A Critical Study of the Stated and Manifest Functions of Noel Holston, Television Critic of the Orlando Sentinel

1976

Allison Van Pelt

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A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE STATED
AND MANIFEST FUNCTIONS OF NOEL HOLSTON,
TELEVISION CRITIC OF THE ORLANDO SENTINEL

BY

ALLISON VAN PELT

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department
of Communication in the Graduate Studies Program
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Chapter 1

SUPPLEMENTARY CLARIFYING STATEMENT

There exists a small but vociferous body of television criticism which reflects a wide-spread dis-enchantment with television fare. Lodged between the voiceless masses, the opprobrious intellectuals, and the powerful networks are the television critics. The legion has been spearheaded by Jack Gould of the New York Times and Lawrence Laurent of the Washington Post, and is locally represented by Noel Holston, television critic for the Orlando Sentinel.

Television critics then, are those individuals who are employed by a journalistic concern for the specific purpose of evaluating television. The views of notable intellectuals and spokesmen for the networks will also be included for the purposes of this study.
Chapter 2

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this investigation is to compare Noel Holston's stated functions as a television critic with those functions manifested in his daily column in the Orlando Sentinel. That study will render information about Holston's attitudes toward television criticism. The critic's manifest functions will be compared to his own stated function and the stated and manifest functions of Jack Gould, past television critic for the New York Times. Jack Gould is presently accepted by the academic community at large as the archtypical television critic. Thus this comparison will render information regarding Holston's sense of responsibility to the television industry and the public which the medium is to serve. Finally, the study will also calculate the degree to which Noel Holston satisfies the critical standards which the academic community deems appropriate for the conscientious television critic.
Chapter 3

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Communication is hardly a new phenomenon; indeed it is a behavior characteristic of not only man but many of his less sophisticated companions in evolution. Two revolutions in communication have, however, indelibly marked our collective history. Only the invention of the printing press has equaled the impact of the widespread use of television.

The potential use of any widely accepted medium of communication comes from its ability to handle information. The medium must permit skilled users to collect data; to store this data; to organize or evaluate this material; to recall or recapture it; and, finally, to convey the raw or processed information to others. For the Western world since the Renaissance, these five abilities have belonged mostly to the medium of print, but now these once unique abilities must be shared with the newer medium of electronic marvels. Our educational system, indeed our culture, has been geared to use of the printed word and, in turn, has given great power to those persons in education, industry and government. We live at the beginning of a shift of power from print to electronic communications.¹

The print media have become aware of the significance of television and its output. Most major newspaper markets, in fact, have regularly published columns which devote their entire attentions to the presentations, problems, personalities, and activities of television. According to Steinberg's study "The Complete Critic," TV Quarterly, 11:13 (Winter, 1974), and other readership studies, the TV page of the daily newspaper is the second most avidly read section of the paper. Clearly, the medium which commands the active participation of millions who both watch television and read criticism about it deserves the attention of academia.

Richard Burgheim contends that television criticism is necessary for at least two reasons.

In the first place, the people do need guidance, program by program. . . . Moses Hades pointed out, "The larger and more indiscriminate the audience, the greater the need to safeguard and purify standards of quality and taste." . . . And then, secondly, critics are needed to bring their judgement to bear at the source of the Petticoat Junctions and pop classics--the producers and network decision makers.

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Because television is a dynamic medium and must serve the public if licenses are to be retained, it is likely both that the film industry and the FCC will respond to columnists like Noel Holston whose entire attentions are devoted to its activities. Such an analysis may give insights as to the directions which both the television industry and its programming will take in the future. Clearly, if the criticism which the media receives is superficial, the industry may do no more than what it is limply asked to do. For that reason, it is important that the academic community familiarize itself with the standards which critics seek.
Whether one sees television as the harbinger of a new age of intellectualism and aestheticism, or the purveyor of mass mediocrity, "one of the great milestones and possibly gravestones in the whole history of culture," there can be little doubt that television is and will remain a vital aspect of the American way of life. A Harris poll which was conducted for Life in 1971 revealed that,

Ninety-two U.S. households out of 100 have telephones, but ninety-six have at least one working TV set; nearly half have two sets or more, and nearly half have color sets. Even among families with incomes of less than $5,000 a year, one in four has a color set. According to Current Consumer, these figures are still

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5 "But Do We Like What We Watch?" Life, LXXI (September 10, 1971), p. 43.
In addition to their physical numbers, Americans over 18 years of age spend an average of 17 hours a week watching television. Any medium which involves and possibly manipulates such prodigious numbers of people is worthy of criticism, and that criticism should fulfill certain responsibilities to both the industry and its viewers.

Beyond a mere report of numbers, that Harris study also revealed that the majority of people are not satisfied with what they watch, but fall into four distinct groups within the mass audience toward which television is theoretically directed. Those groups are:

(1) Satisfied and watching more: Only one population group fits this category—blacks.

(2) Watching more but consider programs they do watch to be worse: This category includes many people with eighth grade educations, those widowed and divorced, people over 65 and those with family incomes under $5,000. These viewers are typically most dependent on TV.

(3) Watching less but consider programs they do watch to be better: These viewers are among the college-educated, single people between 18 and 49, and those with incomes over $10,000. This is an important and sizable chunk of the audience.

(4) Watching less and consider programs worse: This part of the audience is from among the 50-60 age group, white collar and skilled workers and

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those with family incomes between $5,000 and $10,000. For many years this has been the heart of the TV audience and to some extent it still is. . . . 7

As the Life sponsored Harris study revealed, many people are dissatisfied with TV fare. The Life article, however, criticized only the content of the medium. Louis Kronenberger, long time drama critic for Time, bemoaned its physical existence. In 1951 he predicted that we would become a nation of spectators, claiming that, "... in all it is and seemingly ever hopes to be, television is simply a menace to American's cultural and social life." 8 It will, he asserted, when it achieves maturity and offers that which it presently lacks, replace man's need to do or experience. He will no longer find it necessary to transport himself to a theatre for music or drama; he will never have to read a book or newspaper; the art of conversation and the need for it will vanish. Kronenberger went on to say that communication within the family unit will also deteriorate. The critic concluded that the very existence of TV would insure permanent and implicitly negative alterations in the fabric of American

7 "But Do We Like What We Watch?" op. cit., p. 44.
8 Kronenberger, op. cit., p. 11
A new race seems destined to arise, with a wholly new feeling about social relations, about the need for companions or the nature of friendship. . . . And people, as time goes on, will communicate less and less with themselves. There is thus the real problem, among millions of Americans, of ossified inner resources, of atrophied social responses.

A recent *Newsweek* article, "Why Johnny Can't Write," tends to affirm Kronenberger's prediction of intellectual doom. Since 1966, there has been a steady decline in reading scores obtained by high school seniors. The subsequent inability to write competently has also become apparent. The decline mentioned has evidenced itself in both the College Entrance Examination Boards and the Stanford Achievement Test scores. In an effort to establish the provenance of that decline, the author suggested that television was the root of the problem.

Once one has accepted or rejected the notion that the physical presence of television is destined to cause wide-spread mutation within our society, whether on the physical level as Nicholas Johnson told us in "It's What

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9Ibid., p. 12.

We Don't See That Hurts Us Most," or on the metaphysical level as Kronenberger contends, he must next turn his attentive ear to a more vociferous source of criticism—the American intellectual. Within that distinguished body, three distinct sub-groups co-exist. The first of those groups believes that television, by virtue of its private ownership and profit orientation, must attend the desires of the public regardless of the level of its tastes. Those children of Adam Smith and John Maynard Keynes maintain that television, like any other commodity, has no alternative other than to fluctuate with the demands of its audience.

The second sector holds that television is a reflection of the masses who, in the critics' view, are not only ignorant and tasteless, but who will forever remain unaffected by the efforts of educators, television, and critics and will tenaciously retain their pristine ignorance to the last wink of time.

Finally, there are those who maintain that although television is not what it could be, it will some day rise to the vaulted levels that those with great expectations for the medium envision. Subsequently, this group believes, the quality of American life will be upgraded. It is to
this final group that Noel Holston belongs; the group which maintains that criticism of the media will encourage it to improve.

