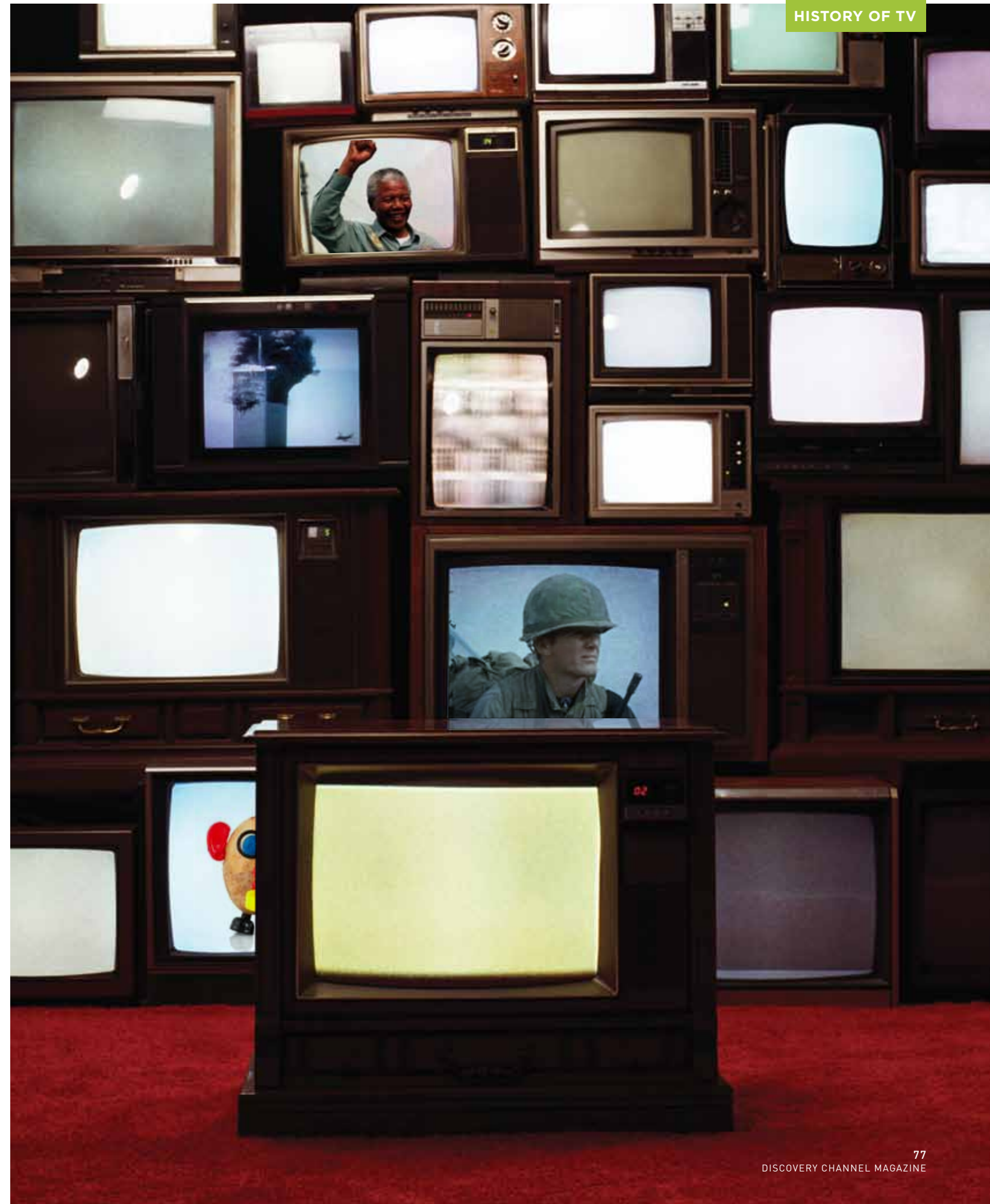
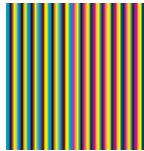


From declarations of war, the euphoria of seeing the first man on the moon, or the atrocities of September 11, the wonder of television has brought history into our homes. **Chris Wright** tracks the course of this world-changing invention

# OUTSIDE THE BOX

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES (TV SETS); INSETS: CORBIS (VIETNAM WAR); GETTY IMAGES (MANDELA, SEPTEMBER 11)



 What a moment it must have been. On September 1, 1939, as World War II formally began, Douglas Birkinshaw was the engineer in charge at Alexandra Palace in London, from which all of British television at the time was being transmitted. At 10am, he received a message from Broadcasting House, concerned that the huge transmission tower could be used to guide German bombers. It said, “Close down television at noon.”

Birkinshaw told his staff: “The end has come. At noon, close it all down.” And then, at the end of a Mickey Mouse cartoon — *Mickey’s Gala Premiere*, to be precise — it shut down. All of TV in the United Kingdom shut down. For seven years.

In modern times, seven years without TV seems implausible, even unthinkable. Many societies in the today’s world could barely last an hour. As it is, television’s intrusion into our lives pervades absolutely everything about us — what we know, what we think, how we talk, what we buy. And yet it’s easy to forget that television is a fairly recent development, something that has only really been part of our mainstream lives for the span of decades. It’s difficult to imagine any other invention that has become so utterly all-powerful so quickly.

#### HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

As with any great invention, there are mixed opinions on who got it started. But purists say TV is the live transmission of moving images with continuous tonal variation. Taking that definition, Scottish inventor John Logie Baird wins the day. He made the first public demonstration of televised silhouette images in motion at a Selfridges department store in London, in the United Kingdom, in 1925.

At first Baird’s demonstrations, on a mechanical TV system using a scanning disc (see *sidebox on page 79*), gave only 30 lines of resolution, barely enough to recognise a human face. He improved this quickly, and in 1927 transmitted a signal over more than 700 kilometres of telephone line between London and Glasgow. The following year, he transmitted

TV across the Atlantic Ocean, and by 1931, achieved the world’s first outdoor remote broadcast: the Epsom Derby horse race.

Many people believe that Baird’s broadcasts over the BBC radio transmitter in September 1929 were the first public broadcasts, but perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised to find that the Americans got in first. Charles Jenkins broadcast from an experimental station in Wheaton, in the US state of Maryland, in July 1928. But the BBC’s service launch in 1936, which swiftly ditched Baird’s technology for that of the Marconi company, is generally considered to be the first transmission of a regular TV service as we recognise it today.

### AND THEN, AT THE END OF A MICKEY MOUSE CARTOON, IT SHUT DOWN. ALL OF TV IN THE UNITED KINGDOM SHUT DOWN. FOR SEVEN YEARS

Whoever was first, it was only after World War II that people took much notice: only then did sets start to become affordable, with people not only having enough money, but enough leisure time to use them. In 1946, 0.5 percent of American households had a TV. By 1954 more than half did. By 1962, it was 90 percent.

