

COMMERCIAL TELEVISION

Some argue that television is an actor's medium; others afford writers that privilege, thereby generating terms like "show-runner" to title authors. While stardom for either the thespian or the scribe is visibly achieved through television, the essays by Butler, Ang, Spigel, Himmelstein and McCarthy reveal that underlying the medium's creativity are considerations that are far more economic in nature. Television is therefore a medium of exchange between industry and its consumers. Through its commercials, TV affords air-time almost exclusively to those identities that industries perceive as comprising a viable, profitable market. Though amorphous enough to conform (and create) trends and novelties to effectively meet its target consumer, television's core identity remains firmly grounded by the realities of market competition. Nonetheless, this advertiser's medium, while driven by profit margins, serves as a fairly accurate barometer for public opinion on issues of space and identity; additionally, commercial television exemplifies how creativity conforms to branding strategies designed for maximum profitability.

While all of the readings address commercial television's affect on social identity and space, the essays differ according to their focus. Himmelstein, through an exhaustive account of the creation of Kodak's "America" campaign, focuses on the creative and economic factors informing the production of *text*. Ang concentrates on *audience* reception vis a vis *Dallas*. McCarthy's study of how the technology's inclusion in taverns and civic spaces affected spectatorship, dialogue and comradeship also discusses the contentious creation and subsequent regulation of television's recreational *space*. And Spigel's discussion of television's relationship with the homemaker-consumer provides historic analysis of television's power to affirm (and confront) gender norms and *identities*.

The creation of Kodak's "America" campaign offers a perfect framework within which to analyze how identity and space is discussed in the other essays. By seeking to infuse its flailing brand with the burgeoning patriotism of the day, Kodak turned to what it perceived were the iconic images of an idyllic American identity: the wandering, rugged (though clean-cut) explorer, the veteran war hero, the golden-haired cherub and the bucolic charm of a timeless, natural "America" that remains static and unadulterated by the nuances of reality. Kodak's success in incorporating patriotic themes was also an effective exercise in exclusion: in depicting "America" as rustic, sanitized and mostly white, Kodak excluded other narratives (specifically urban and minority) that would have presented a far more realistic portrayal.

But then again, this wasn't about reality, nor an egalitarian representation of national identity. True to commercial television, "America" was purposed with evoking a nostalgic patriotism amongst a target market that shared Kodak's ideology. Much like soap operas and day-time talk shows intended for women, "America" was a marketing tool that employed the creative endeavors of film, music and storytelling to assault its consumer with a brand barrage. While it is laudable that the "America" defined by commercial industry continues to expand (as exemplified by ads directed to recently "discovered" consumers in the Latino/a, Queer and Asian communities), it does posit the following consideration: like the tree falling in the ear-less wood, unless a community (rather, an identity) is defined and targeted as a viable consumer base, with industries unable to hear them, does that community make a sound?