Wesley C. Clark, in his article entitled "The Impact of Mass Communication in America," is in agreement with Laurent and asserted that the mass media have changed the face of America. The media, in his estimation, have served to crystalize the nation's opinions, have been responsible for much social legislation, have supported education, and have helped raise the standards of both physical and intellectual life in America. The media, however, not only shape our society, but are shaped by it. Theoretically, the more information television brings to its audience, the more that audience wants to know. That circular relationship clearly has, and will continue to up-grade the quality of American life. We have already produced a better informed electorate, have spread a variety of cultural events to millions who would have had no exposure to the arts without television, and have made

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isolated sub-cultures better aware of the activities, life styles, and values of the larger community. Likewise, the mass has had encounters with its own sub-groups.

That ever-expanding relationship will continue to exist because the media are privately owned and respond to the demands of the audience. If the balance in the dyad were altered by government control, media would no longer meet the needs and desires of its audience. In short, Clark maintains that the quality of television fare depends on the audience and its demands. He contends that the audience will evolve into a more sophisticated body through its exposure to limitless encounters with the varied and often unimagined experiences through the medium of television; its tastes will likewise be elevated and thereby the quality of television will improve. The entire process, in Clark's view, will be a ceaseless, dazzling spiral to quintessence.

Former FCC Commissioner Lee Loevinger was also aware of the role of private ownership in television fare, but was not dazzled by the medium and was thus able to see some possible deterents to television's unending upward ascent.

Loevinger advanced the reflective-projective theory
of broadcasting. He stated that,

... mass communications are best understood as mirrors of society that reflect an ambiguous image in which each observer projects or sees his own vision of himself and society. ... it cannot create a culture or project an image that does not reflect something already existing in some form in society.¹²

Even when one injects the role of fantasy into the nexus, it is likely that relative proportions will be maintained. Considering that intellectualism is not a high order fantasy in our society, it would be unreasonable to expect the mass to demand that view of itself in TV. That is, because the public is interested in seeing its own reflection in the ambiguous mirror, it is disinterested in the image of its intellectual leaders. It is pellucid, therefore, that the greater the degree of satisfaction which the mass obtains from television, the more alienated most intellectuals become as the reflections of their own images decline.

In his position as FCC Commissioner, Loevinger was sensitive to the needs of both the public and the broadcasting industry, and to the reciprocal relationship which

exists between the two. He went on to clarify the often overlooked fact that, "... the medium provides the common denominator to promote national unity and community culture is not necessarily the one that can also provide general adult education, social reform, or even news information to the satisfaction of the intelligencia."¹³

For those who hold over-vaulted hopes that public television will serve as a panacea for what the intellectuals would refer to as the mediocrity of the masses, Loevinger sought support of Howard K. Smith. Smith, in "Don't Expect Too Much from Public Television," Washington Star, October 1, 1967, said, "... there is nothing magic in public TV that is going to increase the quality of genius or imagination in our nation."¹⁴ Such a change in broadcasting cannot be expected until the general tastes of the public have been elevated by some outside source. At that time, media will respond to the new mass impression of self, and will reflect that brighter image.

Gilbert Seldes was also concerned with the role of private ownership of television and its concomitant

¹³Ibid., p. 39.
¹⁴Ibid., p. 42.
responsibility to act in the best interest of the public. He maintained, however, that TV does more than just satisfy the demands which already exist in society; demands which he points out, that are frequently diffuse and unspecific. That critic asserted that the medium has the ability to both exclude audiences which presently exist and create those which do not. Loevinger has ensconced himself with broadcasters and other public opinion shapers who deny their responsibility to the mass.

They dodge it by the ancient excuse of giving the public what it wants, conceiving the public as a mass with tastes already formed. Once they admit that the media can raise or lower the public taste, in the very act of satisfying the public demand, they will come closer to their function, which is defined legally as operating in the public interest, and which, morally, does not insist on raising the public taste but demands, as a minimum, that the public be given every opportunity to find its own level of taste by having access to the best as well as to the mean—which, in this case, is far from golden.15

Like any other commodity, TV fare cannot be demanded until it exists. In television the supply comes first and the demand is then created by virtue of its

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existence.

Another powerful figure who chose to speak out on the responsibilities of television was Herb Jacobs, President of T. V. Stations, Inc. His position was naturally a defensive one. Rather than accept the notion that television is responsible for the ills of society, Jacobs asserted that the influence of television is limited in its ability to determine the values and ideals of America as compared with other social forces at work in the nation. He maintained that television has been used as a scapegoat by those who insist on evading their own responsibilities.

Jacobs maintained that the hue and cry raised against television by intellectuals reflects not only a general flight from responsibility, but also demonstrates their ignorance about the medium itself. In his estimation, those deniers have ignored the countless specials, documentaries and news presentation and cultural events which TV brings to America. They are heedless of both the conscientious effort and expense which the networks assume to make such productions possible.  

Seldes also commented on the effects of television as it presently exists. Although he was not as threatened by the media as Hans Magnus Enzensberger, who saw television as an instrument big business wields to industrialize the mass mind, he did assert that TV not only degrades us intellectually, but also strips us, as Kronenberger would say, emotionally. Television achieves that dubious end when it, . . . offer(s) a greater variety of entertainments, but they are for the most part aimed at the same intellectual level and call for the same emotional responses, the level and the responses being relatively low. The challenge to the mind comes infrequently, and we are being conditioned to make frequent emotional responses of low intensity. . . .

L. E. Sissman, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly, was far more vitriolic in his evaluation of the role of private ownership of television and the programming produced to suit those interests. In addition to the fact that Sissman felt that TV programming was less than banal, he was outraged at the barrage of commercials with which the audience was bombarded. The editor asserted that the low level of television fare has been directly related to its commercial base, stating that,

17Seldes, op. cit., p. 117.
TV was, is, and always will be a matchless oppor­
tunity for art, instruction, and edification. ... It
is equally pellucid, though, that it will, in this
country, continue to evade its opportunities and remain
a commercial football for the networks and the adver­tisers while the audience and its real-world wants
and needs go whistling, and the paunchy FCC twiddles
its fat thumbs in gormless Washington. 18

 Apparently, Mr. Sissman did not see himself in television's
reflective projective mirror.

Essentially, then, there exists a body of criticism
which contends that as long as television remains a com­
mercial enterprise, the broadcasters will attend to the
demands of their audiences and advertisers, with first
attention paid to advertisers and their conception of what
the mass is; they will seek to produce programming which
will generate the largest profits, and will serve the pub­
lic interest, convenience, and necessity only to the extent
that it is required by the FCC.

In order to maintain one's perspective, it must be
pointed out that few in the mainstream of that contingency
view television as a malevolent force in American society.
An exception to that generalization is, as was previously
mentioned, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, who maintains that

18 E. Sissman, "Innocent Bystander: Facing the
Tube," The Atlantic, CCXXXIII (February, 1974), p. 27.
the television industry seeks an industrialization of the mind, and consciously strives to drive intellectuals from its ranks. His views, however, have not received wide acceptance amongst either his peers or the community at large.

In addition to those mentioned, other notable adherents to the school of thought that maintains that economics are the greatest force in television broadcasting and its future include Nicholas Johnson, past member of the FCC, Ernie Kreiling, author of the syndicated television criticism column, "A Closer Look," William H. Kuhns, author of Why We Watch Them: Interpreting TV Shows and Exploring Television, Norman Mark, contributing editor of The New Republic, Frank Stanton, President of Columbia Broadcasting System, Ashley Montagu, anthropologist, and John Tebbel, Journalism professor at NYU.

A more cynical if less popular covey comprises the second intellectual sub-group of the three factions of TV critics. That contingent maintains that it is impossible to elevate the tastes of the public because they doggedly cling to their ignorance. Chief amongst the proponents of that school of thought are Newton N. Minow and Leo Rosten.