Watching broadcasts from those early days is like being transported to another

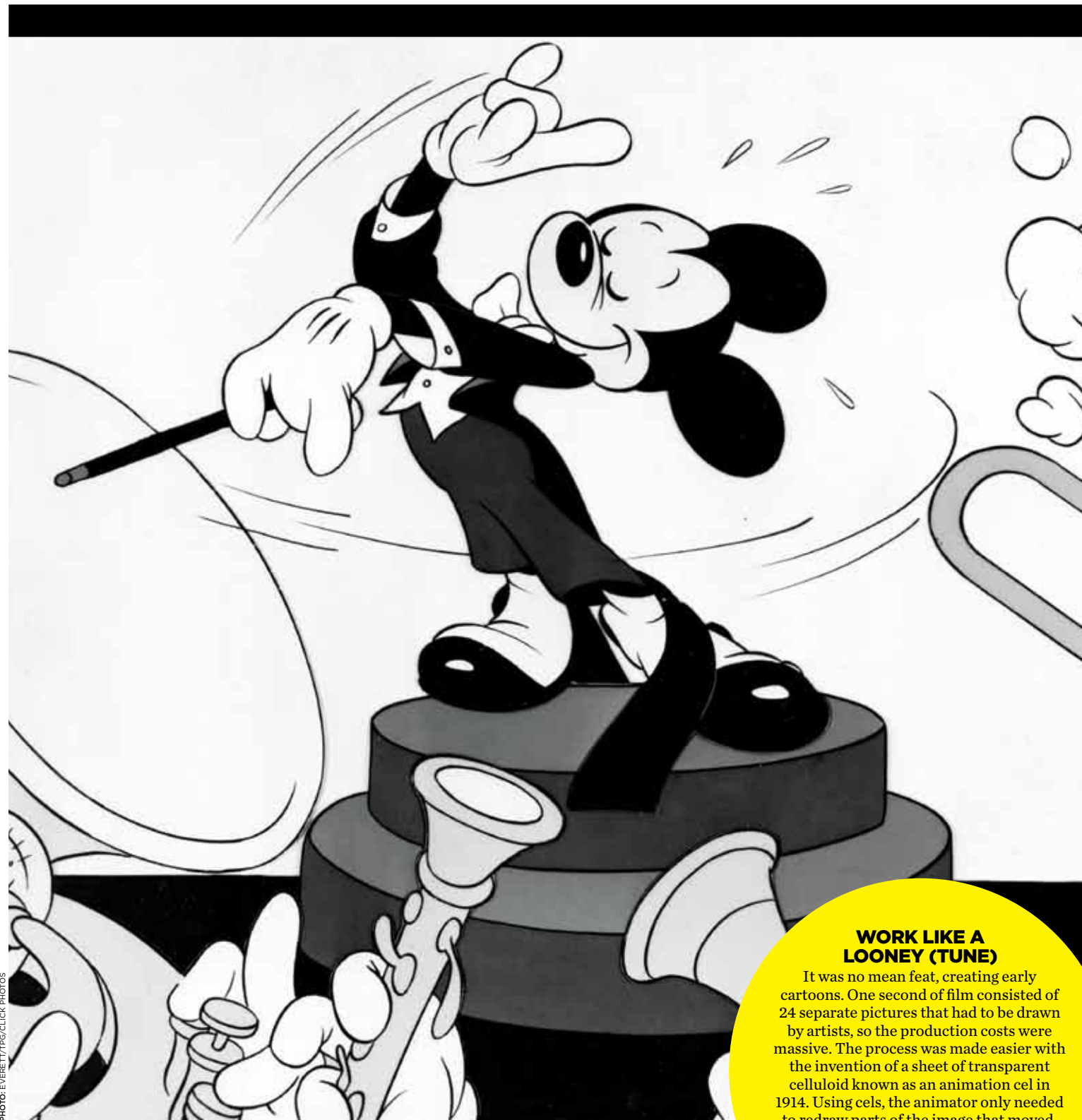


PHOTO: EVERETT/PG/CLICK PHOTOS

ABOVE: MICKEY MOUSE WAS THE LAST IMAGE VIEWERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM SAW PRIOR TO THE SEVEN-YEAR WORLD WAR II SHUTDOWN

#### WORK LIKE A LOONEY (TUNE)

It was no mean feat, creating early cartoons. One second of film consisted of 24 separate pictures that had to be drawn by artists, so the production costs were massive. The process was made easier with the invention of a sheet of transparent celluloid known as an animation cel in 1914. Using cels, the animator only needed to redraw parts of the image that moved.

Nowadays, even with more advanced technology, it still takes six to eight months to create a single episode of *The Simpsons*.

## HOW EARLY TV LOOKED AND WORKED

The earliest television systems used a rotating mirror drum, or a disc with a pattern of holes punched into it, to scan images, and then a similar disc in a receiver would reconstruct the image. This is known as mechanical TV, but was quickly superseded by the cathode-ray tube — commonplace until relatively recently — through which an electron beam was used to write lines across a surface coated in phosphor (a substance which emits light when exposed to the beam). These systems, known as electronic television, became the norm for the bulk of TV’s history to date.

The first TV for sale, on the mechanical model, was from Baird’s company in the United Kingdom in 1928. His Televisor model, sold from 1930 to 1933, is considered the first mass-produced TV, but only sold about 1,000 units. Telefunken in Germany started selling electronic TVs with cathode-ray tube technology from 1934.

There was nothing cheap about early TVs. The cheapest American set prior to World War II carried an eight-centimetre screen — and cost US\$125, the equivalent of approximately US\$1,900 today. They also looked absurd: TVs sold in the 1930s and 1940s were mostly varnished wooden housing, with hardly any screen. They would take up half the living room only to show you a dim picture a few centimetres across.

In the 1960s, when everyone seemed to own one, TVs mostly used vacuum tube electronics, which had two effects — they didn’t work all that well, and they were enormous. By the 1970s, solid-state electronics, which were far better suited to colour TV, took over. At this point most TV sets still had a dial to tune them, hence the enduring exhortation from anchors on American TV ahead of a commercial break: “Don’t touch that dial!”

In the 1980s, as cable television came into its own, so too did the first LCD TVs; while in the 1990s, as video games and VCRs became commonplace, new inputs appeared on TVs to accommodate them.



world, and nowhere more so than in British news, with its plummy-voiced bygone narration: “And lastly, the housewife’s view, as given to our reporter, Godfrey Talbot.”

The first-ever dedicated news show was *News and Newsreel*, launched in the United Kingdom on July 5, 1954. It had no newsreader on camera — “in case some facial twitch suggested he had views,” as veteran newscaster Michael Buerk says in narrating a collection of early broadcasts — nor really any moving images. It was basically illustrated radio. “All very boring, and that was the intention,” Buerk says.

Nor was it particularly challenging to authority. One of the biggest stories in the early days of TV news was the resignation

TV GAVE ARTISTES THE PERFECT NEW MEDIUM FOR EXPRESSING NOT ONLY THEIR SOUND BUT ALSO THEIR CHARISMA AND SEX APPEAL

of the British prime minister, Sir Winston Churchill, and his replacement by Anthony Eden in 1955. “Sir Anthony came out in morning dress,” said the voice-over of the lead news item that day. “The press were there to record the Foreign Secretary’s famous smile.”

METEORIC RISE

But TV grew up fast. The Hungarian uprising in 1956 presaged the rise of the Soviet Union, the Berlin Wall and the entire Cold War; and was the first foreign story Western viewers could watch night after night. On both sides of the Atlantic, rock and roll was being born, and as Buddy Holly and Bill Haley gave way to Elvis and The Beatles, TV gave artistes the perfect new medium for projecting not only their sound, but also their charisma and sex appeal.

TV began to embrace the newsflash, the need for instant information and pictures, though technology and professionalism had some way go to. Televised announcements of the Munich air disaster, which killed many of the Manchester United football team’s players and staff in 1958, are painful to watch today, a wrong-footed newscaster stumbling over a list of the dead while utterly incomprehensible footage of the crash scene rolls on the screen.

