

mounted on a camera operator, a car, a speed-boat, and a horse. It was a convincing demonstration of another new and interesting piece of equipment to help improve the technical quality of film and television production.

The second presentation was a panel of notables who discussed the future of 16-mm film. The consensus was that there is a future for 16-mm film production both for television and features. This naturally brought smiles of relief from the members of Eastman Kodak who were present. There were many questions from the audience which seemed to appreciate an opportunity to discuss 16-mm film production with a group of experts from the industry.

After the formal presentation Arriflex allowed the audience to fondle the equipment and many questions were answered. Arriflex also provided the hospitality. — Richard Marcus (Reporter), Rombex Productions Corp., 245 W. 55 St., New York, NY 10019.

**San Francisco, 19 February** — The meeting was held at the Eastman Kodak Co. facilities with an attendance of more than 100 members and guests who braved the rains to hear SMPTE President Robert Smith give his excellent report on "The Motion Picture and Television Technology in the People's Republic of China." Following Smith's report the audience was treated to a 15-minute whistling exhibition by Jason Serinus, the voice of Charlie Brown's Woodstock. — Joseph A. Semmelmayr (Secretary-Treasurer), Eastman Kodak Co., P.O. Box 3145, San Francisco, CA 94119.

# Book Reviews

## Television Broadcasting: Tape Recording Systems (2nd ed)

By Harold E. Ennes. Published (1979) by Howard W. Sams & Co., 4300 W. 62 St., Indianapolis, IN 46268. 528 pp. Illus. Diagrams. 5½ × 8½ in. Price \$18.95.

This updated edition of the book first published in 1973 will find wide use among studio engineers, technicians, and students with a background in solid state electronics. The book's emphasis is on professional videotape recording systems manufactured within the last 10 years. As in the previous edition the systems approach is stressed, although some circuit analysis appears throughout.

Starting with the basic concepts of videotape systems, the author guides the reader through nine chapters of theory profusely complemented with pictures, block diagrams, waveforms, and circuitry for a variety of WTRs, including the recently standardized Type B and Type C helical-scan formats.

Chapter 10 provides the fundamentals of electronic editing and use of time and control

code, while the practical aspects of recording and reproduction are covered in Chapters 11 and 12 where over 120 pages are devoted to the setup, operation, and maintenance of VTRs for optimum performance. The final chapter gives an overview of VTR systems handling cassettes and cartridges.

To reaffirm reader comprehension, a series of review questions are given at the end of each chapter; answers are given in the Appendix.—*Al Conte*

## What is Cinema Verite?

By M. Ali Assari and Doris A. Paul. Published (1979) by The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Metuchen, N.J., and London. 208 pp. Illus. 5¾ × 8¾. Price \$10.50.

*What is Cinema Verite?* presents an intellectual framework for a controversial cinematic genre and is in keeping with many recent