Minow, past chairman of the FCC and author of the
now famous 1961 "Vast Wasteland" speech, was critical of
television, but also saw that the industry was not solely
to blame for the deplorable state of what Mason Williams
once referred to as "trashmission." Rather than demand
that the networks commit economic suicide by broadcasting
only programs which would enlighten, up-lift, and educate
the viewers, Minow pointed out that the mass audience
rarely watches television for those ends, but wants simply
to be entertained rather than transformed into archetypal intellectuals. Doubtless Minow and Seldes would
not agree, but he did find support in John Tebbel who con-
jectured that,

... had the Caesars given the ancient Romans
chamber music instead of bread and circuses, there
is no reason to believe that the cultural level of
the populace would have been raised appreciably. 19

Like the intellectual Sissman, he would not subject him-
self to continual observation of someone elses reflected
image—an image that in his view is wholly unlikely to
improve.

Leo Rosten's evaluation of the audience was more

19 John Tebbel, "TV and the Arts: The Prospect
Before Us," Mass Media: Forces in Our Society, eds.
Francis Voelker and Ludmila Voelker (New York: Harcourt,
critical than that of Minow. Unlike critics such as Sissman and Kronenberger who maintain that the average man would, if it were not for the ever present television, be engaged in some "meaningful" activity, Rosten claims that,

We seem to forget that the programs by which television satisfies this substantial part of the American public are probably superior to the intellectual fare which these citizens consumed before television existed. Even the dreariest treacle which television offers to the populace is not worse than the trivialized activity with which many filled their lives prior to 1945. . . . Behind much of the criticism of television there has always lurked the starry eyed, and unwarranted, assumption that the public was more concerned with the serious, the significant, the edifying before television appeared on our national scene, that television is debasing the public taste and contaminating popular culture.²⁰

This indeed is the mistake which many intellectuals make. Rather than accepting average for what it is and always has been, American Romanticism has sought to glorify the simplistic, the rustic, and the common man. Those same romantics have maintained themselves at a discreet distance from the logic of mathematics and carefully remain unsullied by the coarse facts of statistics. By definition, superior is, and always will be, two standard

deviations above the mean. As the abilities of the average individual rise, so do those of the gifted. The only assumption which is more absurd than the denial of statistical laws is the ludicrous notion that in the "good old days" before television the average man spent the majority of his free time, that which he presently devotes to the tube, engaged in intellectual, aesthetic, and metaphysical activities.

Herb Jacobs suggested that many intellectuals do not understand or are unwilling to accept the fact that the airways belong to the people as a whole, and should not be solely controlled by those who deem themselves fit to judge what the masses should have. That Big Brother authority has been successfully evaded by the commercial nature of American television.

In response to the oft-heard criticism that television is debasing, panders to the lowest tastes, and the least common denominator, Jacobs asserted that the intellectuals were, in fact, speaking for themselves rather than for the majority of viewers. He said that:

At base, these attitudes hide a refusal to face the fact that we have a new type of culture, which is not the exclusive property of the elite, of the wealthy, or of the well educated. . . . The greatest majority of the people are just not interested in the
art and thought of their would be masters. . . . However, I suspect if the bleeding hearts had their way, we would have boring discussions in place of boring so-called comedy and variety shows, and the high-brow violence of Tennessee Williams in place of the low-brow Wild Wild West. 21

As Marya Mannes suggested, the sooner intellectuals recognize the masses for what they are, the sooner the two groups can work together for their mutual benefit. The intellectuals cannot follow Sissman's example and desert the main body of society. Such an act serves only to further alienate the two groups, intensify polarization, and promote, at best the status quo, and most likely encourage an intellectually and aesthetically bankrupt society. Interaction between the two groups is the only solution to the seemingly irreconcilable differences involved. A by-product of such interaction may indeed be to elevate the mass tastes which would be reflected in the media. 22 That interaction might also expand the horizons of the intellectuals to the vivacity outside the library.


and the exhilarating spectacle beyond the dimly lit theatre, which has somehow managed to not only exist but effuse without their disgruntled participation.

The crux of the matter then seems to be that,

Most intellectuals do not seem to understand, or are unwilling to admit, that the mass media are meant for the masses, not for the intellectuals. The deficiencies of television are many; its product is often banal, vulgar, dreary, irritating, phoney, low in taste, and lower in intellectual content. A very large audience simply does not possess the values, interests, aspirations, or intellectual equipment which distinguishes intellectuals from the masses. 23

In brief, then, it is pointless to criticize the mass media by the standards established by the intelligencia, when the medium in question was not designed for that audience in the first place.

Television criticism does indeed exist, and as with most other forms of published criticism, it is composed by individuals who most closely associate themselves with intellectuals rather than with what is customarily referred to as the mass. The last of the three factions believes neither that television is solely the instrument of crass commercialism, nor a composite of electronic dregs to be flushed out to an ignorant peasantry. This

23 Rosten, op. cit., p. 136.
group is represented by those television critics who believe that through continual comment on the industry, its internal structure, mechanics, personalities, and products, the medium can be improved. The most popular and powerful amongst them are Jack Gould of the *New York Times*, and Lawrence Laurent of the *Washington Post*. Noel Holston is the *Orlando Sentinel*’s television critic.

According to Richard Burgheim, associate editor of *Time*, Jack Gould is the most powerful figure in television criticism today. On the *New York Times* staff since 1942–1943, Gould has wielded considerable influence with the broadcast industry. According to Burgheim, in the face of considerable support from many other critics, Gould managed almost single handedly to cast the fatal die in the issue of the Public Broadcast Laboratory. It is conjectured that the networks have made an effort to win Gould's favor. Burgheim, however, was concerned that Gould, the best of television's critics, was not critical enough, and felt a need for more austere criticism of the medium.

Two assertions regarding the need for criticism have been made. The first contends that television must be subjected to criticism simply because it exists. That
justification for TV criticism is superficial and lacks both sufficient specificity and an evaluative component. The second assertion, that TV must be criticized because so many people watch it who are incapable of exercising any judgment of their own, is a pompous and self-aggrandizing proclamation which serves only the needs of its issuers. The Nielson ratings should quickly preclude all doubt that viewers do exercise judgment even if their decisions do not suit the intellectual sector of our society. Succinctly, both assertions are superficial.

From whence should criticism spring? The most likely source would not be those intellectuals who choose to remain aloof from society at large, but from those who are involved with, and in a position to exert influence on large numbers of people—educators and journalists.

Nat Hentoff has conducted a course at NYU's Graduate School of Education where graduate students in Mass Communication involved themselves in media criticism. Similar courses are taught at the undergraduate level by Budd, Taylor, and Sadowski at Florida Atlantic University and by Dr. Robert Arnold at Florida Technological University. A growing interest in television criticism at the university level reflects the general consensus in the
academic community that television indeed warrants serious scrutiny.

The Aspen Institute has recently sponsored a workshop on television criticism and the following propositions emerged from that conclave.

1. Prime-time television is worthy of serious critical effort . . .
2. It seems a shame that educational systems and universities limit themselves to training the literary imagination, and neglect the training of the television and cinematic imagination . . .
3. As a medium, television is not identical to cinema . . .
4. We need to develop a special aesthetic for television . . .
5. The position of the television critic needs to be established . . .
6. Often a television show exceeds the bounds of mere entertainment; it generates imaginative symbols which feed the entire culture . . .
7. A critic of television must locate himself psychologically, then, in a somewhat different position from the critic of movies or of books . . .

Once one has accepted the notions that television is a part of American life, that it should not be destroyed as a menace to civilization, that there is room for and a likelihood of improvement in TV, and that criticism can facilitate such an end, all which remains is for the critics to delineate the criteria for evaluation and to

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apply them to the media. Several researchers have endeavored to establish criteria for evaluation of television criticism. The standards set by J. B. McGrath, Jr., and Margrette Nance, Maurice E. Shelby, Jr., and Peter E. Mayeux will be examined.