As TV entered more and more homes, it approached some of its finest hours, many of them American on the burgeoning three networks of CBS, NBC and ABC (Fox didn’t appear until 1986). Some of the earliest

PHOTOS: CORBIS (VIETNAM WAR); GETTY IMAGES (QUEEN ELIZABETH II)



DURING THE VIETNAM WAR, TV — AND SOME BRAVE WAR CORRESPONDENTS — ALLOWED AMERICANS TO GET DAILY UPDATES ON WHAT WAS ACTUALLY HAPPENING ON THE FRONT LINES

SACRIFICE ON FILM

When Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc set himself on fire at a busy intersection in downtown Saigon to protest the Vietnam War on June 11, 1963, photographs and film footage of the act instantly became a global anti-war image. American President John F. Kennedy himself stated: “No news picture in history has generated so much emotion around the world as that one.” Although he was the first — and perhaps the best known — to protest the Vietnam War this way, he was not the last.

THE TV TIMES

1952

POTATO NOT INCLUDED

A PLASTIC POTATO WITH FACIAL FEATURES AND A HAT MIGHT SEEM LIKE A STRANGE CHILDREN’S TOY, BUT **MR POTATO HEAD** IS STILL POPULAR TODAY. AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE SPUD WAS THE **FIRST-EVER TV COMMERCIAL FOR A TOY**. THIS, BY THE WAY, WAS BACK WHEN THE MR POTATO HEAD KIT CONSISTED OF PLASTIC FACIAL FEATURES TO STICK ON A REAL POTATO, WHICH YOU HAD TO BUY YOURSELF



CORONATION

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD WATCHED THE **CORONATION OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II** IN THE BBC’S BIGGEST-EVER BROADCAST OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY. THERE WERE 8,000 INVITED GUESTS, THREE MILLION WELL-WISHERS LINING THE LONDON STREETS, AND OVER 20 MILLION VIEWERS WATCHING ON TV SETS AROUND THE WORLD, WITH THE EVENT BROADCAST IN 44 LANGUAGES

1953

1957

COLD WAR?

THE AMERICAN BROADCASTER CBS PRESENTED A SPECIAL NEWS REPORT ON THE **RUSSIAN LAUNCH OF SPUTNIK 1**, THE FIRST ARTIFICIAL SATELLITE IN HISTORY. THE TV REPORT HELPED FAN THE FLAMES OF SUSPICION, SPECULATION AND FEAR IN THIS **EARLY STAGE OF THE COLD WAR**, THOUGH SPUTNIK WAS NOT THE CODED MESSAGE SENDER OR BALLISTIC MISSILE LAUNCHER MANY FEARED

