

Paddy Chayefsky Speaks Out

by Susan Horowitz



PADDY CHAYEFKY, fifty-three years old, sporting a graying goatee and a nondescript blue jersey, appraises the noise from the traffic eleven floors below. "There's a climate of hatred in New York that's very, very energizing. It's impossible to escape reality in this city. It's a significant thing for creative work."

It was that smell of reality, dialogue that sounded as if it had been tape-recorded in the Bronx, that catapulted Chayefsky to fame in the 1950s as the author of *Marty*, a teleplay that became an Oscar-winning film. Like his other television dramas, *Marty* probed the sensitivities of lower-middle-class New Yorkers, the people with whom he grew up.

I asked Chayefsky what it was like writing for television in the Fifties.

"It was all live television. A compressed set. No exteriors. That made for small drama, what we called 'kitchen drama.'"

"What about the artistic freedom of a television writer in those days?"

"I was lucky. I fit into Fred Coe's 'Philco Playhouse.' Fred came out of the theater. In 'Philco' they treated you like a playwright. But on most shows, the writers didn't even know when the show was on. The writer on television is a lowly hired hand. Ratings determine the program. The writer is told to cut to pattern."

"Do ratings reflect what the public really wants?"

"Sure. But audiences resist change. To introduce a new idea in television, you have to shove material down the audience's throat week after week till it's familiar and they get to like it. But now shows are decided week by week. If it doesn't go the first week, it's off. They yield to the immediate reaction, which has got to be negative because, as I say, people resist change."

"*Network* is about how television is obsessed by ratings, isn't it?"

"Television is an advertising medium. If you've got a good show, you raise the price of your advertising. The top shows are paid something like \$130,000 a minute, as opposed to a news program, which might get a fraction of that. If they had their way, they'd throw out the news altogether and keep putting the 'Bionic Woman' on."

"Do you see television moving in any particular direction?"

"Profit orientation entirely. Most people in charge of television today still retain a sense of

responsibility. They try to balance some sort of noblesse oblige with the profit motive. What happens with the next generation—no longer Brahmans of television, just profit makers? That's what *Network* is all about."

"That people coming up have no conscience?"

"They're no longer programming people, creative people with theatrical backgrounds. They come out of advertising, sales, managing local stations. They're totally oriented towards profits, towards ratings, which is the same thing."

"Are you speaking just about television here?"

"We [Chayefsky and his producer, Howard Gottfried] always do microcosm films—the whole society in one institution."

"Like *Hospital*, your film with George Scott? Wasn't that also about the depersonalization of an institution and also a satire?"

"They're satires, but there's not one unauthentic note in either *Hospital* or *Network*. The medical journals cited *Hospital* as being highly realistic."

"What about style? In *Network* you seemed to be combining realism with parody and rhythmic, almost poetic dialogue. Is there any particular reason you do this?"

"I just get personal, professional pleasure out of mixing a complex of styles."

"It seems to be an unusual form for film. Does it grow out of your experience in theater?"

"Probably. You have more technical license in the theater. You can even write in verse in the theater. *Gideon* was totally written in verse but squeezed into block paragraphs so that the actors wouldn't be made self-conscious by it."

"Will audiences accept poetry?"

"It's tough. Contemporary drama is not a language drama. Poetry has to come from the conceptions, the visual imagery. Film is the hardest on language. You have to find some device. I use insane people a lot because it allows you to be extravagant in your language, and insanity is a very contemporary theme. It's hard to find a form of diction for the movies that most of the audience will accept as entertainment and that another layer of audience will accept as poetry. You have to make it sound as if they're talking realistically but with an articulate reality—characters who are capable of poetic reality."

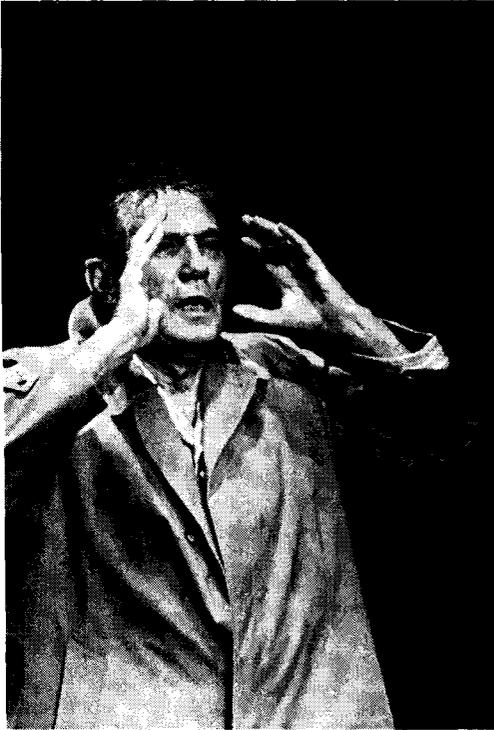
"Do you expect *Network* ever to be shown on television?"