McGrath and Nance, in an article published in the *Journal of Broadcasting*, attempted to measure the levels of excellence of the criticism of Jack Gould, Lawrence Laurent, *et al.* The researchers decided that criticism of a television program should cover twelve areas of discussion. The categories they delineated were:

1. **Talent**—the artistry of performers;
2. **Worthwhile Purpose**—social value of the program;
3. **Camera Techniques**—artistic accomplishment of the visual presentation;
4. **Writing**—clarity, effectiveness, and style of script;
5. **Uniqueness**—singularity;
6. **Color**—technical and artistic use of color;
7. **Subject**—material chosen for program content;
8. **Producer**—individual in charge of final judgment, selection of personnel and supervision;
9. **Musical Score**—composition and appropriateness of music selected for program;

10. **Adaptation to Medium**—coexpression and its evolution into a synergetic language;

11. **Empathy**—involvement of the viewer with the stimulus provided;

12. **Sublety**—refinements of insights and perceptions.\(^{25}\)

The suggested method of evaluation has been rejected for use in the analysis of Noel Holston's column for a number of reasons. The initial cause for rejection was philosophical. The McGrath and Nance model concentrated itself on program criticism only and shunned all other aspects of television. Fortunately, there is more to television than TV shows. Secondly, the moralistic tone involved in some of the categories made them unacceptable. The implication involved is that all television fare must be edifying, significant, and relevant. Such a criteria eliminates the hypothesis that on certain occasions television can justifiably provide entertainment for its own

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sake. The primary function of a circus is to entertain whether the audience attends the performance or watches it on a TV set.

In addition to those primary objections to the McGrath and Nance model, there were two secondary objections to their evaluative method. Camera technique and color do not warrant the column space implied by the categorization. Modern television maintains a notable level of technical excellence on all but the rarest occasions. The music selected for television is usually of a consistent quality as well.

Finally, those criteria are too similar to those used in detailed literary and dramatic criticism. The number of items to be covered for each program review is too extensive and would command excessive column space which could be more appropriately allocated to the many other aspects of television. The researchers have, however, created evaluative standards for the art of preview and review. For that reason those criteria will be used to judge the quality of Holston's critical efforts as revealed in his previews and reviews.

Maurice E. Shelby, Jr., established another set of criteria for evaluation of television criticism. The range
of his analysis was far wider than that of McGrath and Nance. Shelby's category headings were as follows:

1. **Industry Problems**--NAB news, cable TV, editorializing;

2. **Legal Aspects**--freedom of speech, FCC regulations and actions, fairness doctrine;

3. **Program Reviews**--column space devoted to the evaluation of specific programs;

4. **News and Notes**--brief informative items regarding a wide range of programming facets;

5. **Personality Features**--those articles which deal solely with profiles of TV personalities;

6. **General Programming**--items which deal with programming as a whole, audience responses, and rating services;

7. **Miscellaneous**--all articles which do not fall into one of the previously listed categories.²⁶

The Shelby format, which has been used to evaluate Gould and Laurent as well as others, has been rejected not because of any inherent weaknesses in its structure, but

simply by virtue of the fact that Mayeux has designed a standard of evaluation which is more appropriate to the style of Noel Holston and offers a slightly broader spectrum for evaluation.

The standards of evaluation developed by Peter E. Mayeux for his examination of the work of Jack Gould, television critic for the *New York Times*, were utilized in this study. Mayeux delineated fourteen separate areas worthy of comment by television critics. Those categories were:

1. **Program Previews**—All items referring to the conception, development, and promotion of programs. Included were previews of programs, scheduling changes, and other information appearing either as a separate item or as part of a selected schedule. Excluded were critical reviews of programs.

2. **Program Reviews**—All items evaluating programs *ex post facto*.

3. **Censorship and Discrimination**—All items referring either to the deletion of substitution of broadcast material, or discrimination against personalities.

4. **Personalities**—All items about people, whether performers, production specialists, businessmen, government officials, broadcasting technicians or officials.
5. **Economic**—All items about costs of broadcasting activities and investments, advertising, commercials, production costs, salaries, licensing fees, market research, and sponsorship of broadcast time.

6. **Government**—All items about the development, function, and operation of government in relation to broadcasting.

7. **Audience**—All items about the various reactions of the audience to broadcasting and the effects of broadcasting on the audience.

8. **Technical**—All items about producing, transmitting, and receiving equipment and technical developments in broadcasting.

9. **Industry Business**—All items about the activities of broadcasting association, relations among broadcasters, and relations between broadcasters and the public or other business interests. Included were administrative practices and needs of the broadcasting industry.

10. **Educational**—All items about the educational values or practices of broadcasting. Included were items about both educational radio and television.

11. **International**—All items about international broadcasting. Included were all broadcasting news from
foreign countries and broadcasting activities overseas.

12. **Humor**—All items containing jokes, quips, or anecdotes. Included were comments on humor as an art or entertainment form.

13. **Programming**—All items about programming practices, policies, or needs of broadcasting outlets, comments on trends and developments in programming, discussions of programming categories or periods of the broadcast day or year.

14. **Miscellaneous**—Any item that did not conform to the requirements of any heading or subheading in this list of categories.27

The Mayeux evaluative standards were utilized in the analysis of Noel Holston's television criticism column for a number of reasons ranging from the pragmatic to the aesthetic and philosophical.

Because those same standards have been employed in an earlier analysis of Jack Gould's column, the use of the Mayeux standards created the most logical basis for comparison. Additional validity was facilitated by employing

the same standards of evaluation in the comparison of the two critics.

The Mayeux standards were also broader in scope than those of Shelby. More specific areas of critical concern were outlined and defined in the Mayeux model for evaluation than in the Shelby model. The former also more clearly delineated the characteristics of each category. That clarity served to decrease the threat of subjectivity. All subjective judgments would not be eliminated from the study, but all attempts to diffuse ambiguity in classification were considered positive efforts.

Unlike the McGrath and Nance model, neither Shelby nor Mayeux confined analysis to the theatre aspects of television. Mayeux's standards for classification approached the whole of television rather than concentrating attention on only a few aspects of the medium.

That breadth of consideration conformed more closely with the philosophical inclinations of the researcher—that all of television should be examined. Because the researcher also believed that the aesthetics of television fare must receive rigorous examination, Noel Holston's columns were examined through the prisms of both McGrath and Nance, and Peter E. Mayeux.
Chapter 5

METHODOLOGY

Noel Holston is the television critic for the Orlando Sentinel. For a one year period which commenced on March 7, 1975, and ran until April 10, 1976, every third article produced by Holston was analyzed. Mr. Holston contributed six articles a week to the Orlando Sentinel. Theoretically, 112 articles should have been included in the study. In all eighty-five articles were used in the study. The reason for that discrepancy was that no articles were written while Mr. Holston was on vacation, business trips, special assignment, and the like. In addition to that, special articles appearing in the Sunday supplement, or other sections of the paper were not included in the study.

Each of the eighty-five Holston articles of television criticism was read and broken into the fourteen categories. After a second reading and categorization, millimeters devoted to each category were measured and recorded.
After all columns had been read, categorized and measured, total column millimeters devoted to each category were computed and percentage of column space devoted to each category was calculated. Finally, those figures were compared to the findings of Peter E. Mayeux in his evaluation of critic Jack Gould.

It was hoped that Mr. Holston would supply the researcher with a statement regarding his views of the responsibilities and functions of the television critic. Although the editors of the Orlando Sentinel most assuredly act as gatekeepers, it was assumed for the purpose of the study that Mr. Holston has sufficient freedom to fulfill the responsibilities which he accepts as a television critic.

Early in the course of this study, the researcher was required to obtain the permission of Mr. Holston to use his column for analysis. At that time he was informed that the intent of the examination was to compare his stated and manifest functions with those of Jack Gould as rendered by Peter E. Mayeux. Mr. Holston stated that he did not believe that he would fare well in such a comparison, but nonetheless granted the researcher permission to examine the Orlando Sentinel's back files of his column and
tentatively agreed to supply the researcher with a statement regarding his views of the responsibilities and functions of the television critic. When the conversation concluded, it was agreed that the researcher would shortly contact Mr. Holston by mail and request both general and specific information about himself and his profession.

On April 23, 1976, said letter (See Appendix I) was sent to Mr. Holston. It specifically solicited his statement of the responsibilities and functions of the television critic, and sought any clarifying information which Holston deemed either relevant or informational. It seemed that Mr. Holston had changed his mind, for he reversed his earlier decision to cooperate with the research effort. The request for his statement regarding the responsibilities and functions of the television critic went unanswered.