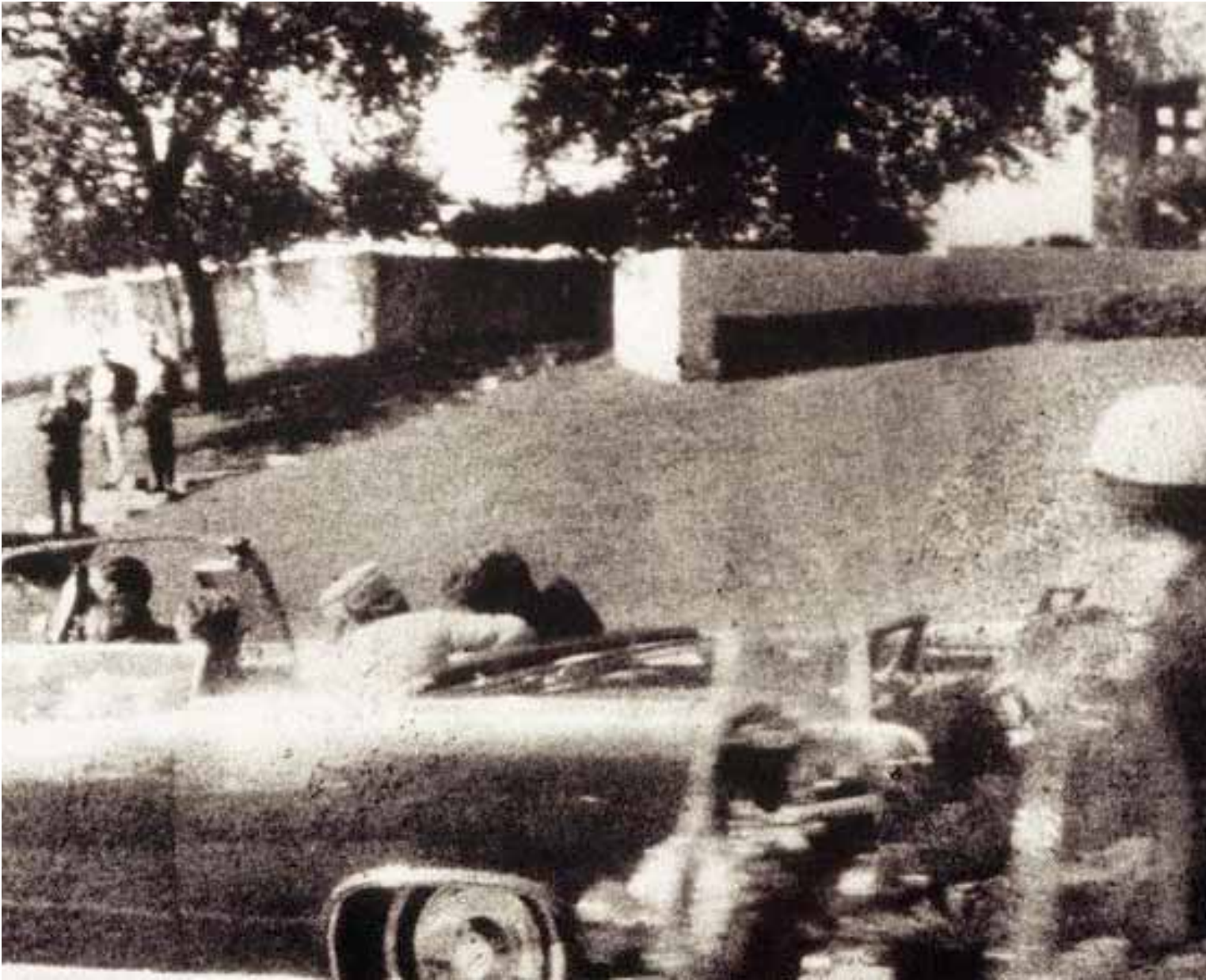
1958

CHI-CHI

GIANT PANDA **CHI-CHI** WAS CONSTANTLY IN THE NEWS AND BECAME A FIRM VIEWER’S FAVOURITE AFTER THE **LONDON ZOO** PURCHASED HER FOR £12,000 (US\$ 19,500)







PHOTOS: CORBIS (ASSASSINATION); JOHN F. KENNEDY JUNIOR; CBS NEWS (WALTER CRONKITE)



**WE INTERRUPT THIS BROADCAST...**

Coverage of the assassination (*left*) and funeral of American President John F. Kennedy, and the killing of suspect Lee Harvey Oswald, remains one of the most iconic chain of events in TV history. On Friday, November 22, 1963, news of the shooting in Dallas, Texas, broke into normal programming, causing veteran presenter Walter Cronkite (*above*) to cry on-screen. Many images from that week are as poignant now as they were then, such as young John F. Kennedy Junior saluting his father's coffin (*top*).

footage many people might be familiar with concerns either President John F. Kennedy making his “*Ich bin ein Berliner*” speech beneath the shadow of the Berlin Wall, or the space programme he engendered.

“Roger, all systems go.” You can picture it and hear it, can’t you? Those gravelly American voices, slightly distorted by static and distance. The mission control countdowns, that wonky “we are go for launch” syntax: it still sounds so familiar today, yet clearly identifies a particular era. And as colour TV entered the home, what could possibly be a better use of this bold

**THE ZAPRUDER FILM IS A SHORT SEQUENCE, BUT IT REPRESENTS THE FIRST MAJOR EXAMPLE OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE PUBLIC IN RECORDING TELEVISION, AND HENCE, HISTORY**

new medium than a vast Apollo Saturn rocket making its upward progress, the bright red initials “USA” sliding past the gantry as super-cooled gas shimmer and pour from the sides?

In 1969, barely three decades after the world’s first public broadcasts, people watched live pictures from another celestial body. “The blurry black and white images of Armstrong jumping onto the lunar surface and the short surface explorations by Armstrong and Aldrin are widely regarded as television’s first, and perhaps greatest, example of unifying a massive worldwide

audience in common wonder and hope,” says space writer Chris Paterson.

TV wasn’t just about the good times though. For many viewers, the first colour TV they can remember seeing — news footage, that is — is Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, when a manufacturer of women’s clothing called Abraham Zapruder was trying out a Model 414 PD Bell & Howell Zoomatic camera just as Kennedy’s motorcade rolled past. The Zapruder Film is one of the most famous segments of film in existence. It’s a short sequence, just 486 frames, or 26.6 seconds of Kodachrome II 8mm film, but it perhaps represents the first major example of a modern trend: the involvement of the public in recording television, and hence, history.

Today, academics call this citizen journalism, where the public is the first line of news. During the July 7 terrorist attack on London’s Tube and bus systems in 2005, the earliest and possibly the most important original footage came from ordinary people who had survived the attack and were recording the images of dark tunnels on their mobile phones. We saw this happen again recently, with the Arab Spring.

**WAR IN THE LIVING ROOM**

TV quickly changed wars — our understanding of them and our opinions towards them. By the time the Vietnam War began, it was feasible for correspondents to be able to get cameras into the war zone and to report back, while in American homes, more and more people could see what they reported. For American networks, Saigon became their largest bureau outside the United States, often with five separate camera crews on duty at one time. “Vietnam was the first television war,” writes Dr Daniel Hallin, a professor in communications at the University of California San Diego, in the United States. Another writer, the American-Armenian Michael Arlen, had an even more apposite name for it: “the living room war.”