"We cut our own television version. Otherwise, they'll butcher it. Cut a whole scene to take out one dirty word."

"So your attitude toward television is suspicious?"

"I'm not as benign as I used to be. I don't have much hope, but it's still there. Television remains a medium with limitless potential. It's really beyond comprehension." ©

Susan Horowitz is a free-lance writer.



Peter Finch—"A peculiar dignity and a deeply moving pathos."

hand. . . . But when the front-page stories and viewer reactions come in, with a jump of five rating points in a night, there's a bright young programming executive on hand to convince Hackett that they've lucked into something. She guarantees that with Howard to "articulate a popular rage," she could turn the evening news into "the biggest smash on television."

She does, and the result will appear increasingly less fantastic to those aware of what has been happening to the major news programs in recent years and to those willing to project the same rate and elements of change, as Howard is transformed from "an angry prophet denouncing the hypocrisies of our time" into, quite literally, "the mad prophet of the airways." And his show serves as lead-in, if not to "The Death Hour" that Max envisioned, to the "Mao Tse-tung Hour," featuring films of the Ecumenical Liberation Army in terrorist action through the collaboration of the Communist Party. But madness, of the mind or of the morals, can get out of hand in the ratings game and in the power ploys, and we are faced with a final solution.

THE Chayefsky script, with its crisp jargon and its fast-flowing comedy, interrupted by those arias of self-revelation and moments of heart-stopping compassion that are this writer's hallmark, is remarkably rich in it-

self, as well as in comparison to the aridity of most screenwriting. And it is an obvious joy to performers rarely given an opportunity to portray such articulate characters. Peter Finch's Howard, whose restrained madness reaches heights of glittering sanity, sustains a peculiar dignity and a deeply moving pathos. William Holden's Max, like many Chayefsky protagonists, is in the middle-of-the-night stage of his emotional life; unlike them, he is decisive and self-aware, the man of "simple human decency" who sees and escapes self-destruction. Most glittering is Faye Dunaway's Diana, the woman of self-styled "masculine temperament," a driven careerist existing only in her work, unable to feel, only to "handle," emotion, her self-absorption total. She is indeed "television incarnate," as Max calls her, detached from unscripted living. There are persuasive performances, too, by Robert Duvall as Hackett, the ultimate corporation man, the knife—and hacksaw—at the ready in every move; Ned Beatty as the conglomerate chieftain who sees the world as "a college of corporations"; Beatrice Straight as Max's deeply caring wife; and Marlene Warfield as the Marxist whose manifesto soon includes syndication rights and over-head clauses.

Sidney Lumet, himself a television veteran (as a network staff director of some 300 shows before turning to film with *Twelve Angry Men*), has sustained the momentum of his recent films—*Serpico*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Dog Day Afternoon*—in the fast pacing of a complex story. Here he makes the moments count along the way: a breakup scene between a long-married couple explodes in anger that turns to pain and resolves itself with love; lovers caress and couple and relax to the woman's endless monologue about her work; the fellowship of an impromptu office gathering; the ice-cold dispositions and jugular-thrust approach of company meetings, the newsroom and control-room routines, the manipulation of studio audiences, all come clear in the instant.

Above all, *Network* articulates—gratuitously in high style—our awarenesses of television's dreary effect upon the fabric of our lives, our passivity in the process, our acceptances by default. And indirectly it reminds us of the potential of a medium that has, in all too large part, been exploited as a "boredom-killing business." If Chayefsky's is a jeremiad, it is one touched with wit and imagination, designed for literates and delivered from the heart of a caring man.

Other Movies

The Sunday Woman, directed by Luigi Comencini, with a screenplay by Age and Scarpelli, is a mediocre detective story made charming by a trio of talented players. Jacqueline Bisset, lovelier than ever, and Jean-Louis Trintignant, idle rich sophisticates, become involved in a murder investigation conducted by Marcello Mastroianni, a chap who knows his place and his business. The results are delightful despite the plotting.