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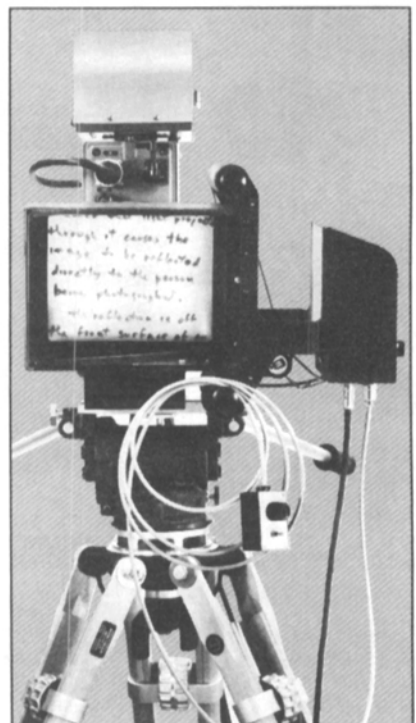
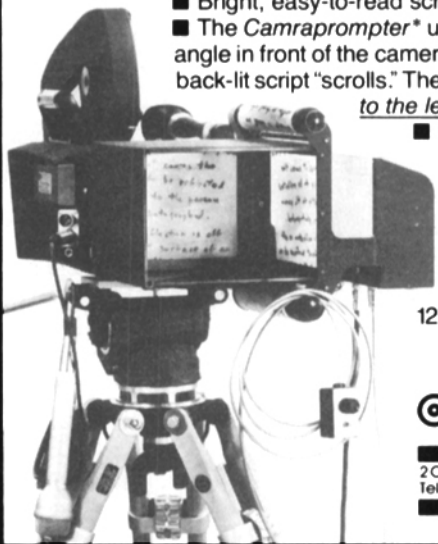
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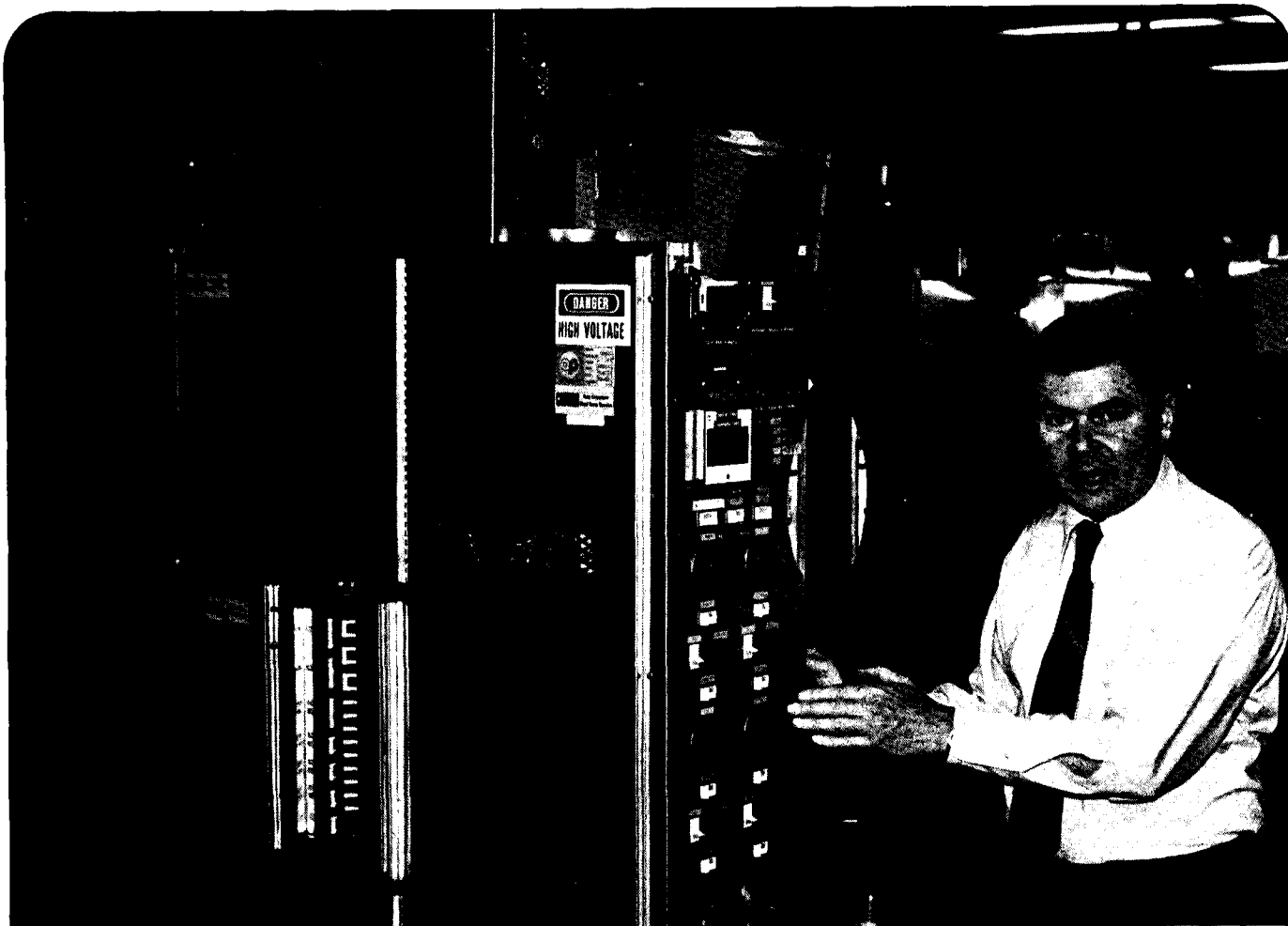
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works that make an academic approach to cinema. The trap into which the authors of this book and of similar works fall is that while they attempt to treat their subject objectively, they are actually making value judgments based on their predilections and aversions. The authors of *What is Cinema Verite?* apparently tried to avoid this trap by writing in a self-effacing style, depending heavily on quotations from other writers; but their aim, to validate a predetermined viewpoint, is transparent.

Cinema verite, according to Issari and Paul, is an art form rooted in the transcendent works of documentarians such as Robert Flaherty, whose *Man of Aran* (1934) remains a stunning experience for the viewer, and the Italian neorealists who courageously revived a film industry totally devastated by war. As an occasional viewer of cinema verite films, and a more frequent viewer of neorealism films and documentaries, I deplore the authors' determination to provide cinema verite with a prestigious ancestry by arbitrarily denoting the great documentaries of the past as historical forebears.

However, the authors' evaluative procedures reach a successful conclusion with a chapter on portable, lightweight, 16mm motion picture cameras and tape recording equipment. The technical information contained therein is certainly of interest. Also noteworthy is an appendix which lists cinema verite films and includes synopses, creative personnel, and equipment used.

— Gary Rosenberger

### The War, the West, and the Wilderness

By Kevin Brownlow. Published (1979) by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York. 602 pp. Illus. 7 1/4 x 10 1/4. Price \$27.50.

The historical significance of the silent film is vividly conveyed in a passage from Kevin Brownlow's major survey of the factual film in the early part of the century. It is a scenario of Russian soldiers entrenched in the Eastern Front battlegrounds of World War I:

"Captain Bromhead's shows were received with rapturous delight by audiences consisting of as many as six thousand troops. The power was supplied by searchlight dynamos. . . These pictures were frequently accompanied by gunfire and one show was visible from the Austrian lines; the Austrians obligingly held their fire until the very end — when 'God Save the King' was played — and even then they shelled another part of the line."