**THE TV TIMES**

1964

**BEATLEMANIA**

ENGLISH POP SENSATION **THE BEATLES** ARRIVED IN THE UNITED STATES TO **BEATLEMANIA: A WELCOME FROM MORE THAN 3,000 HYSTERICAL TEENAGERS**. THE FIRST BRITISH BAND TO BREAK INTO THE AMERICAN MARKET, THEIR INTERVIEW ON **THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW** REPUTEDLY SAW CRIME DIP TO A 50-YEAR LOW AS 73 MILLION PEOPLE (40 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES AT THE TIME) TUNED IN TO WATCH



**'NAM**

DUBBED THE **FIRST “LIVING ROOM WAR”**, COVERAGE OF THE VIETNAM WAR BROUGHT **THE HORROR OF COMBAT INTO THE HOME**. INSPIRED BY AMERICAN DEMAND FOR “BANG-BANG” FOOTAGE, THE MUSEUM OF BROADCAST COMMUNICATIONS REPORTS THAT SOME COVERAGE OF THE TIME WAS CRITICISED FOR ITS LACK OF ANALYSIS OF VIETNAM’S POLITICS AND PEOPLE

1965



1966

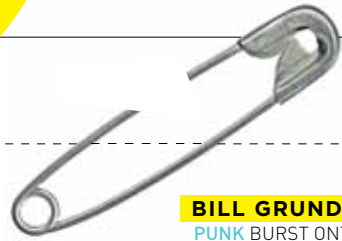
**FINAL FRONTIER**

A NEW SERIES CALLED **STAR TREK** MADE ITS SMALL-SCREEN DEBUT. IN ITS SECOND SEASON, TV EXECUTIVES TALKED ABOUT CANCELLING THE SERIES, AND DID SO AFTER THE THIRD SEASON. THE ORIGINATOR, GENE RODDENBERRY, LEFT IN PROTEST AND WENT ON TO USE HIS CREATIONS TO HELP **SPAWN ONE OF THE BIGGEST MOVIE FRANCHISES OF ALL TIME**

1976

**BILL GRUNDY**

**PUNK** BURST ONTO THE SCENE WITH A TV INTERVIEW THAT WILL BE REMEMBERED FOREVER. VETERAN PRESENTER BILL GRUNDY’S CAREER WAS WRECKED BY THE CONTROVERSIAL **LIVE CONVERSATION WITH THE BAND, THE SEX PISTOLS**. LEAD SINGER JOHN LYDON (KNOWN AS JOHNNY ROTTEN) MANAGED TO PEPPER THE SHOW WITH EXPLETIVES — ESCALATING THE BAND’S CAREER, AND FINISHING GRUNDY’S



**VIDEO STAR**

BRITISH GROUP **THE BUGGLES** HAD THE HONOUR OF BEING BEHIND THE FIRST MUSIC VIDEO PLAYED ON TELEVISION IN THE UNITED STATES. IRONICALLY, **“VIDEO KILLED THE RADIO STAR”** WAS THE STORY OF A SINGER’S CAREER CUT SHORT BY VIDEO

1981



MOST WATCHED

Reliable numbers for total viewers worldwide are difficult to obtain and verify. For example, estimates of the 2008 Olympic opening ceremony in Beijing run from one to four billion — quite a range. So bearing that in mind, here’s a few of the planet’s most watched



2006  
FOOTBALL WORLD CUP FINAL  
715 MILLION

2011  
CRICKET WORLD CUP SEMI-FINAL  
ONE BILLION

1969  
MOON LANDING  
530 MILLION

1983  
M\*A\*S\*H TV DRAMA, FINAL EPISODE  
50.15 MILLION

The arrival of video and DVD has completely changed the way we watch film. In the United Kingdom, the broadcast of a Bond film used to be such a landmark that power stations would have to prepare for a surge of electrical demand during the advertisement breaks as the nation put the kettle on. The record for a film viewing on British TV was *Live and Let Die*, in 1980, when 23.5 million people watched. Similarly the arrival of satellite and cable, and the introduction of enormous choice, has meant that new records for TV viewing are rarely set in the United States. Since 1996, only one broadcast has joined the ranks of the top 20 most-watched in America, and that was a Super Bowl.



PHOTOS: CORBIS (WORLD CUP); GETTY IMAGES (MANDELA)  
ABOVE: FANS GATHER TO WATCH THE 2006 FIFA WORLD CUP FINAL ON LARGE PUBLIC SCREENS IN TIERGARTEN PARK IN BERLIN, GERMANY. THE MATCH WAS BETWEEN ITALY AND FRANCE

Of course, the two are one and the same; TV brought war into the living room. A generation of Americans spent much of the early 1970s watching their own people being killed on the TV. “The conventional wisdom has generally been that [TV] was an anti-war influence,” writes Hallin. “It brought the horror of war night after night into people’s living rooms and eventually inspired revulsion and exhaustion.”

As early as 1965, CBS reporter Morley Safer showed United States Marines setting the thatched roofs of the Vietnam village of Cam Ne alight, while in still more famous footage, NBC showed General Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting a captive in the head in Saigon in 1968. Later viewers would see the effects of a napalm strike hitting civilians.

Furthermore, journalists — who had started out with a gung-ho, with-our-boys type of style familiar from earlier wars — gradually changed the tone of their reporting as they themselves became more cynical. Walter Cronkite, perhaps best known for covering Kennedy’s death and the moon landings, is often credited with changing public attitudes with a special broadcast on the Tet Offensive in February 1968, in which he concluded that the war was unwinnable. This was so influential that journalist David Halberstam called it “the first time in American history a war had been declared over by an anchorman”.

