increasingly unstable business and labor relations, endless content "repurposing," and seemingly endless "multichannel" and "multitasking" choices. Because of the reduction in scope, splintering of tastes, shifting modes of production, and technical instabilities characteristic of the later period, my fieldwork must necessarily account for industry through narrower forms of "local culture."[46] The "one size fits all" aspirations of general or classical film theory necessarily gives way here to something far more heterogeneous. In the last decade, several important books explored new methods for researching production in this same context.[47] Julie D'Acci, Herman Gray, Jostein Gripsrud, Jane Shattuc, Amanda Lotz, and Elana Levine all further integrated the critical interviewing mode of Newcomb, Alley, and Gitlin in important directions by situating the insights of producers within various theoretical, textual, social, and historical contexts.[48] Elizabeth Traube, Barry Dornfeld, Arlene Dávila, Laura Grindstaff, Vicki Mayer, and Georgina Born in turn brought increasingly sophisticated methods from anthropology and ethnography to study production.[49] In pursuing an integrated cultural-industrial analysis of recent production trends, and given these precedents, I have found particularly resonant the literature on the sociology of work and organizations by Paul M. Hirsch, Howard Becker, Paul DiMaggio, Andrew

Ross, and Angela McRobbie,[50] as well as the research on creativity and constraint in organizations by James Ettema and D. Charles Whitney.[51]

Studying what might be termed the "indigenous" interpretive frameworks of local production cultures provides specific insights about how individual filmmakers make aesthetic decisions, put theoretical ideas into practice, and make critical distinctions in their job tasks and work worlds. Even as I acknowledge the importance of valuing indigenous or lay theorizing, however, I resist deferring entirely to the local categories and aesthetic paradigms of producers, at least as final guarantors of authenticity or meaning. This latter possibility (a form of authority based on "naive" ethnographic or journalistic deference) is no less problematic than what some have attacked as the "naive" forms of textual analysis that film scholars have traditionally favored due to disregard for media law, policy, and film/video production methods.[52] Interviews with and statements by producers and craftspeople in film can be conceptually rich, theoretically suggestive, and culturally revealing, yet we should never lose sight of the fact that such statements are almost always offered from some perspective of self interest, promotion, and spin. That is, modern film and media companies are resolutely proprietary in nature; they guard many internal processes and on-screen content decisions possessively; they force employees to sign "non-disclosure" and "confidentiality agreements"; and their employees usually only enter the public world and trades as opportunities to hype projects in development or distribution or to fuel PR campaigns and marketing initiatives.[53] Going to industry to "get it right" is valuable to a certain point, but such an approach fails unless we see and consider such expressions as embedded within broader cultural commitments, economies, and industrial traditions that in turn inflect and transpose those very expressions.

Understanding production talk as cultural sense making and self-ethnography requires more carefully and comprehensively considering the practices, expressions, and self-representations of producers, crew members, and technicians. In the next few pages I introduce how reflexive talk by these workers can be viewed as rich, coded, cultural self-portraits. In the subsequent section I play devil's advocate by considering what insights mere industrial artifacts ("deep texts") can provide that explicit explanations ("trade talk") largely circumvent.

INDUSTRY'S SELF-THEORIZING TALK

Production "insiders" predictably differ in the way they explain and theorize their film/video production work. As the cinematographer Michael Chapman, ASC, states bluntly: "The cinematographer's job is to tell people where to look." Garret Brown, DP and the inventor of the Steadicam, however, is more expansive: "Why move the camera? The reasons range from the very most primitive (the simple 3-D effect) to the most absurdly complex (intersecting dramatic, kinetic, psychological and optical possibilities)."[54] *Variety,* however, takes a more businesslike approach: "Studios increasingly need specialty labels to guarantee a supply of original and sometimes kudo-worthy work, particularly at a time when tent-pole and franchise pics have become their new bread-and-butter. . . . When [company founder] Schamus isn't writing and producing, he's a Columbia University professor known for his classes on film theory and what he calls 'no-budget' production."[55] The first cinematographer evokes a fairly common view among practitioners: that production is task oriented and nontheoretical. The second cinematographer, by contrast, suggests that even camera design—with its machine user-interface as a psychological/theoretical nexus—is as complex as anything from high theory in the academy. The third account describes the function of film theory in film marketing and explains the economic logic and theoretical background (that is, "high theory/low budget") of the new feature art-film specialty division of the multinational Universal Studios. Another filmmaker, DP Michael Grady, deftly theorizes how his complicated technical approach to exposure control, emulsion engineering, and lab chemistry follows logically from his "experimental" film aesthetic derived from Wong Kar-Wai, Michael Mann, and Martin Scorsese.[56] Despite their apparent differences, all of these accounts raise the issue of theoretical competence as a factor in the making of contemporary movies. These habitual explanations suggest that we should ask how self-theorizing is being used to make creative and technical decisions on the set and within production organizations. Such questions must be asked vis-à-vis very specific modes of production.

Managing or soliciting the input of writers and producers over the course of twenty-four or thirty-six television episodes, for example, is always ultimately subsumed under the shadow of the person at top. In October 2003 I spoke with Jon Cassar, producer/director of the hit Fox Network television series *24*. Filmed dramatic series on television have, like sitcoms, traditionally been writer-driven shows. Each series usually has a master script with all of the essential narrative details about characters and plots combined in a bound typewritten booklet called the series "bible." Newer series like *24* and *The Shield* and *Boomtown,* however, are more stylish, frenetic, and highly cinematic than both sitcoms and the traditional hour-long dramas of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Because these shows are shot, directed, and edited like contemporary feature films, the status and authority of the series bible has shifted. At one point in my interview with Cassar the following exchange took place:

> **CALDWELL:** Writers of series television have always had "bibles" to serve as blueprints or lexicons, from which all future scripts are developed, as a way of achieving consistency of tone and point of view. How is the look of these (newer) series established and maintained from a postproduction perspective? I assume that is a very important part of both *The Shield* and *24*—to establish a style of editing to carry through the entire series.
>
> **CASSAR:** Well I think you have the human bible. The *producer/director,* that's on the show. Like Scott is. Like I am. That's on the show for the whole duration. So you're the one that keeps that all constant. You're the one that talks to all the new directors. You're the one that makes sure they all understand the style. And you will oversee all of that. And in my case that will go all the way through the mix. Including sound spotting and music spotting. So you become that person in a way. So there isn't a written bible, but there's me. That's my job. I have to make sure everyone understands what we do."[57]

When Cassar asserts that he—rather than a written text—is "the human bible" for the entire filmed series, he has in effect "embodied" the artistic work of hundreds of professionals in the crew and studio. But he has also described an industrial practice that has been largely unrecognized by academic media studies scholars. Newcomb and Alley were among the first to have recognized that it is the "writer/producer" (usually the executive producer) in prime-time television who functions as "auteur." This stands in stark contrast to film, where the director has always assumed (at least symbolically and publicly) the position of author. Newcomb and Alley's conception still holds true in much of television (sitcoms in particular). But a great deal has changed stylistically, economically, and technologically since the network era that Newcomb and Alley described. Jon Cassar does not write for the series *24*. Nor does Scott Brazil write for *The Shield.* Yet the intensive

An onscreen struggle over authorship is staged by NBC, when three levels of filmic reality (and their film crews) collide in self-analysis and in deconstruction of the series *Homicide.* This episode, which aired on January 3, 1997, was directed by Barbara Kopple and produced by Barry Levinson. *Composite photos of video frames by J. Caldwell*

cinematic demands, frantic shooting schedules, high production values, and the need to maintain consistency of look and narrative texture across sixteen or twenty-four different episodes per year (written by dozens of different writers and directed by many different episode directors) has lead to a new authorial function: the series "producer/director." Practitioners argue and rationalize that the written template is no longer sufficient to guarantee stylistic integrity throughout a series. Especially in shows defined by manic style, frenetic editing, and complicated storytelling, the director/producer has emerged as a defining site of artistic authority in current industrial practice. This is but one example of how explicit industrial theorizing describes pervasive film practices and changes in production, of which academic theorists have been largely unaware.

Industrial self-theorizing, of the sort Jon Cassar and Scott Brazil practice, disregards many of the fundamental principles on which scholars judge and evaluate theory. Communication and film theory—whether from classical traditions or contemporary revisions—have tended to value theoretical arguments based on their effectiveness at being systematic, logical, and/or convincing in accounting for how film/media works or means. And while the field of film theory has developed from early forms of impressionistic engagement to rigid scientistic analysis to totalizing ideological models and finally to more modest interventions, most *industrial* self-theorizing practices seldom live or die by their systematicity, detail, logic, or comprehensiveness. Instead, practitioners theorize in practice—that is, at work, in trade narratives and professional interactions—in a very different manner. The production world's self-theorizing disposition can be characterized in six ways: instrumental and inductive, ecumenical and eclectic, unintentional and effacing, reductive and proprietary, real-time or preemptive, and commonsensical. From this perspective, industrial critical practices can be usefully considered not simply as social postures but as cultural performances as well.

The attitude or demeanor of industrial self-theorizing in socio-professional situations frequently combines contradictory or competing impulses. For example, when production is explained publicly, practitioners usually speak from an *instrumental and inductive* perspective. While overtly suspicious of contemporary or ideological academic theory, for example, many screenwriters will fully embrace and acknowledge Aristotle's *Poetics,* Lajos Egri's theory of story structure, Joseph Campbell's myth theory, and Jung's archetypalism to explain their work or screenplays in general. This is because such philosophical sources "work." Such theorizing functions instrumentally because it provides a logic to the daily writing practice and fits a long-standing (and financially proven) industrial mode of production. Most screenwriters will say that good screenplays aren't good because they illustrate Aristotle, Egri, or Campbell. Instead, working writers presuppose that Aristotle, Egri, Campbell, and successful contemporary screenwriters recognize and describe properties of narrative that are universal in nature. Theory (with a capital "T") gives way here to the assumption that writers are dealing with a kind of "natural law"—but it is a form of narrative theorizing, nevertheless. This kind of old school or traditional theorizing practice has been fully incorporated into studio and network story departments, script doctoring, and the WGA, so much so that it is now relegated and categorized as "common sense" rather than critical theory.

Industrial self-theorizing and sense making are also *ecumenical and*

Haskell Wexler, ASC, lights a set, demonstrates a look, and directs a camera crew. Production talk and work protocols like these follow historic conventions that can be understood as "fully embedded" cultural texts and practices. Los Angeles, 1997. *Photo © J. Caldwell.*

eclectic. Film editors may work hard careerwise to develop individual styles (usually based on the conscious appreciation of specific filmmakers, film historical traditions, or cinema aesthetics). Yet in terms of the production choices they've made they will also respond to questions in public by saying that they are open to any and all "solutions" that happen to work to solve a given production problem. Production workers tend to be ecumenical in that they are willing to use any solution (any aesthetic tradition or theoretical perspective) as long as it provides a tool to overcome some obstacle or a key that fits the film. Cinematographers will do the same thing when employing or choosing from among camera or lighting technologies. Each technology brings its own aesthetic possibilities, and DPs choose among these alternatives when confronting the unique lighting and exposure constraints of each location. Essentially cinematographers, camera operators, and editors must of necessity be versatile and hybrid theorizers, ones that never prejudge the look of a production. This is because they are required to work to render someone else's vision (a director's); they approach each location or set inductively and from the ground up (even if they've had a rough plan in preproduction); and they must be able to choose from an extensive set of otherwise competing aesthetic traditions (film noir, montage, expressionism, the MTV style, Rembrandt lighting, neorealism, etc.) to achieve their ends.