Mad Dog, offering us Dennis Hopper as Daniel Morgan, a legendary nineteenth-century Australian outlaw, seeks to tidy up the highwayman's image and prove him a man turned antisocial by prison cruelties but kind to his aborigine companion and a few of his victims. It proves only that he was a functioning outlaw who came to a bad end after a career soaked in blood and violence, both nauseatingly depicted on screen. Hopper, as always, plays Hopper.

A Matter of Time, adapted by John Gay from Maurice Druon's novel *Film of Memory*, is a multimillion-dollar Cinderella story. Directed by Vincente Minnelli, the film presents Liza Minnelli as a peasant girl who comes to Rome as a maid in a seedy hotel where a senile ex-femme fatale, Ingrid Bergman, inspires her to cut her hair and be self-confident—whereupon she becomes an instant movie star. Charles Boyer has a minuscule scene as Bergman's ex-husband, apparently and understandably too embarrassed to linger. Geoffrey Unsworth has photographed some lovely moments in the lavish sets as Liza flits in and out of Bergman's memories and sings three songs that are completely anachronistic to the settings. Suffice it to say that director Minnelli has repudiated the film as cut and dubbed.

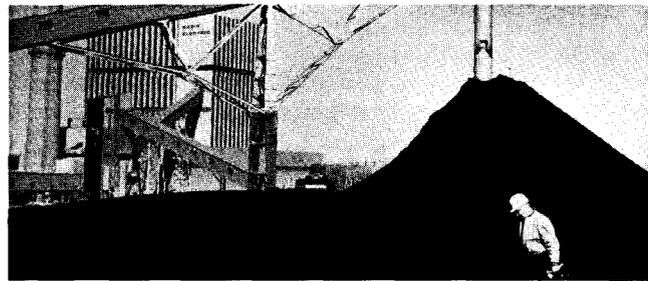
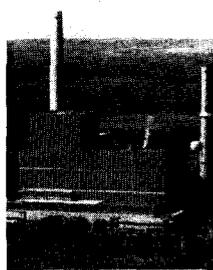
Part 2, Sounder, a sequel by Robert B. Radnitz to his highly successful 1972 film, is that rare sequel that not only satisfies but extends itself beyond the original. Once again Lonnie Elder III has provided the screenplay and Taj Mahal the on- and off-screen music, but a new cast portrays the Morgan family in their continuing effort to provide young David Lee with an education. The emphasis is on character rather than drama, but under William Graham's direction, a tense drama—of a black community's determination to build a school in Louisiana in the Thirties—does emerge. ©

When it comes to energy, we're in the countdown years.

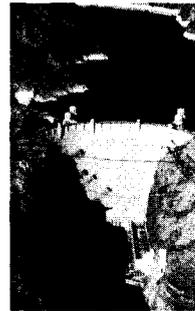
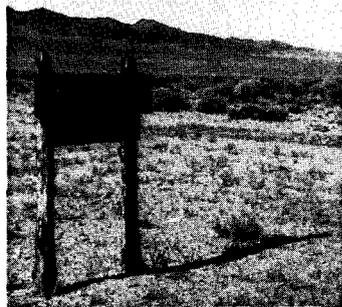
An electrically powered irrigation system has greatly increased productivity on this farm in northeastern Colorado, near Fort Morgan. These huge sprinklers are now a common sight in the nation's millions of acres of once parched and useless land.



Basin Electric Power Cooperative's new lignite-fired plant near Stanton, N.D., is part of a complex generating power for more than 100 rural electric systems in eight states. Long a leader in mined area reclamation, Basin is also researching productivity levels of reclaimed land.



One of America's newest consumer-owned rural electric cooperatives, Mt. Wheeler Power, Ely, Nev., is wiping away the last great power desert in the West. Mt. Wheeler has strung more than 1000 miles of line to serve a few hundred families in Nevada and Utah.



One of the world's largest dams is Hoover (Boulder) Dam, near Las Vegas, Nev. Hydroelectric projects in the U.S. today meet about one-sixth of the nation's total electric energy needs. Few sites remain which can be developed for hydro projects.

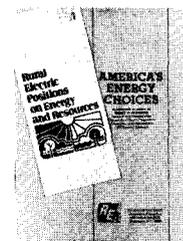
Day by day the earth's supply of oil and natural gas — on which we rely heavily — gets smaller. By the year 2000 most of it will be gone.