Getting footage out of war zones wasn’t easy at first. As writer and journalist Robert Fisk wrote in his book, *The Great War for Civilisation*, when a British news crew reported the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980, Geoff Hale, the team’s producer, had to hand-carry cans of film out to London in order to get them on the air, then come straight back again, a 13,500-kilometre round trip at least three times a week.

Today, of course, we see war as it happens, with reporters embedded in military units and needing no dedicated crew of their own as they broadcast live from a videophone. Sometimes this immediacy can be unnerving — when the

first occupation forces landed on Somali beaches at night in 1992, they found their way illuminated by the lights of international news crews, awaiting their arrival.

Also since the Gulf War, we have been able to see closed-circuit video images from cameras inside a missile, as they close in on a target. TV technology is no longer just part of reporting wars, but fighting them.

LIVE AUDIENCES

Another field to have been closely influenced by advances in television is sport. The two have long been symbiotically linked.

“Television got off the ground because of sports,” said early TV sportscaster Harry Coyle, who worked at NBC. To watch a game of football today is to have access to a dozen angles and replays that the referee probably didn’t see: we are the empowered. Cricket has gone so far as to join forces with this omniscient presence and use the TV to help it review questionable decisions.

“TV BROUGHT THE HORROR OF WAR NIGHT AFTER NIGHT INTO PEOPLE’S LIVING ROOMS AND EVENTUALLY INSPIRED REVULSION AND EXHAUSTION”

As such, rather than just a medium for viewing, TV is now a part of the game. And it’s also brought extraordinary riches to the leading lights in football, baseball and basketball, and encouraged the adjustment of match times over to weird hours of day or night, in order to better satisfy television schedules. (Continued on page 87)

THE TV TIMES

1989

BERLIN

VIEWERS AROUND THE WORLD WATCHED HISTORY UNFOLD IN FRONT OF THEIR EYES AS **THE BERLIN WALL, WHICH DIVIDED EAST AND WEST, CAME DOWN**. COMMUNIST RULERS GAVE PERMISSION FOR THE GATES TO BE OPENED AFTER HUNDREDS CONVERGED AT THE CROSSING POINTS IN A TIME OF GREAT POLITICAL CHANGE



1992

OLYMPIC SPIRIT

AT THE **1992 OLYMPIC GAMES IN BARCELONA**, BRITISH 400-METRE SPRINTER DEREK REDMOND TORE A HAMSTRING HALFWAY THROUGH THE SEMI-FINALS. HE TRIED TO FINISH ON HIS OWN BUT QUICKLY LOST STRENGTH. IT LOOKED LIKE HE WOULDN’T CROSS THE FINISH LINE — UNTIL **HIS FATHER RAN ONTO THE TRACK AND SUPPORTED HIM THE LAST STRETCH**, TO A STANDING OVATION FROM THE ROARING CROWD

1994

NELSON MANDELA

ANOTHER KEY MOMENT IN HISTORY, BEAMED AROUND THE WORLD. THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE FLOCKED TO PRETORIA TO WATCH **NELSON MANDELA BECOME SOUTH AFRICA’S FIRST BLACK PRESIDENT**, BRINGING AN END TO 300 YEARS OF WHITE RULE AND APARTHEID



Y2K

PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD ANXIOUSLY WATCHED TELECASTS FROM THE FIRST COUNTRIES TO CELEBRATE THE NEW YEAR. SPECULATION ABOUT A **GLOBAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS CRASH FROM THE Y2K BUG** CAUSED MANY TO THINK THAT IN THE FIRST SECONDS OF 2000, **THE WORLD MIGHT REVERT BACK TO THE STONE AGE**. THANKFULLY, IT DIDN’T

1999





## SELLING POWER

The United States is generally considered the first place to have built TV advertisements into the mainstream. But to this day, there are some networks that don't allow ads at all — most famously Britain's BBC, which instead imposes a TV licence fee on all British viewers to fund itself.

Digital video recorders that allow people to record a programme and screen out the ads have put the future of the advertising model in doubt. Some feel this is the fault of greedy networks. "In the United States, you've got a fairly large-scale flight away from broadcast TV, because the networks are so clogged up with advertising that it's quite a difficult viewing experience," says John Ellis, a professor of media arts at Royal Holloway, University of London, in the United Kingdom. "A lot of people are choosing to watch online instead."

So what would replace that model? "The solution is going to be more product placement," says Ellis. "In the show you are watching, if you like the dress, you say: 'where can I get that dress?' and the TV will allow you to buy it." While that may still seem to be advertising, he adds, "it's coming from you, the viewer, rather than waiting through an ad break while they sell you something you don't want."



### LET'S GET READY TO...

There are a lot of famous TV catchphrases out there, but probably none have made a person richer than "Let's get ready to rumble!" Coined by American sports announcer Michael Buffer in the ring during boxing matches, he also copyrighted it as fame spread — which is why, as of 2009, he made over US\$400 million just from saying that phrase. He's even riffed off the original quote, doing a voice-over for a Kraft cheese commercial, saying "Let's get ready to crumble!"