In the final stages of the research proceedings, July 6, 1976, another attempt was made to contact Mr. Holston. In a telephone conversation Holston stated that he believed that,

The television critic should perform two main functions: (1) keep the public informed as to the direction television is taking, not in terms of television trends, but how the medium is reacting to the country's moods, and (2) to let people know what is
new, different, unusual and of high quality in television.\textsuperscript{28}

The journalist, who holds both a B. S. and a M. S. in Finance and Economics, stated that he felt it was rather pointless to continually emphasize the negative aspects of the medium, but to spend the majority of one's critical effort on that which is good. Having early recognized that (1) little is accomplished by negative reviews and (2) television criticism does not significantly affect viewing habits, the journalist has elected to use an essay format for his column and used television as a spring board around which to build impressionistic commentary.\textsuperscript{29}

Jack Gould's statement regarding the functions and responsibilities of television critics was taken from Peter E. Mayeux's "Three Television Critics: Stated \textit{vs.} Manifest Functions." Mayeux reported that,

Gould has commented in various publications that the functions of the television critic are: (1) to serve as a reporter for the medium, (2) to act as a mediator between the viewer and the industry, and between the viewer and television programs, (3) to be concerned about the evolution of the television medium, (4) to review all types of programs, (5) to determine what programs are trying to accomplish and

\textsuperscript{28}Statement by Noel Holston, telephone interview, July 6, 1976.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid.
how well they succeeded, and, (6) to determine how programs fit into contemporary life.\textsuperscript{30}

After eliciting Jack Gould's assembled statement regarding his functions, Mayeux examined Gould's columns and categorized their content as belonging to the aforementioned categories. In 1963 Jack Gould devoted the following percentages of his column space to each of those fourteen categories.\textsuperscript{31}

Table 1

Proportion of Total Column Space Given by Jack Gould to Specific Categories in 1963

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<th>Categories</th>
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\textsuperscript{30} Mayeux, "Three Television Critics: Stated vs. Manifest Functions," op. cit., p. 28.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 29.
Comparing this information to Gould's statement regarding the functions and responsibilities of the television critic, Mayeux reached the following conclusions regarding Jack Gould's performance as a television critic.

Generally, Gould's stated functions were manifested in his columns. To draw this conclusion, the reader needs to interpret, and perhaps "read into," the stated functions of Gould. Gould was a "reporter" to the extent that he informed his readers about the industry and its programs and problems. He was a "mediator" in that he talked directly to the industry about programs and issues that he felt deserved attention and immediate solutions. He was "concerned about the evolution of the television medium" when he built public support for positions on issues he felt important--e.g. ETV, reduction of over commercialization, proper government regulation, and ratings. Gould did not "review all types of programs"; there were several program types which received little or no attention. . . . Gould did try to elevate public taste in television programming by critiquing programs in such a way as to establish program standards for the audience and the industry. His last two stated functions (to determine how programs fit into contemporary life) were implicit in his program comments about plot, theme, and program structure. Thus, Gould seemed to be fulfilling his stated functions, in some manner, in his . . . 1963 column.\(^{32}\)

Clearly, both qualitative and quantitative data has been generated by the study. Even though the categorization system is clearly outlined, certain selections were subjective. The analysis of the stated functions was,\(^{32}\)

Ibid., p. 31.
at least in part, subjective as well. Any judgments passed on the comparative worth of the two statements have, however, been based on a conscientious consideration of the statements and judgments of the critics' peers. Qualitative judgments were also rendered regarding the degree to which Holston met the McGrath and Nance criteria for good television criticism, the adeptness of Holston's wit, the lucidity of his style, and the like.

The only quantitative data rendered by the study was the percentage of column space devoted to each of the fourteen categories. From that data one was able to infer which areas Holston apparently thought were most important.
Chapter 6

PRESENTATION OF DATA

In all, eighty-five articles of television criticism were examined. As was previously mentioned, only those articles which appeared as part of the entertainment section of the Orlando Sentinel between Mondays and Saturdays were used in this study. Although Mr. Holston occasionally wrote special articles for the paper's Sunday supplement, those articles were not used or counted when selecting articles for consideration.

The average length of Noel Holston's daily columns was 29.33 millimeters and contained 792 words. In all 2492.5 column millimeters were examined and categorized.

The examination and categorization of Holston's column is shown in Table 2, which starts on the following page.
Table 2

Column Millimeters Given by Noel Holston to Specific Categories in 1975-1976

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*Symbol used in place of heading. Key: #--Newspaper Article.

**Letters used in place of category names. Key: A--Program Previews; B--Program Reviews; C--Censorship and Discrimination; D--Personalities; E--Economics; F--Government; G--Audience; H--Technical; I--Industry Business; J--Educational; K--International; L--Humor; M--Programming; and N--Miscellaneous.
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The total column millimeters devoted to each category was as follows:

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Millimeters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Previews</td>
<td>705.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Reviews</td>
<td>496.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship and Discrimination</td>
<td>124.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalities</td>
<td>413.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>116.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>52.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>168.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Business</td>
<td>67.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>246.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Converted to percentages the following information was generated:

Table 4
Proportion of Total Column Space Given by Noel Holston to Specific Categories in 1975-1976

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Previews</td>
<td>28.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Reviews</td>
<td>19.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship and Discrimination</td>
<td>4.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalities</td>
<td>16.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>6.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Business</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>9.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For ease of comparison, the percentage of column space devoted to each category by Jack Gould and Noel Holston is reproduced in tandem:

Table 5

Comparative Proportion of Total Column Space Given by Jack Gould and Noel Holston

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage Gould</th>
<th>Percentage Holston</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Previews</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>28.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Reviews</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>19.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship and Discrimination</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>4.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalities</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>16.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>6.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Business</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>9.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 7

DISCUSSION OF DATA

As can be seen from the data, Noel Holston allocated the greatest percentage of his column space to program previews. Those were largely items which supplied advanced analysis and comment on programs yet to be aired, and simple announcements of what would be aired when.

It should be pointed out that while Holston used 28.30 percent of his column space for program previews, Jack Gould devoted only 1.7 percent of his column space to that category. That fact should not be construed to mean that Jack Gould did not deem previewing as a valid function of the television critic. The reasons for Gould's superficially poor showing in the preview category were twofold. First, the networks used more live performances which could not be previewed during the period of time when Gould was writing. Secondly, the networks maintained a no-preview policy until relatively recently. It has only been within the past two years that NBC discontinued its
no-preview policy. For that reason, both program previews and reviews will be considered together in this comparison.

Noel Holston devoted 19.90 percent of his column space to reviewing television shows while Jack Gould utilized 50.1 percent of his column space for reviewing. Thus Holston used 48.20 percent for the combination of previewing and reviewing and Gould used 51.8 percent for the same combination. This difference of approximately 3 percent is not significant, but is still worthy of note.

The quality of Holston's criticism varied. Previews and reviews were frequently merely a recounting of the plot and a listing of the names of performers. Thirteen of the eighty-five columns, however, demonstrated Holston's too infrequently employed ability to render incisive criticism. McGrath and Nance would doubtless find his criticism acceptable in some areas and wholly unsatisfactory in others. The twelve categories of criticism outlined by McGrath and Nance were: talent, worthwhile purpose, camera techniques, writing, uniqueness, color, subject, producer, musical score, adaptation to medium, empathy, and sublety. Noel Holston gave consistent attention to only seven of those areas of criticism.
Talent was the first area of criticism to which he brought his attentions. Holston always mentioned the principal actors in his critical analyses and generally evaluated the performance of each. Infrequently he examined the quality of the characters as well as the ability of actors to perform their roles.

Holston devoted two complete articles and sections of two other articles for a total of 69.4 millimeters of commentary on the lack of worthwhile purpose in airing "Helter Skelter." Although he rarely discussed the purpose of any show, he did speak out against exploitation, unnecessary violence, and the like. The "Helter Skelter" articles were unusual for several reasons. First, no other show, either series or special, received as much column space. Secondly, Holston assumed an unyielding negative stance. That willingness to put one's opinion on the line without mincing words is an admirable trait in a journalist.