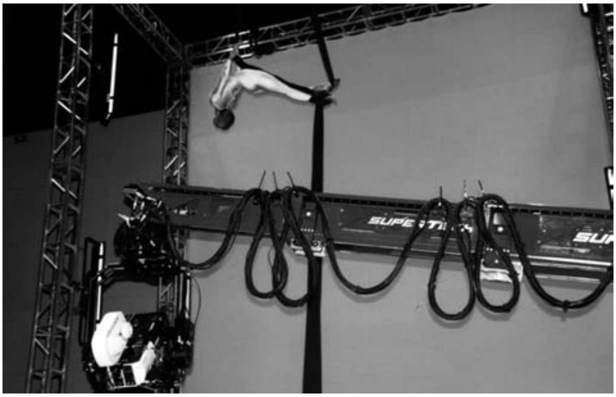
Industrial self-theorizing and sense making frequently pose as *unintentional and effacing.* Below-the-line workers seldom talk of imposing their will or vision upon filmed material or the footage they've been given. Consider one editor's description of an increasingly overwhelming postproduction process now in vogue with fast-paced prime-time dramas:

> **CALDWELL:** With the new (frantic) editing styles, do you try to get more, or less "coverage" during a shoot? I'm curious about shooting ratios for example?
> **SCOTT POWELL:** I've never received this much footage in a show. Or paid less attention to the script. We go through and *read the film.* And we do a lot of rewriting after it is shot. Yeah, it's a challenge. It's a lot to go through."[58]

Powell here describes a process in which the filmed scenes and footage impose *their* will on postproduction workers. The key to this process is effectively "reading" or formally and critically analyzing the film, and then responding with editing decisions that are appropriate to the material in the can. When Powell talks of "rewriting" the film he does not mean relying on, rendering, or deferring to an original script (or the writer's vision). He refers instead to building a film organically from the filmed footage at hand, which is only generally informed by one of *24*'s episodic scripts. Even prestigious film editors like Powell refuse to discuss their specialty as a preconceived art form; they sometimes refer to it as craft, but frequently discuss it as a very unremarkable form of physical work. A few celebrated cinematographers, like Vittorio Storaro, when given the opportunity write and speak overtly, expansively, and in detail about the theoretical concerns (including psychoanalysis, color theory, and cognition) behind lighting and moving image making. Yet these few influential "aesthetes" are far from the norm for the vast majority of cinematographers or members of the camera union. The director of photography Steve Burum draws out what he considers to be one of the most important characteristics of cinematographers: "They learned together, and they developed this technique, and they invented this equipment. Everything that you see on a camera was invented by a cameraman, because he needed to do something, and he didn't know how to do it. And they had these machine shops and they would just fabricate the stuff."[59]

Burum acknowledges a degree of initial ignorance on the part of cameramen, but he is clearly unapologetic about it. Rather, from his perspective this status gives the cameraman a clean slate from which to see, engage, and solve problems. His argument is pragmatic: the filmmaking art is essentially a process of physical problem solving based on the obligatory need to overcome production obstacles. Burum's view is an update of the adage that "necessity is the mother of invention" (and innovation), and it contributes to one of the dominant poses among below-the-line film/video workers. Above-the-line creative personnel (producers and directors in particular) pose with greater variation in sense of purpose. Their position of authority and relative autonomy at the top of the production labor pyramid gives them greater license to claim creative agency and credit for themselves. Even though feature film and prime-time production involves hundreds of specialists working collectively, retrospective or public comments by individual producers and directors about a given production will occasionally claim sole responsibility for the success of a film (however, no one tends to take responsibility in public for films that are failures or flops).[60] Yet many others have learned the traps of egotism and the pragmatic value of more carefully distributing artistic credit in public demonstrations of deference.[61]

Industrial self-theorizing and sense making are *reductive and proprietary.* No matter how complicated, intimidating, or overwhelming the behind-the-scenes picture of a studio back lot or a computer-generated imagery (CGI) effects department may appear in a making-of, the DVDs that include such things will typically explain or reduce the whole undertaking using fairly archaic notions linked, for example, to the persistence and playful "magic" of artists and medieval alchemists. Industrial Light and Magic (ILM), PDI, and Pixar corporations employ legions of workers, including digital artists, programmers, and computer scientists. Yet behind-the-scenes genres that highlight these companies gain little by explaining the studio's on-screen success as the result of workers possessing technical or computer engineering degrees. After all, such expertise is available to any corporation that chooses to hire engineers or technicians. Disney was among the first to have mastered the use of behind-the-scenes shorts and making-ofs in the 1950s as part of its film/TV multimedia studio, as Chris Anderson has shown.[62] True to its origins at Disney five decades earlier, making-ofs about Pixar, PDI, and ILM (or those broadcast on the Sci-Fi Channel, Bravo, or AMC) tend to mimic the genre structure pioneered by Disney. For example, making-ofs about special effects in a summer blockbuster will typically establish an educational and scientific discourse early on in the episode, thus giving viewers a "special" glimpse of the high



Technologies also function as loaded cultural artifacts. While the interface design and use of production tools are "fully embedded" within production culture, staged demonstrations for other technicians (like this one, featuring Cirque de Soleil aerial performers), also function as "semiembedded" practices. Through trial technical demonstrations, proprietary technologies stimulate "imagined worlds" for potential users: here, "Super-Technocrane." Los Angeles, 2001. *Photo © J. Caldwell.*

technology and scientific wonders housed at the company. This educational and futuristic discourse tends to change when the same making-ofs subsequently explain such wonders not as the result of high-tech science but rather of a cadre of hard-working but caring techs and geeks who are, the viewer is led to believe, actually talented artists driven by intuition and personal vision. Among other things, this generic formula—where sci-tech morphs into artistic vision through sleight of hand—helps "brand" Pixar, PDI, and ILM as unique sites of personal innovation. Such effects companies represent themselves as forward-thinking, visionary boutiques; places where distinctive personalities and proprietary imaging skills are made available to clients (and audiences) who chose to pay for, watch, or invest in their services.