## WHO AMONG US CANNOT REMEMBER WHERE WE WERE WHEN WE HEARD THE NEWS AND RACED TO THE NEAREST TV?

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (TV AD, ROYAL WEDDING, SEPTEMBER 11)

ABOVE: EVEN MORE THAN A DECADE LATER, SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 IS A DAY THAT REMAINS UNFORGETTABLE

(Continued from page 84) TV has also become the place where we catch the biggest moments, and gather to reflect on them. In 1986, the on-air explosion of the American space shuttle, Challenger, veering crazily left and right, became a seminal TV event, its footage repeated endlessly. In the aftermath, Paterson writes, President Ronald Reagan would call the TV America's "electronic hearth", a common gathering place to seek solace and understanding. "As shared national tragedy, it was an event like none other," Paterson adds.

Like none other, until September 11, 2001. Who among us cannot recall where we were when we heard the news and raced to the nearest TV? Al-Qaeda knew exactly what it was doing, timing the second plane to hit some time after the first. The result was that the whole world watched as that second plane hit the tower, and none of us will ever forget it, nor the images that followed.

Veteran Middle East correspondent Fisk was on a plane from Brussels to New York when it happened; it was sent back to Brussels and he was trying to shape his copy when a colleague called him. "Look at the pictures," he said. "You've got to see the pictures. Then you'll understand." When he did, he understood. "The message was the act. The claim was contained in the pictures," Fisk writes. "Our own television cameras were the claim of responsibility." TV was not only how we all saw September 11 — the reach that TV provided, bringing images instantly to the world, was likely how the targets were selected in the first place.

It is thought that many newscasters look back with regret at the frequency with which they replayed the moments that 3,000 people died, as it became voyeuristic. But it also made it one of history's most significant TV moments.

### TELLY TODAY

Over the years, as we have watched more and more TV, we've all become more cynical towards it too — which isn't entirely bad.

"The public for TV and internet moving images has become more sceptical about any material that claims to be 'factual', and more appreciative of the skills involved in manufacturing the modern fictional spectacle," says John Ellis, a former TV producer and now professor of media arts at Royal Holloway, University of London, in England. "A connoisseurship has developed, which asks 'how did they do that?' Viewers will speculate amongst themselves about the nature of the editing, and possible omissions of important material."

Ellis thinks part of the reason for this is that people are not only more used to being on TV than previous generations, but through affordable video, have become used to filming it too. "The two-way street between film-makers and their eventual viewers is congested with traffic," Ellis says.

What about the junk on our screens? We can remove that from our history, can't we? Not so fast. Ellis draws a parallel with archaeology, in which the midden, basically rubbish, is valuable as it tells us about what it was like to be alive at a particular time.

"For the historian of the last 50 years, few things will be more worthwhile as evidence than the unconsidered trifles: the variety shows and sitcoms, the crime series and docu-soaps, the Jerry Springer freak shows and daytime discussions of unlikely moral dilemmas and weight loss," he says. "Those will provide the evidence of what it was like to be alive in the last 50 years."

Indeed, the jetsam of everyday TV tells us a lot about how much it has changed our lives. "Television is more than programmes alone," notes Ellis. "It is a system for creating meanings. The television schedule divides up the day into different parts, with different expectations and meanings."

"Television is always there. It is pervasive. And this is why it is called rubbish," he says. Yet TV is also a powerful cultural mirror. "It is important evidence of what it felt like to be alive, and what it looked and sounded like to be alive, at a particular moment in history." ●

## THE TV TIMES

2004

### TSUNAMI AID

US\$7 BILLION IN AID WAS PROMISED IN THE WAKE OF THE 2004 TSUNAMI THAT CLAIMED THE LIVES OF OVER 300,000 PEOPLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. INTERNATIONAL TV COVERAGE ACCELERATED THE AID EFFORT

2008

### OLYMPICS

IT WAS ESTIMATED THAT A STAGGERING 842 MILLION CHINESE (69 PERCENT OF THE COUNTRY'S 1.3 BILLION POPULATION) WATCHED THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS ON TELEVISION



2009

### KING OF POP

WHEN NEWS BROKE OF THE UNTIMELY DEATH OF MICHAEL JACKSON, MANY PEOPLE TURNED TO THE MORE TRADITIONAL FORM OF MEDIA, TV, TO WATCH TRIBUTES TO THE SO-CALLED KING OF POP AFTER SITES ON THE INTERNET CARRYING THE NEWS CRASHED DUE TO TOO MUCH TRAFFIC



### CHILE

MILLIONS WATCHED WITH BATED BREATH THE DARING RESCUE OF THE CHILEAN MINERS WHO WERE TRAPPED UNDERGROUND FOR 69 DAYS. OVER 2,000 MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE WAITED ON-SITE TO COVER THE RESCUE MISSION

2010



2011

### ROYAL WEDDING

AN ESTIMATED TWO BILLION PEOPLE WORLDWIDE ARE REPORTED TO HAVE TUNED IN TO WATCH PRINCE WILLIAM MARRY KATE MIDDLETON IN A TRADITIONALLY ENGLISH ROYAL WEDDING. IN COMPARISON, HIS PARENTS' WEDDING IN 1981 GARNERED AN ESTIMATED GLOBAL TV AUDIENCE OF 750 MILLION