The two reviews on "Helter Skelter" also served as an excellent example of Holston's ability to use a particular television event as a core around which to build social comment. They serve to demonstrate that the critic does indeed fulfill his stated functions.
The next category of criticism which McGrath and Nance believed a critical review should include was camera technique, or the artistic accomplishment of a visual presentation. The researchers would have been sadly disappointed as they leafed through Holston's previews and reviews, for with the exception of a few lost millimeters here and there, camera technique was ignored. Other McGrath and Nance categories which received little or no consideration were: color--technical and artistic use of color; musical score--composition and appropriateness of music selected for a program; and adaptation to medium--coexpression and its evolution into a synergetic language. In defense of Holston and other contemporary television critics, these areas do not warrant the attention which McGrath and Nance suggest. The technical end of television has advanced to the extent that virtually all nationally produced programs have fine camera techniques and use of color. Likewise, the musical scores developed for television are also of a consistently high quality. Finally, screen writers, musicians, producers, and engineers have had sufficient experience with the medium to develop the synergetic language of the medium.

Noel Holston consistently makes a conscientious
effort to acknowledge the creative talents of both writers and producers. He did so even when he was not favorably impressed with the format itself. That is to say that although he was opposed to the airing of "Helter Skelter," he recognized the fine quality of writing and directing that went into the special. He also devoted much column space, as in the cases of his discussions of "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" and "One Day At A Time" to the producer Norman Lear.

Perhaps Holston's greatest critical attentions were devoted to what McGrath and Nance called empathy--involvement of the viewer with the stimulus provided, and sublety--refinements of insights and perceptions.33 When Holston takes the time to fully direct his critical attentions toward the medium rather than merely list what is going to be on when, he has rendered fine incisive criticism. If the television critic assumes that part of his responsibility includes not only directing the viewers attentions to that which is worthwhile in television, but also educating him as to the qualities which are characteristic

of art, he must not only inform the viewer as to what he believes to be good, but he must also point out why it is good. Noel Holston is capable of supplying his readers with that criticism, but unfortunately, he does not do so with sufficient frequency.

Holston did not, however, review many regular programs. He stated that he believed that some shows simply did not warrant critical reviews. That notion received support for Jules Rossman, who said that,

Some program reviews can be important if looked at not necessarily as an attempt to affect program viewing but as an attempt to educate viewers in recognizing criteria by which critics determine whether they enjoy a particular program. Review can also serve to give the program's creative and performing artists a professional evaluation of the quality of their effort regardless of viewer opinion as reflected in ratings. In this context, program review becomes a matter of critical selectivity, with some kinds of programs more worthy of reviewing than others.\(^3^4\)

Noel Holston certainly met the first requirements Rossman set forth, but made an attempt to do more than supply viewers with criteria for evaluation. He also made an attempt to direct viewers' attentions to television's better offerings. The second criteria was also

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\(^{34}\)Rossman, "The TV Critic Column: Is It Influential?" op. cit., p. 403.
consistently dealt with in his daily columns. Without fail, Holston cited actors and directors whom he felt had performed admirably.

In addition to the aforementioned criteria established by Rossman, Noel Holston also met another group of requirements which Rossman set forth. According to the researcher:

New program series deserve comment and comparison in terms of their quality and innovation. Network documentaries, cultural essays, dramas, artistic specials, and similar public television programs also deserve critical comment. By reviewing these programs, the critic encourages more of these efforts and hopefully educates viewers to accept and evaluate programs not primarily geared for mass entertainment. 35

Without doubt, Noel Holston at least minimally satisfied this Rossman criterion. Of the eighty-five articles examined, a total of sixty-two or 72.93 percent of them dealt at length with old and new series and specials. Twenty-one focused on old series, twenty-three on new series, and eighteen dealt with specials. That is 33.88 percent focused on old series, 37.09 percent on new series, and 29.03 percent dealt with specials. Although it is arguable that Holston should have delegated more of his

35 Ibid.
column space to specials, it is also true that many of his readers may not have had a high interest in specials and documentaries. If there is a need for improvement in this area, it is only slight. By considering new program series and specials, he did fulfill his second stated function, "to let people know what is new, different, unusual and of high quality."\(^{36}\)

Although there is much to be said for reviewing only those programs which are "worthy" of comment, a large segment of the viewing day was dealt with superficially at best and was generally ignored completely. Only 27.0 millimeters or 1.08 percent of his column space was devoted to day time programming and 4.2 millimeters or 0.17 percent was granted late night programming. To make matters even more grim, only one day time program, "Good Morning America," received what could even loosely be called criticism. The rest of his references were simply listing of time schedules, chats about production, and lead-ins to other stories. In short, in the eighty-five articles examined, both day time and late evening

\[^{36}\text{Holston, telephone interview, op. cit.}\]
programming were summarily dismissed from critical comment. Henceforth Noel Holston should title his column "Prime Time" and thereby cast aside his pretense of being a complete television critic.

The next category which Mayeux established for television criticism was Censorship and Discrimination. Noel Holston devoted 124.0 column millimeters or 4.97 percent of his column space to that category while Jack Gould devoted only 0.9 percent of his column space to the topic. Holston's major concern was not discrimination against races or individuals, but censorship. Frequently, as was the case with "Helter Skelter," he maintained that certain programs, types of programs, and various subject matters should not be aired. He generally adopted a conservative stance on broadcasting. In short, he maintained that the networks rather than the viewer should exercise discretion.

Personalities commanded 413.1 millimeters or 16.57 percent of Holston's column space while Gould devoted only 3.0 percent of his space to chit chat about the stars. According to Jules Rossman, "Columns devoted to industry news, program promotion and personality pieces might interest readers, but do not form the basis of influential
comment. 37 In fact, Rossman maintained that even 11.0 percent of a critic's column space was too much to devote to personalities. Rather than concentrate on those types of materials, Rossman suggested that far more would be accomplished if critics would,

... emphasize in their daily columns the kind of content which if read and considered by programmers and FCC decision makers could have influence. This means emphasizing comment and opinion of the legal, technological, licensing, and programming issues of the medium. 38

The next category of television criticism was Economics. Noel Holston devoted 116.3 column millimeters or 4.66 percent of his column space to the economics of the television industry while Jack Gould devoted 4.3 percent of his space to the same topic. It can be deduced that both attributed the same relative level of importance to the topic. Of the items concerned with economics, the vast majority of Holston's items dealt with how much a particular television personality was being paid or how much the production of a particular show amounted to. The remainder of his items regarding economics dealt with the

37 Rossman, op. cit., p. 401.

38 Ibid.
efforts of Channel 24 to raise money through membership drives. He did not delve into the profits of the industry itself, the cost of advertizing, the losses suffered by the networks in their production of documentaries and the like.

Noel Holston devoted 52.7 column millimeters or 2.11 percent of his space to issues involving the relationship and actions between government and broadcasting. Jack Gould devoted 13.7 percent of his column space to the same topic.

According to Rossman, it is important that the television critic keep viewers informed and avoid an unnecessary and illogical emphasis on program reviews. They must instead attempt to influence those who are responsible for programming and government decision makers. By Rossman's standards, Noel Holston did not devote sufficient critical commentary to the workings of government in relation to broadcasting. Conversely, Jack Gould devoted an acceptable percentage of his column space to government.

Although Holston made no direct comments about his responsibility to keep his readers informed as to the workings of government in relation to the television
industry, there seems to be a consensus among those who comment on television and its critics that this indeed is among the critic's responsibilities. Jack Gould, on the other hand, did assume that as part of his responsibility as a television critic and satisfactorily fulfilled that stated function.

The next category for consideration included items about the audience, whether it be the audience's reaction to television or the effects of broadcasting upon the audience. Noel Holston devoted 168.8 column millimeters or 6.77 percent of his column space to audience while Jack Gould devoted only 4.1 percent of his articles to that issue. Clearly this is an important area of consideration and probably deserved more attention from both columnists.

Holston seemed to have two main areas of interest in the issue of the reciprocal relationship between the audience and broadcasting. The first area was the effect of television violence and fantasy upon children. Although he did not claim that TV violence was responsible for violent or other aberrant behavior in children, he did seem to feel that no good could come of continual exposure to the less civilized side of man. It may safely be
assumed that Holston would not accept Herb Jacob's stance that because

Small boys, and often girls, have an instinct for violence in defense of their own rights or of right. A visual image of violence is not necessary to evoke it. It is spontaneous and biological in the young. The civilized deplore television violence for violence's sake alone, but the young are not civilized, never were, and never will be. If the young were civilized, the race would vanish in its own insipidity.39

In fact, Holston would be utterly opposed to the notion that exposure to violence and other forms of antisocial behavior will have no effect on children simply because they are by nature uncivilized themselves.