Industrial self-theorizing and sense making are also *preemptive or real-time.* Unlike academic theory, which somehow manages to agree on a loose but de facto canon of films and issues (which it uses as the basis for theoretical deliberation), contemporary industrial theorizing frequently unfolds even as or before a given film or television show screens or airs. Vaporware helps explain why this happens in some instances.[63] But this preemptive temporal tendency is also because almost all of the low industrial theorizing that I've referred to in this introduction is driven by or contained within marketing campaigns. Since in American television almost 80 percent of all new shows fail and are canceled each year (low ratings), and films fare little better (uneven box office receipts), advance rhetoric and deliberation about the significance, origins, audience prospects, stylistic approach, director's background and intentions, and use of technology typically flood the trade sphere and now the blogosphere, months before the forthcoming film or television show ever appears in public. Hyperbolic arguments like the following are commonplace in production company press kits: "This is possibly the most advanced production metaphor to hit our industry since David Wark Griffith decided it might be nice to move the camera. . . . With a techno-panorama of 30 screens displaying camera image, computer elements, or control interfaces, the view at the location (of the shoot) becomes a cacophony of components that contribute to a greater whole. . . . The new technologies have a learning curve that not only includes lots of new equipment and personnel, but an entire new glossary that everyone needs to be familiar with."[64]

The ambitious historiographic claims made in this industrial text are formidable: a mere commercial spot produced in 2003 somehow displaces D. W. Griffith as the architect of a fundamentally new cinematic technique. Additionally, all filmmakers will now apparently have to reckon with and adjust to this "breakthrough," given the new technological and formal standards that have resulted. In addition, the "tropes" and forms of figuration used in this press kit are recognizable to film theorists and scholars: an "entirely new" film "glossary" has been developed; and a fully "immersive" visual experience is now ostensibly available for audiences. This production executive at a regional HD (high-definition) production house spins these ambitious theoretical claims to describe his company's recent commercial production (entitled "Red Riding Hood"). Even before the spot airs, therefore, preemptive theoretical arguments touting these cinematic breakthroughs (along with photos proving the distinction) circulate in the postproduction trades.

Personal disclosures by film workers in public tend to be deferential, effaced, and modest. Self-theorizing claims in the printed trade press, on the other hand, tend to be fueled by more acutely partisan marketing and advertising goals. Industry public relations writers occasionally refer (usually off the record) to writing for trade magazines as a form of prostitution or "whoring."[65] Many trade "articles" (or *most* of the articles at some less prestigious publications) are merely hastily reauthored company press releases. Other industry public relations writers specialize in "planting" faux articles in the lesser video production trades (this is more likely to happen in fairly narrow specialty trades like *Video Systems* than in more prestigious industry-wide publications like *Variety*). Trade editors regularly accept such "articles" if they include lists of general "tips" for doing things better in the production specialization. Yet this form of "helpful," but stealthy, writing in the trades usually conceals some vested interest. A company's new programming language, computer code, or proprietary technology, for example, may be presupposed or legitimized by the "helpful" suggestion list being offered to the field at large. Following through on the suggestion contained in a stealth trade article may require a practitioner/reader to purchase a "third party" company's proprietary technology, which is subtly presupposed or required by the trade article's technique tip in question.[66]

Finally, industrial film/video self-theorizing and sense making are *commonsensical.* Production personnel frequently hesitate to admit or assert that their film or creative project has intellectual or cultural significance, or that it participates in a broader theoretical dialogue outside of industry. Even though production personnel may speak at length about filmic form, the production process, how the film works, and even how they see the film related to culture and societal trends they generally will not go to extratextual ends (like scholars) to explain or justify what they've done. One director I spoke to, however, implicitly offers rather sophisticated theorizing about audience engagement and interactivity:

> **CALDWELL:** Have . . . you thought about how this kind of frantic editing and production style (in *24*) is analogous to the de facto "editing" that viewers now do when they "surf" from channel to channel with their remotes?
>
> **SCOTT BRAZIL:** I know that my wife . . . will watch (a show) on Tivo. And I'll come upstairs. And suddenly, I'll hear that, whatever that little tone is—dut, dut, dut (if you don't have Tivo, go buy it, it's brilliant). And it's in the middle of a show and she's zipping through a scene. And I'll say "Why are you doing that?" And she'll say, "I really don't like that character." And then she goes to where the next character appears that she's interested in. And I think that that is really interesting. She's edited the show herself. To watch what is interesting to you. It is scary (for a producer to see). That's what we do."[67]

