

My Ink-stained History

Newspapers were always special places to work.



My first job was in the bustling city room at a tabloid newspaper, *Chicago's American* ("Hey, Boy!"). I always thought the highest calling was to be a newspaperman...a term that's not used much anymore, especially by anyone younger than I am (except probably,



Rick Kogan, a lifer and most likely, the last champion Chicago Newspaperman.

My four years of 40-60 hour weeks as a sports reporter and Sports Editor at the *Michigan Daily* newspaper in Ann Arbor didn't do anything to dissuade me from the idea of print journalism.



(Videofreex, c. 1970)

Being able to put people on TV (or at least on a monitor in those early days) was a total breakthrough. TV defined reality. Because we were the first people to have a TV- starting in 1947—video was in our DNA (a concept that didn't make the cover of LIFE until 1963).

In no small part, the freedom and power of portable video made it possible to pick and choose subjects, time spent on them and editing the pieces in the length and POV that seemed right to me.

So, it's no wonder that I have mostly been actively and intentionally done my video creating out of the mainstream for almost 50 years. A day hasn't gone by without thinking about or actively doing something with video, TV, and images for screens. We've called that "independent" but I have to acknowledge that it's a perspective that most people – probably including me – would call **the fringes**.

I don't watch it or produce it the way most people do. Almost everything I watch is nonfiction, which definitely includes sports. Nowadays, I'm much more involved with TV as a process: how it affects us as viewers, not limited to the content or story being told. Why are the images and sounds crafted as they are? I want to understand what's being told on lots of levels. And what's being SOLD—because, after all, as CBS trillionaire founder Bill Paley said, **"TV is primarily a sales medium."**

One of the how-to-view concepts that most of the students in my college courses over the last decade or so find new to them is: **whose interests does it serve?**

My own kids called my kind of TV “telling you something.” What I believe in is to show and tell beyond facts. There’s a unique vocabulary and flow to editing video because it’s perceived on many levels at the same time and in particular ways by individual viewers.

This has been one of the underlying themes of the dozens of classes I have taught in both TV and Documentary. I’ve created a bunch of

24-1810

**Special Topics in Documentary:
From Guerilla Video to You Tube**

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Introduction

This course is about how documentary videomaking has evolved since its beginnings as “Guerilla Video” to the present.

We will watch and analyze old work from the 1970’s up to some of the most innovative videos around today. Emphasis will be on **nonfiction content** that makes a difference in the world or in perceptions of it. Humor has always been a component of strong documentary.

Instructor will be responsible for supplying the majority of the **videos we screen** in class. Also, each week, one student will be assigned to select one video for the class to screen and discuss. Responsible journalism and humor are continuing themes.

band of like-minded merry men and women, culminating in an unprecedented video production/living together scene in Miami Beach during the Democratic and Republican conventions in 1972.

handouts that students usually read because they’re never longer than two pages (I’ve never taught at the University of Chicago, where they still actually read). Some of the titles are “How to Watch,” and “The Twelve Steps of Making Good TV,” etc. (see Appendix).

In the late 60’s, it became clear that I wasn’t alone in seeing TV the way I did.

Somehow, we found a



TVTV, Miami Beach, 1972

For many years – even decades - were able to spur each other on to accomplish productions and to promulgate perceptions with video and TV, functioning as cooperative creators, not as corporate mullets, all swimming the same way at the same time, chasing the shiny lures with hooks on them, (as my friend Clarence Cross first explained to me about his fellow CBS execs.) We believed in the power and truth of recording people telling their own stories. That's a significantly different premise than “regular” TV. (More on Studs Terkel's influence later).

This isn't a sudden revelation. I have thought about this TV and what's-on-the screen stuff for thousands of hours. Studied it. Taught about it. Loved it. Hated it. Never stopped learning from it.

Or, ultimately, being addicted to it in one way or the other.

I also participated in developing and articulating a litany and set of values that permeated the thousands of hours of raw video and hundreds of TV shows I produced and were in the guidelines for everyone who worked on “my” shows and series. For instance, in just about every broadcast I have ever been associated with, I

studiously have avoided shootings, bloody violence, and guns (unless it's in the context of control) There's enough death on TV – real and staged. We don't have to add to it.

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