Likewise, Holston recognizes the positive role of fantasy in the lives of children, but he is opposed to exposure to the types of fantasy which may potentially be harmful. As an example, one network had proposed a cartoon series whose star was a friendly shark. Holston felt that children should not be led to believe that sharks are not only harmless, but friendly.

The critic's second major area of interest was with regard to the audiences' response to the soliciting

done by public/educational television. On the one hand he was sympathetic with Channel 24's need to increase their membership, but he was also sensitive to the irony of commercials being replaced by pleas for contributions.

In light of the vast quantities of data which has been generated by academic research, neither Noel Holston nor Jack Gould devoted sufficient column space to the complex relationship between television and its viewers. Children were the only group singled out for analysis. The uses of television, its affects upon our society, our perceptions of self, and the like were ignored.

Another area of consideration was the technical end of television. Neither critic allocated significant column space to the topic. Noel Holston allowed only 27.0 millimeters or 1.08 percent of his articles to technical considerations and Gould gave up only 1.8 percent to the topic.

It is important to note that during the period studied, two of the major networks in Holston's market moved their facilities to a new and more powerful transmitting tower. Had this coincidence not occurred, it is likely that even less column space would have been devoted to that category. Both Holston and Gould could have
devoted more attention to the continuing advances made in the technology of television.

Another area which apparently failed to captivate the interest of either critic was industry business—items about the interests and activities of broadcasters. Noel Holston allocated only 67 millimeters or 2.68 percent of his column space to the dealings of broadcasters while Gould sacrificed only 1.5 percent to the topic. Let us hope that the critics do not believe that if they say nothing about the broadcasters, the broadcasters will not do anything too bad.

According to Jules Rossman:

Increasing government and public concern over violence and children's programs, the implications of CATV, STV, and other technological developments, recent administration and industry conflicts, new proposals on licensing, political broadcasting, and other areas are all ripe for comment and opinion by the critics. The critic today should certainly devote a maximum of space to opinion and comment rather than to program reviews. 40

Jack Gould came closer than Holston to meeting Rossman's standards, but neither critic was in line for the Jules Rossman award for competent criticism. Chief

amongst their failings was the amount of column space devoted to previews and reviews. In the future it might be suggested that Noel Holston devote a greater part of his attentions to those issues which are more important than what time a show will be on and what songs will be sung.

Wide disparity was evident in the relative importance which the two critics attributed to the category of education. While Noel Holston gave only 25.7 column millimeters or 1.03 percent of his column space to the topic, Jack Gould saw fit to devote 8.6 percent of his column space to the educational uses of television. Only reviews and government were allocated more column space than education in Gould's column.

A possible explanation for this apparent disparity should be advanced. While Noel Holston did not appear to be particularly fascinated by education and television, Jack Gould was writing his column some ten years earlier when the potential utility of television for education was first being examined with elan. This is not an attempt to defend Holston's sparing concern for a matter of such importance to the academic community at large, but is designed to serve merely as an alternative to the
accusation that Holston was unconcerned with or unimpressed by the encyclopedia of television.

If Noel Holston was unenchanted by the magic kingdom of educational television, he was virtually unaware that the medium even existed in other nations. He devoted only 5.7 millimeters or 0.22 percent of his column space to international broadcasting. Jack Gould was not far in advance of Holston's limp foray into foreign territory, for the New York Times critic allotted only a scant 1.9 percent of his attentions to distant shores.

To make matters even more embarrassing for Mr. Holston, his only reference to international television was in relation to the airing of a British series, "Space 1999," here in the United States. It must be assumed that Noel Holston is an isolationist.

Apparently, Noel Holston had a sense of humor while Jack Gould did not. Holston devoted 38.2 millimeters or 1.53 percent of his column space to humorous articles while Jack Gould never cracked a smile. Holston usually employed his humor as a lead-in to comment on some TV offering. Rather than attempt to tell unpolished jokes, he generally relied on anecdotes.

The last category to receive special attention by
either critic was programming. Noel Holston wrote 246.2 millimeters of text or 9.87 percent of his column and Jack Gould gave the topic 7.8 percent of his journalistic attentions.

Holston, as previously mentioned, seemed to be most concerned with prime time viewing. For that reason, he kept a watchful eye on all scheduling changes. Those changes were made for a number of reasons including shows being pre-empted by specials, moved to another time slot or temporarily deleted because of their inappropriate content, or re-scheduled in order to create a more advantageous competitive posture in the ratings war. Although a comparatively large quantity of space was given to programming, most of the information provided by Holston could have been more clearly and readily garnered from a simple broadcast schedule. His comments did not seem to be addressed to those responsible for programming decisions. Secondly, he appeared to largely be in agreement with programmer's decisions to delay or delete regular programs which dealt with more sophisticated subject matter. Such conservatism was frequently apparent in his daily copy.

Finally, 0.24 percent of Holston's and 0.5 percent
of Gould's columns fell into the miscellaneous category. Holston used miscellaneous items as lead-ins to other stories which fell into one of the previously examined categories.

It can be surmised that if Jack Gould of the New York Times is used as a model of what a television critic should do, Noel Holston in large part meets the demands of Gould and the remainder of their professional community. The areas in which he fell short of their demands can easily be satisfied by a conscientious effort on the part of the local critic.

Lawrence Laurent, television critic for the Washington Post, has supplied a comprehensive description of the complete television critic. The first demand that Laurent made was that the

... complete television critic begins with a respect and a love for the excitement and the impact of the combination of sight and sound. ... He must be absolutely incorruptible, a firmly anchored man of objectivity in a stormy world of special interests and pressure groups. At the same time, he should stand above the boiling turmoil while he plunges into every controversy as a social critic and guardian of standards. ... 41

It must be assumed that Holston is indeed excited about the synergetic function of television. Neither does he appear to bend to the influence of special interest groups with the possible exception of middle-class conservatism. He is not, however, the pawn of a particular network, advertiser, or any of their ilk. Neither is he hesitant to speak out, either for or against that which television offers its audience. He is, however, not without faults.

Laurent maintained that the complete television critic should be able to write with confidence about all manner of news and documentary programs and be able to evaluate the integrity of those who gather and present the information around which those presentations have been built.\(^{42}\) Unfortunately, Holston concentrated his evaluations of specials on the entertainment variety rather than those which delved into the complex nexus of public affairs, the delicate world of fine art or the baffling and awesome macrocosm of the sciences. Nowhere in his column was the news dealt with in any terms other than personality profiles of popular commentators. Programs which consis-

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 157.
tently deal with social and political issues of the day. "60 Minutes," "Firing Line," "Meet the Press," "Issues and Answers," "Black Forum," "Today," and a powerful host of others were cast into the journalistic abyss. They never found themselves in the ink and pulp of print.

Straining for freedom from the same dark corner were the wonders of Wolftrap, Margot Fontaine, Leonard Bernstein, Beverly Sills, and so too was Salvador Dali. The arts did manage to sneak in three lines for themselves. In his March 15, 1975, column Holston did say,

... I have a sneaking suspicion that there's more artistic worth in the WORST work of one of the greatest playwrights of the century than in, say, the typical "Rookie" episode. 43

The critic did not say anything about the scheduled O'Neill play, but at least his name appeared in print.

The sciences did not fare as well. Only once did an article about a science oriented documentary, "The Invisible Machine," appear in Holston's column. Neither did the critic trouble himself to inform his readers that most news documentaries and public affairs programs are those which reduce the networks' profits.

Laurent, like Rossman, felt that critics must acknowledge the advances in television’s technology. \(^{44}\) Noel Holston was simply inadequate in that department. It may be argued that such information is too complicated for the average reader to understand. It might also be assumed that the average reader is not interested in such matters. If the television critic adopts reader disinterest or lack of sophistication as excuses for not covering all facets of television, he too is guilty of the sins attributed to television itself—pandering to the lowest levels of taste and the least common denominator of culture.