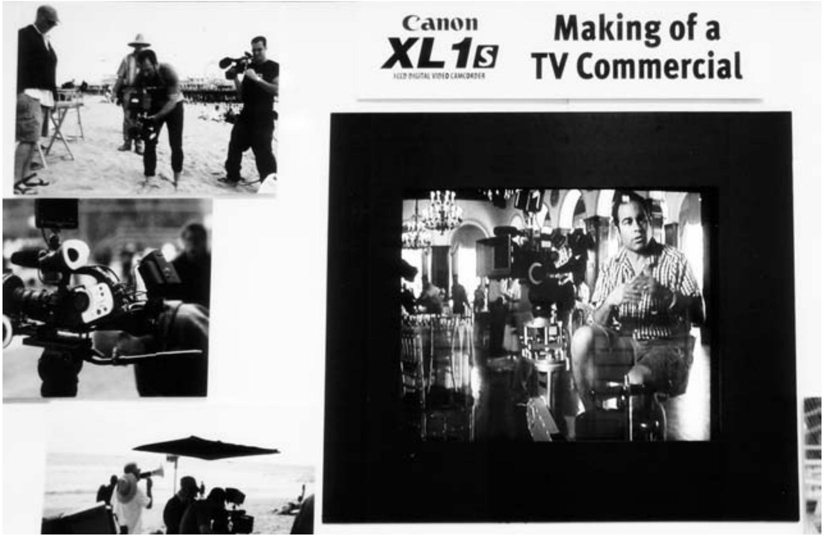
Perhaps more than any other statement that I've cited thus far, Scott Brazil's comments embody many of the attitudes and postures of industrial theorizing practice. His approach, I would argue, is profound and pragmatic, grounded and speculative—and it connects the filmic form (something he creates professionally at the studio) with a provocative theory (something he discerns from his marriage and home life) about how audiences work to customize texts through interactivity, resistant reading, and home editing strategies. More than anything, though, Brazil's insights are presented as "common sense." In this pragmatic process-driven inductive approach to theorizing film form and effect, practitioners enact a kind of theory that scholars like David Bordwell and Noel Carroll have called for—namely, "middle-level theorizing" that is workmanlike, specific, delimited, and local. In talking and visually representing film/television in this way to themselves, practitioners assume a stance that some scholars might deem "theoretical modesty."[68] But to reduce this localism, inductive tendency, and speculative modesty to the status of "mere" common sense (making it unlike theory in status and intention) is to miss important similarities between common sense and theory.[69] In analyzing the nature and cultural function of common sense, Clifford Geertz is particularly vexed at anthropologists—not because they tend to find and so affirm "complex" abilities in "primitives" but because they describe and force these abilities and behaviors into artificial categories imposed from the outside.[70] Geertz rejects artificial, a priori definitions of complex categories in analysis and also describes how common sense presupposes the existence of a "preemptory reality" that underscores the immediate availability of experience rather than deliberated reflection upon it. Yet Geertz also describes a number of the systematic characteristics and critical functions of common sense that closely align with the properties found in production's self-theorizing.[71]

Unfortunately, some media and film theorists have maintained a far darker vision of common-sense making than did Geertz, and broadly prosecuted common sense as the cultural breeding ground of "ideology." According to this view, common sense naturalizes contradictions, normalizes authority, and closes down debate about conflict and power.[72] Such suspicions make academics fairly cynical about the reasoning capacities of those below them in the cultural hierarchy, including workers. Yet media workers and scholars are not well served by this tired, dismissive caricature. Saying that common sense is suspect is like saying that cognition is suspect: both are pretty useless assertions. Sometimes common sense actually turns out to be prescient, self-evident, and logical; a productive way to make sense of things, whether through trade texts or trade talk. At other times, however, trade artifacts betray and indict trade talk's slippery origins in marketing and spin, as I indicate in the next section.

DEEP TEXTS AND ARTIFACTS: NBC 2000 AS SELF-THEORIZING

Many socio-professional behaviors and expressions in production culture pose as pragmatic, functional, and "merely" commonsensical (mostly in venues involving personal disclosure and interpersonal trade talk). At the same time, however, an entirely different set of symbolic artifacts show film/video production cultures to be highly reflexive and self-consciously organized around activities involving critical and aesthetic "interpretation" (a focus most evident in industrial icons, demos, and mediated forms). Fully understanding production culture, therefore, means recognizing the industry's Janus-like stance or profile. On the one hand, face-to-face, verbal, and ritualized forms of interaction tend to explain and legitimize the industry and its practices in commonsense terms. On the other hand, mediated, textualized, and produced forms of trade communication seem strongly predisposed to critical analysis, metareflection, and generalizable (or more theorylike) explanations about film/video.[73]

My approach to the coded and inflected nature of practitioner talk is to consider it alongside a more systematic study of what I term the deep industrial practices of film/video production. That is, practitioners constantly dialogue and negotiate a series of questions that we traditionally value as part of film studies—including questions about what film/video is, how film/video works, how the viewer responds to film/video, and how film/video reflects or forms culture. Yet filmmakers (as opposed to theorists) seldom systematically elaborate on these questions in lengthy spoken or written forms. Rather, this form of embedded theoretical "discussion" in the work world takes place in and through the tools, machines, artifacts, iconographies, working methods, professional rituals, and narratives that film practitioners circulate and enact in film/video trade cultures and subcultures. Rather than simply accepting and legitimizing a producer's generalizations from interviews about how film/television works or what it means, such explanations should be grounded within the contexts of the material,



Making-ofs are also produced for professional consumption. This corporate DVD can be approached as a Geertzian opportunity for "over the shoulder" observation of indigenous, corporate critical theorizing, and it fits within a category of "semiembedded" or "publicly disclosed" deep texts. 2001. *Photo © J. Caldwell.*

symbolic, and representational practices of production workers (see appendix 1). "Looking over the shoulder" of crew members—by analyzing the deep texts, demos, machines, and artifacts that they circulate among themselves—frequently offers insights considerably more complex than "direct" production worker talk.

One example of embedded industrial reflexivity in particular—namely, deep texts exchanged as part of a network "makeover" campaign—offers the chance to test this methodological hunch and suspicion about direct trade talk and foreshadows many of the themes of the book. Film and television now invest considerable energy in behind-the-scenes disclosures among professional workers, circulated as part of professional inter- and intra-organizational communication. These industrial disclosures and exchanges frequently involve forms of critical self-reference that are "mediatized" (produced in video, audio, digital, iconic, or technical formats or ritual interactions). Industrial reflexivity in media form, intended for and circulated among professionals, also regularly "leaks" into the on-screen world of audiences and fans.[74]