Any force that can postpone a battle has enormous implications, and it is particularly mystifying when it is the medium of art which exerts this monumental influence. Yet, somehow, impossibly, half of the motion pictures produced in the silent film era have perished, having decomposed in the vaults of movie studios, archival centers, and other, as yet, undiscovered repositories. This negligence is cogently symbolized by the 500 reels of nitrate film uncovered in the summer of 1978 by a Canadian excavation team. The films were preserved, ostensibly not for the benefit of posterity, beneath a layer of permafrost in Dawson City, a gold rush town situated in the Yukons.

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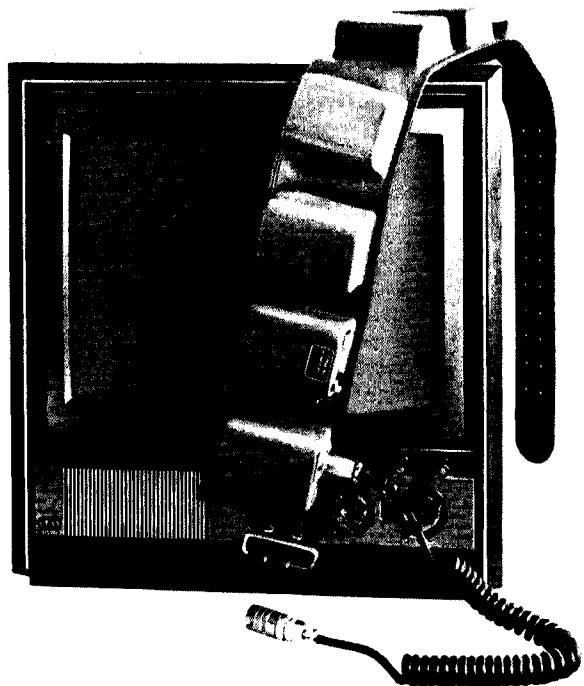
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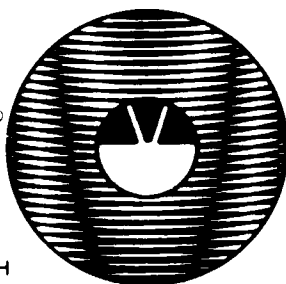
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The problem cannot solely be ascribed to a lack of commercial interest and profitability but, rather, to a postulate that has bearing on all relics and artifacts: As cultures die and renew themselves the likelihood of the relic retaining its original purpose and function is diminished. This is certainly true of the topical motion pictures discussed by Brownlow, which, of those that survive, are dissevered from the culture which gave them life and meaning. It is doubtful that the average modern audience, viewing *The Little American*, will be moved by Mary Pickford's performance of her impending death following the torpedoing of the "S.S. Veritania" by a German U-boat (more likely, it will elicit tearful laughter or a response bordering on narcoleptic tranquility).

It is the solution to this dilemma that makes Brownlow's work so distinctive and worthwhile. He creates a remarkable portrayal of the early twentieth century through which he intertwines the cinema of the period. The result is a unique political-historical-cinematic tract which captures a suspenseful and surprisingly congruent sense of the past.

The temptation of revealing too much about a book as riveting as this is difficult to suppress, but a few words must be said in deference to the iconoclasm which, in this work, so often titillates the mind. Imagine, for instance, Pancho Villa, the great Mexican revolutionary, signing a \$25,000 contract with the Mutual Film Corporation for exclusive newsreel footage. (Among the finer of the many fascinating photographs permeating the book is a two-page spread of Pancho Villa staging a battle which he delayed in order to honor his contractual obligation.)

But only the truest iconoclast will smash the most glorified idols without the slightest notion of replacing them or the vaguest hint of an apology. In this case, the man most honored for the invention of the motion picture is criticized for attempting to stifle its growth:

"As a handful of early filmmakers reached the West, one element they shared with the outlaws and cattle rustlers of former days was the stealth with which their operations were conducted. Most of them used cameras that were violations of established patents. [Thomas] Edison had formed a trust from the major film companies, all of whom paid royalties for their film and equipment. The idea was to force independent operators into liquidation. It developed into a vicious, and sometimes, violent campaign, with gangsters employed by both sides."

Because revisionist historians who point out the baser elements of our sacrosanct heroes are legion, an historian's disdain for conventional wisdom must be more far-reaching than simple irreverence or sensationalism. With the breakdown of wrong or regressive notions, wisdom must be wrought from the ruins.

The primary insight that emerges conjoins two dominant and opposing themes of filmmaking: authenticity and fraudulence. Throughout Brownlow's survey, both are equally respected in the context of a social reality which tended to erase the distinction between courageous, independent filmmaking and Hollywood fakery. It is a context in which a Tom Mix "shoot-em-up" and a doomed Antarctic expedition share equal historic value for shaping an era that *The War, the West, and the Wilderness* so expertly revivifies.

— Gary Rosenberger

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