It's a frightening countdown. It wouldn't be so bad if we were not an energy-based nation. But we are. Everything that enters into the way we live in America depends on energy — food, shelter, jobs, recreation, *everything*.

There are several promising possibilities — such as solar and geothermal power — which may provide at least partial answers for the long term.

But for the immediate future we must turn to available alternative sources of energy.

That means nuclear power and coal. We have to concentrate on those areas of development *now* — before the countdown goes too far.



The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association is the service organization for nearly 1000 rural electric cooperatives and public power districts, serving some 25 million people in the U.S. Write "Viewpoints," NRECA, 2000 Florida Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009, for your information packet on rural electric energy positions.

America's rural electric systems



Music to My Ears

Young Old "Porgy" New Young Pianist

by Irving Kolodin

THE decades that have brought honors to *Porgy's* creators have also brought peril to those who challenged the standards of their now famous progenitors. Such eminent elders as Anne Brown and Todd Duncan, Leontyne Price and William Warfield, all brought something uniquely personal to their impersonations, which cast real, if invisible, shadows over the opening performances of the company that has been playing at New York's Uris Theatre.

But those chosen for the first-night ordeal in this revival not only fleshed out the shadows that hung over them but established approaches of their own to the roles they performed. The principal women were Clamma Dale (tall, young, beautiful, in face and voice, sinuous in movement), who can very well progress from Bess to an operatic career, as Price did; and her alternate Esther Hinds, who has, prophetically, already measured up to her prototype by performing the role of Cleopatra that Samuel Barber created, operatically, for Price when the Lincoln Center Metropolitan Opera House opened a decade ago. Not yet so fully in command of her abilities as Dale, Hinds delivers her own kind of vibrantly youthful Bess, and very

well sung it is, too, in a bright well-formed sound of great promise.

The men brought less prior identity to their parts but abundant reasons for justifying their choice. Donnie Ray Albert is not only the right age and physical size for a credible Porgy but the possessor of a booming baritone that makes the ears quiver with his singing of "I've Got Plenty o' Nuttin'" and the "Buzzard Song," as well as his duets with Bess and all the in-between action. Abraham Lind-Oquendo, somewhat less magnetic in personality and projection, radiates a human warmth that is much in the inner being of Porgy.

In other roles, Andrew Smith is a Crown burly enough to recall the original, Warren Coleman, with a musical background that already includes performances of Scarpia and several principal roles in Verdi operas. Add Wilma Shakesnider, who sings a poignant "My Man's Gone Now" in the role of Serena, and Carol Brice, who has left behind the frustrations of being a greatly talented black mezzo in the days before integration (when the Met and other opera companies were looking the other way) to become a brilliantly artistic embodiment of the mature Maria, and there is very little this production lacks by comparison with its

antecedents. That little might be charged against the Sportin' Life of Larry Marshall. He has a good enough light tenor voice and a flexible body, but he hasn't yet gotten below the surface of this verminous character.

Like its predecessor with Price and Warfield, the revival's production scheme, devised by Jack O'Brien on behalf of the sponsoring Houston Grand Opera, permits the original three-act sequence to be played in two. This is achieved by means of a reversible unit in the Catfish Row setting. Mounted on rollers, it can be swiveled swiftly in view of the audience to provide the interior for Robbins's wake or the hurricane episode later on. Thus, everything up to and including the scene on Kittiwah Island is played in a single, continuous sequence.

A more subtle consequence is to gain time in which to include sundry bits and pieces of Gershwin's score often omitted ("Jazzbo Brown Blues," "Oh, Doctor Jesus," "O Hev'nly Father," and "Oh, Dere's Somebody Knockin' at de Do'") without stretching the evening to inordinate lengths. Also, sequence is preserved by presenting the "Buzzard Song" in its proper place, prior to the intermission, rather than deferring it to near the end, as in the famous Blevins-Breen production of the Fifties. Jack DeMain's conducting lacked a little of the leadership that the late Alexander Smallens so long provided, but it maintained a gratefully light hand on Gershwin's scoring. The sizable pit of the Uris Theatre permitted an orchestra of forty-six, which, by Broadway standards, is practically symphonic.

Do all these values contribute to making *Porgy and Bess* more "operatic"? Only superficially. In this production all the

Abraham Lind-Oquendo as Porgy, below, bids farewell to his neighbors on Catfish Row. Donnie Ray Albert as Porgy and Clamma Dale as Bess, right, share duet.

Photographs: Martha Swope