In a provocative corporate videotape "demo" prepared to explain details of the NBC 2000 "makeover campaign," executives appear on camera to rally their own affiliate stations, employees, and advertisers by showcasing a set of new theories that were intended to "reenergize" the network. The nonbroadcast tape—used in network affiliate meetings and advertising upfronts—begins confessionally with executives bemoaning the impact of the viewer's remote control, which regularly causes "25 percent dips in viewership between shows." Then, in poignant images and sound bites, as inspirational music fades up, the same execs describe seven categories in NBC's new "value-added" on-screen viewing experience. The demo visually illustrates each tactic with graphic "chapter" intertitles. The first strategy, titled NBC's "Living Window," inserts a graphic frame at the end of each series episode, which shows behind-the-scenes footage from the production. The video then previews a second tactic, namely "video diaries" made by stars like Will Smith that the network calls "Backstage NBC." The third strategy, "Classic NBC Moments," interjects historical archival footage at hour and half-hour programming breaks, which are illustrated by black-and-white footage of a young Michael Landon singing to a swooning female audience on the early 1960s show *Hullabaloo.* Melodramatic music swells up to underscore the teary nostalgia of the moment. "Trivia," the fourth reflexive strategy announced by NBC management to its industrial partners, provides short game-show-like doses of "interesting facts" about the network. The demo exemplifies this with questions about which TV stars ("Jay Leno," "Mary Tyler Moore," etc.) had appeared as phone-in guests on NBC's hit show *Frasier.* The fifth strategy dramatized on the video, termed "Special Events," showcases a montage of historical Olympic coverage produced by NBC decades earlier. This device provides the trade, audience with opportunities for chest-thumping nationalism as part of the network brand.

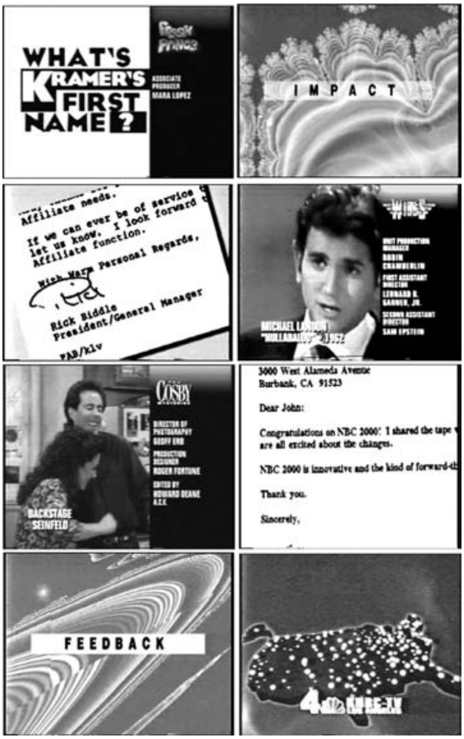
"Flow," the sixth illustrated chapter theorized in the corporate campaign tape, includes a self-righteous but suspect summarizing claim by one 1994 NBC executive: "Well, we have created flow." The NBC exec is apparently unaware of the academic Raymond Williams's formulation of flow in 1974. More remarkably, he is also apparently ignorant of his *own network's* invention and implementation of "flow" programming practices by the NBC president Pat Weaver in the early 1950s.[75] The seventh and final reflexive strategy of the makeover campaign outlined on the demo is termed "Impact." Footage of grateful affiliate stations follows in this section, thanking the network for allowing them to "participate" in the parent corporation's sweep-

Warren Littlefield
President, NBC Entertainment
FLOW
Backstage
NBC
Mommies
BASED ON THE
STAND-UP COMEDY
ACT OF
CARYL
KRISTENSEN
AND
MARILYN KENTZ
ER
COSTUME DESIGNER
LYN ELIZABETH
PAOLO
COSTUME
SUPERVISOR
DORIS ALAIMO
COSTUME
SUPERVISOR
HOPE SLEPAK
SET DECORATOR
MICHAEL
CLAYPOOL
4 NEWS AT 11
John Miller
NBC's
Seamless
Secrets
BY ED MARTIN

President Warren Littlefield tells affiliates that the network's "makeover" campaign was as important for NBC's success as their top-rated series ER. In explaining the secrets of NBC's new "seamless" programming strategy, executive vice president John Miller, unaware of Raymond Williams's theorization of "flow" in 1974 or President Pat Weaver's own invention of flow programming strategy at NBC in the early 1950s, claims the innovation as his own in 1994–95 corporate video: "We've created flow." *Composite photos of video frames by J. Caldwell.*

ing nation-wide changes. A montage of thank-you letters from the heartland heaps effusive praise by local broadcasters on NBC and its branders. To drive home the point, in a move either ignorant of or in calculated denial about competitor MTV/Viacom's industry-recognized, critically acclaimed fifteen-year innovative success in branding, the "Impact" chapter concludes when an NBC executive returns to the screen to state: "We've created a personality that's never been a part of a network before." Warren Littlefield, NBC president, then drives home the hyperbole: "Was *E/R* an important part of the 1994–1995 season? You bet. But so was NBC 2000." Music up. Fade to black. In this odd, mediated executive summary—essentially an *internal* on-screen marketing campaign—the network awards NBC's corporate self-analysis of televisual flow and identity with the same marquee status as NBC's own Emmy-winning A-list dramatic programming.

Intended to lure distracted, channel-surfing viewers back to the network, the seven on-screen strategies of obsessive self-reference theorized by executives fueled NBC's promotional activities in the mid-1990s. Ironically, many viewers who left to graze on cable channels elsewhere did so with complaints that the "ad clutter" had simply gotten too overwhelming on the traditional broadcast networks like NBC. The corporation's counterintuitive


WHAT'S KRAMER'S FIRST NAME?
Fresh Prince
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER MARA LOPEZ
IMPACT
Affiliate needs.
If we can ever be of service let us know. I look forward Affiliate function.
With Warm Personal Regards,
Rick Biddle
President/General Manager
FAB/klv
MICHAEL LANDON "HULLABALOO" 1962
UNIT PRODUCTION MANAGER ROBIN CHAMBERLIN
FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR LEONARD R. GARNER, JR.
SECOND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SAM EPSTEIN
COSBY
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY GEOFF ERB
PRODUCTION DESIGNER ROGER FORTUNE
EDITED BY HOWARD DEANE A.C.E.
BACKSTAGE SEINFELD
3000 West Alameda Avenue
Burbank, CA 91523
Dear John:
Congratulations on NBC 2000! I shared the tape
are all excited about the changes.
NBC 2000 is innovative and the kind of forward-th
Thank you.
Sincerely,
FEEDBACK
4 KNBC-TV

