

Cover picture: Orestes mask for *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus. Design by Jocelyn Herbert for the National Theatre 1981 production and one of the items to be seen at an Exhibition of the work of over 100 British Theatre Designers being held at the Round House, London from 24th February to 19th March.
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CUE

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Video or Television?

Commentators, having gotten their reviews of the past year out of the way, habitually cast around for a punditorial theme for those grey January dog watches when it is preferable not to have to sally forth beyond the saloon bar on missions of a researching nature. This year they were handed a plum on a plate in the shape of the christmas TV audience ratings. It seems that, while many of us millions continued to watch, there were a few millions more than usual who exercised what many market euphemists prefer to refer to as 'the negative option'. Reactions have varied from predictions of the end of an era to simple rehashes of stock phraseology. One of these phrases is 'too many repeats' although more selective viewers have often felt that perhaps there were not enough repeats. But repeats, whether more or less, have become a non-topic with the development of home video recording.

Now theatre has considerably more experience than television in the matter of audience goodbyes. So we feel that we have some excuse for producing unresearched advice based on mere instincts developed through centuries of survival. And so we venture to suggest that the television channel programmers remember that their ace card is actuality – *seeing it as it happens*.

And we ask them to consider whether their programmes are not just too too smooth, too too technically perfect. It is, after all, but a very small step from smooth to bland. Why do they not try more *rough television*? Surely they have noticed how much theatre has been rejuvenated by its *fringe* in the last decade. We suggest that one of the root problems of television was aired at the *Showlight 81* conference (in television, as in theatre, it is interesting to note how many of the fundamentals are first voiced by the lighting men) – *too much post-production*. There is an interesting parallel in the music industry: recordings may be edited for technical perfection, but it is often the wrong note or momentarily defective ensemble that creates the tension to make a live performance live.

Let's have more live television and let it live more dangerously.