To an extent, Holston did fulfill what Laurent saw as the first duty of the complete critic, "... to comment on the daily offerings, the performances, and the productions that reach the screens of millions of television receivers." \(^{45}\) Noel Holston did consistently comment on the daily offerings, performances, and productions of prime time television. He did not, however, give sufficient attention to day time, weekend, and late night broadcasting.

\(^{44}\)Laurent, op. cit., p. 157.  \(^{45}\)Ibid., p. 158.
Laurent also said that if the critic,

... is writing about a dramatic production, adapted from a theatrical play, he will have become familiar with the original. If it is adapted from a novel, he will have read the book... 46

It was difficult to judge Holston's degree of competence when it came to evaluating dramatic productions. Of the three that he did review, in two, "Love Among the Ruins" and "The Swiss Family Robinson," he gave no references to the original works. His criticism dealt largely with personalities, quality of performance, and in the case of "Swiss Family Robinson," weaknesses in plot. "Helter Skelter" was the third production reviewed. Having read Helter Skelter, the critic did not think that the book was appropriate material for transcription to the synergetic language of television, but he failed to mention what he would like to see instead. In short, prime time television presents very few dramatic productions; in the eighty-five articles examined, Noel Holston reviewed only three, and he appeared to be familiar with the original of only one. That was not a good showing for either television or its critic.

46 Ibid., p. 159.
The working of the federal authority which regulates television should, according to Laurent, be a matter of vital interest to the television critic. Noel Holston did not devote sufficient consideration to the government in terms of its relations with and influence on television and subsequently its viewers.

Laurent asserted that,

It is also important that a fully informed television critic understand and be able to explain to the public such issues as pay-as-you-see (or subscription) television; or about the reservation of channels for use by educators and for noncommercial use by communities . . .

Holston did not mention pay television, UHF, closed circuit, educational TV, and the like. He was, however, concerned with the continuing effort of Channel 24, Orlando's educational station, to get economic support from the community. He also frequently "plugged" public television by pointing out that it offered things which the standard networks did not. To that extent he lends his support to educational television.

Laurent maintained that,

Our ideal television critic would have a special obligation to study the continuing controversy over

47 Ibid., p. 162.  
48 Ibid., p. 164.
the effect on children of violence in programs . . . and it is the duty of a responsible critic to keep pace with the research in this field. 49

Holston also demonstrated a degree of concern over the effects of television on the nation's children. He has not, however, paid sufficient attention to the voluminous research academia has undertaken in other areas which involve television.

The critic from the Washington Post maintained that the complete television critic would not advocate the status quo. 50 By virtue of the fact that Holston attempts to direct his viewers' attentions toward the finer offerings of television rather than toward the standard pulp which the tube emits, he is enjoining the audience to seek positive change in the medium. By doing so he meets not only the demands of Lawrence Laurent, but he also fulfills his own stated function.

Finally, Lawrence Laurent maintained that the complete television critic must be aware of and comment upon the total impact of television on American culture.

The television critic, as the interpreter of the new forces, must deal with shattering problems. There is the immediate, internal contradiction that comes

49 Ibid. 50 Ibid., p. 168.
from the extravagant claims made for television as the most effective instrument for shaping attitudes and creating desires for consumer products; opposed by a disclaiming of any negative effects on consumers of entertainment programs.  

Holston at no time dealt with the total impact of television. With the exception of an article which reported both sides of the continuing argument over the effects of violence on children, he did not confront the issue of television as a social force in America. The claims made by advertisers and broadcasters cannot both be valid, but Holston remained unintrigued by the glaring contradictions in those attitudes.

Finally, it has been surmised that Noel Holston was in command of what Laurent called philosophical serenity. He was keenly aware of his responsibility to both his readers and himself and appeared to be unwilling to compromise the integrity of either.

Thus Noel Holston has demonstrated at least partial conformity to the standards Lawrence Laurent outlined for the complete television critic. His failures were grounded in those instances when he allowed himself to be merely a reporter rather than a critic. It is hoped that

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51 Ibid., p. 170. 52 Ibid., p. 171.
he will establish his professional identity more clearly in the future. Like the medium which he is to consider, he is all too often banal rather than compelling, flippant rather than salient, and generally superficial.
Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

In view of the data secured, Noel Holston only partially satisfied his stated functions: (1) to keep the public informed as to the direction television is taking, not in terms of television trends, but how the medium is reacting to the country's moods, and (2) to let people know what is new, different, unusual, and of high quality in television.53

The critic's first stated function was subjective and vague, thus making evaluation difficult. It cannot, however, be said with any level of confidence that Noel Holston fulfilled that end. In no given article did the critic confront either the direction television was taking or the manner in which it reflected the mood of the country. By virtue of the fact that he reported on the daily offerings of the medium, noting what was being

53Holston, telephone interview, op. cit.
dropped and added, he did report the mood of the country as it is reflected in Nielson ratings. The accuracy of that standard is questionable at best, and probably has little if anything to do with the issue at hand. Even if one assumes that ratings are a measure of the country's pulse, it is certainly an oblique approach to take on an issue which is of concern to so many Americans. In the final analysis, it must be concluded that Noel Holston did not keep the public informed as to how the medium was reacting to the country's moods.

Conversely, the Orlando Sentinel critic did fulfill his second stated function, to direct viewer attention to that which is good in television. Unlike his failure to deal directly with the abstract questions involving television, Holston did confront television with clear-cut standards of excellence and a sense of obligation to both art and man. All too frequently he was a reporter rather than a critic, but he at least demonstrated the ability to meet the responsibilities outlined for the television critic. Perhaps the greatest improvement in his column could be effected if Holston would transcend the role of merely watching television to being a watchdog for the medium instead.
Noel Holston also fared rather well in his comparison with Jack Gould. Both critics devoted excessive column space to reviews, and Holston allocated too much space to personalities. The Orlando Sentinel critic certainly needs to examine the activities of government, the broadcast industry, and research conducted on the medium more carefully.

When Holston's work was compared to the stated functions of Jack Gould, he did not fare as well. Holston was indeed a reporter to the extent that he recounted information regarding programs and personalities. He did not, however, give sufficient attention to the industry and its problems. Occasionally Holston was a mediator in that he addressed the industry about programs and issues, but he did not do so frequently enough to be effective.

It could be deduced that Holston was concerned over the evolution of the medium from his concern over the "family viewing hour," the creation of bogus social images, and ratings. Like Gould, Noel Holston did not review all types of programs. Day Time and late night television were virtually ignored. His failure in that area is somewhat mediated by his statement that all programs do not warrant review. Holston certainly tried to elevate
public taste by giving positive recognition to those creative efforts which he deemed meritorious. In a rather disorganized fashion, he also tried to supply his readers with standards for evaluation. As in the case of Gould, the Orlando critic also implicitly fulfilled Gould's final stated function—determining what programs were trying to accomplish, their level of success, and how they fit into contemporary American life. Noel Holston had a higher measure of success in meeting the functions outlined by Jack Gould than he did in manifesting his own stated functions.

As was previously mentioned, Holston should redirect some of his attentions to the more vital areas of television and its relation to society at large. He should refrain from committing the same sins as those so prevalent throughout the industry—being banal and superficial rather than being incisive and dealing with what is significant in both television and our society. Above all, he should become more firmly entrenched in his sometimes wavering stance as a critic. That is to say that Noel Holston must attenuate his posture as reporter and more clearly align his professional identity as a television critic.
APPENDIX

370 Carissa Court
Satellite Beach, Florida
April 23, 1976

Noel Holston
Orlando Sentinel
Orlando, Florida

Dear Mr. Holston:

Earlier this year I sought your permission to examine articles from your column from the past year. That data has been collected and is presently under analysis.

The purpose of the study is to examine your manifest functions as the television critic for the Orlando Sentinel. My efforts would be greatly facilitated if you would supply me with your statement regarding the functions and responsibilities of the television critic. Any additional information which you regard as relevant would also be welcomed.

Your earliest response is anxiously awaited in order that research may proceed. If you feel disinclined to comply with this request, please notify me of your decision so that research may be altered and continue.

I look forward to hearing from you and will be happy to answer any questions you have regarding the progress and results of the study.

Sincerely yours,

Allison Van Pelt
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D. INTERVIEW