The 1995 makeover videotape NBC 2000 served as a theoretical primer outlining numerous strategies for making interstitial material "entertainment content." This included "hot-starts" between shows, "trivia" contests, "backstage diaries," nostalgic "classic moments" from NBC archive footage (here, Michael Landon sings on Hullabaloo in 1962), and marketing "feedback" raving about the exciting ways that the makeover would "rebuild" the nationwide family of affiliates (lower right). *Composite photos of video frames by J. Caldwell.*

response? With its network makeover, NBC simply jammed more and more information and "entertainment content" into smaller and smaller blocks of interstitial programming space. Shows now started "hot"—that is, simultaneous with the end of the preceding show. As a result, the final minutes of each ending and transition became graphically dense to the point of illegibility. End titles were squeezed and extruded into high-speed microscopic credit rolls—which angered production workers industrywide. Meanwhile, the newly keyed-in secondary promotional content supposedly "entertained" viewers during the blurred transition. In the new scheme, each show morphed with the one that followed, and both were glued together into an amalgam of network minutiae, nostalgia, fragmented making-ofs, fan surveys, frenetic graphics, archival finds, and inspirational shtick. NBC had apparently overdosed on self-referentiality. The dense, textual, marketing cloud that resulted each evening in prime time merely guaranteed that no discernable breaks remained in which viewers could switch to another

Art vs. Reality
ART IMITATES LIFE
HOMICIDE:
LIFE ON THE STREET
Directed by
Barbara Kopple

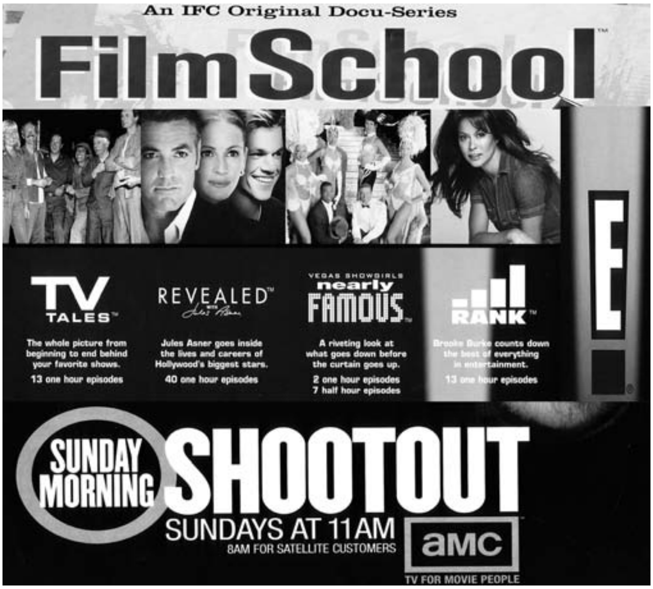
Reflexive films/series follow an institutional logic, as NBC/*Homicide* exploits on-screen deconstruction for critical distinction and exploitation by local affiliate broadcasters. Fictional scenes in one episode interrogate the nature and limits of the "art vs. reality" conundrum, while both the episode and the "News at 11" that follows consciously interrogate the contradictions of documentary and genre theory—as local and programming cross-promotional tie-ins. *Composite photos of video frames by J. Caldwell.*

channel. Arguably, this on-screen gambit was less about intelligibility or legibility of messages than it was an attempt to hijack and take on the wearying channel-changing "work" of the viewer. Indeed, NBC now had built audience-like, remote-control channel-changing behavior into the network programming flow itself. Who needed to go elsewhere if channel grazing was now "helpfully" prepackaged for the viewer, in-house and in advance? The makeover demo, screened at affiliate meetings and up-fronts, analyzed and justified the on-screen overhaul for NBC's anxious partners. Critical self-theorizing stood front and center as a privileged corporate activity.

While some scholarly attention has been paid to reflexive on-screen textual practices in one broad category of public disclosure (behind-the-scenes knowledge produced and distributed *for audiences*), far less attention has been directed to the second register of disclosure exemplified by NBC's makeover campaign (behind-the-scenes knowledge circulated *among professionals*).[76] In the first five chapters that follow I take on this latter regime of internal industrial disclosure and reflexivity as the chapters' primary focus. Even the examples introduced thus far suggest that the very strategies promoted by academic theorists as resistant forms of textual or on-screen "criticism" may end up fulfilling fairly rudimentary branding (reflexivity), marketing (intertextuality), and programming (deconstruction) functions in the industry's management, program development, and business sectors.[77]

FRAMEWORKS AND LIMITS

In the chapters that follow I pay considerable attention to how creative workers use self-reference to make sense of industrial and technological change; how critical reflexivity adds value to and sanctions contemporary post-Fordist industrial practices; and how reflexivity promotes flexibility and responsiveness in new forms of media conglomeration. Yet in these same chapters I do not generally push beyond cultural, economic, and institutional analysis and perspectives in order to consider more speculative, philosophical questions.[78] Especially important in this regard are questions about how unique or distinctive these kinds of industrial reflexivity are to film and television; whether other industries and sectors share, teach, or learn these practices from Hollywood; and how or whether industrial reflexivity in U.S. film and television production can be situated within broader historical, intellectual, and cultural shifts in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first.[79] Anthony Giddens puts forth a major argument about the importance and centrality of reflexivity in late modernity and the age of globalization.[80] For Giddens this late modern condition means that human subjects are required to and (in many cases) now able to master "self-monitoring" activities in order to function effectively. But whereas Giddens poses reflexivity as a more general condition involving the idea of a traditionally unified subject, the industrial reflexivity I examine in this book is not so easily explained as a symptom of a general human or historical condition. Nor is industrial reflexivity solely an outcome of comparably generalizing theories of self-reference. Michel Foucault's theory of self-disciplining as a response to widespread societal surveillance, for example, or Christopher Lasch's theory of cultural narcissism, like Giddens's generalizing approach, both make self-reference a deleterious outcome generated


An IFC Original Docu-Series
FilmSchool
TV TALES
The whole picture from beginning to end behind your favorite shows.
13 one hour episodes
REVEALED with Jules Asner
Jules Asner goes inside the lives and careers of Hollywood's biggest stars.
40 one hour episodes
VEGAS SHOWGIRLS nearly FAMOUS
A riveting look at what goes down before the curtain goes up.
2 one hour episodes
7 half hour episodes
RANK
Brooke Burke counts down the best of everything in entertainment.
13 one hour episodes
E
SUNDAY MORNING SHOOTOUT
SUNDAYS AT 11AM
8AM FOR SATELLITE CUSTOMERS
amc
TV FOR MOVIE PEOPLE

The multichannel spectrum is loaded with metacritical programming in which the industry proudly opens itself up for public consumption (here, exposés, behind-the-scenes programs, critical debates about film, reality series about film school, and shows deconstructing TV. *Composite photograph by J. Caldwell.*

by sociopolitical forces.[81] Angela McRobbie challenges Giddens's general concept by forcing it to speak to actual sociological conditions through ethnographies of highly specialized cultural work sectors (like fashion and club culture).[82] The sorts of task velocity, client churn, and employee mobility that I encountered over the last decade in Hollywood characterize these other sectors as well. McRobbie shows that the cultural logic and semiotic economy of new flexible artistic labor extends far from the soundstages, television studios, and edit suites of Hollywood. Like Andrew Ross, McRobbie traces out the sometimes-alienating logic of the new flexible cultural industries, which oversell the notion of gratifying labor, career mobility, democratic management, and workaholism as creative forms of self-fulfillment.[83]

Unlike the creative industries in New York and London that Ross and McRobbie analyze, however, film and television production in Los Angeles continues to survive with less volatility and relatively more predictability than either dot-com or club cultures. This relative predictability follows from a paradox. On the one hand, Hollywood is rather distinctive in maintaining very old forms of Fordist industrial predictability: a massive unionized workforce, a rationalized system of entitlements and inside dealing, and the unique geographic agglomeration of local suppliers, producers, and facilities that Allen Scott identifies.[84] On the other hand, Hollywood exploits very new forms of post-Fordism: diversity of tastes, heterogeneous identities, artistic or niche narrowcasting, and cultural innovation as part of a pervasive and edgy new multimedia experience economy. The industrial inertia that results from this mix of normally divergent organizational modes—geographic anchoring and industrial continuity alongside boundaryless cultural innovation—gives film and television their historic persistence and cultural resilience. Unlike Giddens, Foucault, and Lasch, the industrial reflexivity examined here appears to be not just an outcome but a constituent of production culture's input *and* output processes. Reflexivity, in this book, emerges as part of both corporate macrostrategies and human microstrategies. That is, reflexivity operates as a creative process involving human agency and critical competence at the local cultural level as much as a discursive process establishing power at the broader social level. This mutual alignment may give film and television entertainment much of its resilience, since the alliance synthesizes the gratifications of human creative resistance with the excessive profitability of new forms of conglomeration. The new conglomerates generate relatively little anxiety at national policy levels because they have, apparently, mastered the responsiveness, nuance, user-friendly demeanor and self-conscious textual sophistication characteristic of very legitimate local cultural expressions.

In each chapter that follows I examine one discrete category of trade communication and worker expression. The first two chapters examine trade storytelling conventions among workers as a symptom of labor conditions and then the ways that media corporations and trade associations organize space culturally across labor and craft divisions. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on "below-the-line" work sectors and consider how trade imagery, equipment iconography, demo tapes, and technologies function as cultural representations and as components of "imagined communities." Chapters 5 and 6 analyze cultural practices in the "above-the-line" worlds of producers, directors, and studio and network executives, with a particular interest in how new practices of writing by committee, mentoring, networking, and branding fuel and manage the instabilities of these worlds. Finally, chapter 7

Featuring Golden Globe® Award Nominee JEREMY PIVEN
VINCENT CHASE
HEAD ON
IN THEATRES JU
HIS FAME IS THEIR FORTUNE
entourage
THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

Viral marketing as prime-time programming: online solicitation invites fans to interactively "interview" for a job with *Entourage*'s manic on-screen agent Ari. *Photo of HBO poster in West Hollywood, J. Caldwell, 2006.*

builds on the insights of close technological, sociological, and cultural analysis in the preceding studies to consider how these industrial conditions predispose film/television to certain forms of "flexible" on-screen content. The concluding studies are especially focused on how economic conditions, repurposing strategies, digital technologies, and the DVD have made production, distribution, and marketing a unified "viral" process driven by reflexivity.

The industry now constantly speaks to itself about itself, sometimes in public. It also makes these dialogues and debates available in various multimedia formats. Some of these reflexive artifacts and deep texts are intended only for the closed world of the studio or edit suite; others are ostensibly intended to allow viewers access to the "inside" of the industry and the production process. But this trend is clearly not just a "top-down" process either. Yes, corporations now make film knowledge, general aesthetic speculation, and critical analysis parts of their consumer media products, viewing experience, and marketing campaigns. But practitioners and artisans also produce and circulate deep critical texts among themselves, and they do so for very different reasons than companies tiered lucratively inside of the giant conglomerates.

Unlike a hundred tell-alls, this book offers no privileged “keys to the kingdom” of Hollywood. As a genre, popular behind-the-scenes tomes are obliged to promise and deliver an insider’s pose. Yet no singular secret or governing principle to “the business” can possibly exist. Production cultures are far too messy, vast, and contested to provide a unified code—to either job aspirants or scholars—for breaching its walls. Given this metaphor, I’ve aimed my sites closer to the ground by seeking instead to better understand the industrial masonry, cultural textures, and social mortar used to shore up the walls and carefully guarded portals surrounding the industry’s center. Interestingly, this behind-the-scenes shoring of mystique proves to be every bit as important for film and television workers as it does for their audiences. And that is an important part of the story in the chapters that follow.