

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

2012

Murrow and Friendly's Small World: Television Conversation at the Crossroads

Kathleen Collins
CUNY John Jay College

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/jj_pubs/3

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

Murrow and Friendly's *Small World*: Television Conversation at the Crossroads

In a roundup of new educational television series premiering in early 1958, a *New York Times* reporter fittingly summed up the period. He described "... a surprising effort by the broadcasting industry to extend the intellectual and scientific horizons of its masses...The abundance of high-toned programing [sic] suggests that broadcasters are caught up in the Age of Sputnik, a sense of urgency, a feeling that the nation's citizenry must be further enlightened even though it be by hodgepodge methods" (Adams).

In the late 1950s in the United States, television networks were motivated by a confluence of events including postwar economics, Cold War politics, quiz show scandals, and government regulation, to carefully consider their public service obligations.¹ Television had become, in its relatively short life, a scapegoat for a handful of ills – e.g. intellectual flabbiness and declining morality – that critics believed had befallen the nation. (Baughman *National Purpose* 42; Schickel 462). The commercial network Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) was well equipped to deliver quality public affairs programming and was already doing so, in large part due to the ambitions of renowned broadcast journalist Edward R. Murrow and producer Fred W. Friendly who provided the groundbreaking documentary series *See It Now* (1951-58). Murrow and Friendly – and other "crusaders for better television" (Schickel 461) – believed that television was a medium for information and a potentially powerful tool for viewers to learn about the nation and the world and thereby citizenship and democracy. They upheld the ideals of documentary television, which, by the end of the 1950s, was a "prime focus of efforts to reform the medium" (Curtin 19).

The programs for which Murrow is best known as host are *See It Now* and the celebrity interview program *Person to Person* (1953-61). A now obscure Murrow and Friendly discussion program called *Small World* (1958-60) was somewhat of an amalgam of these two shows. *Small World* premiered three months after *See It Now* ceased production² and the same week as Murrow's legendary October 1958 speech to the Radio-Television News Directors Association wherein he criticized the networks for pursuing profits at the expense of quality public affairs programming. *Small World* was emblematic of the type of program Murrow and Friendly thought television needed but whose survival, they believed, was threatened in an increasingly corporate-controlled broadcasting climate.

With *Small World* Murrow³ and Friendly attempted to continue their mission of providing enlightening and thought-provoking fare to audiences and to experiment with the medium both technologically and culturally. With its blend of eminent personalities discussing cerebral subject matter, *Small World* illustrates the contradictions of public service and television-as-informational-medium that have confronted the industry since television's inception. While changing network practices and U.S. legislation advancing educational and publicly funded television brought the debate about public service broadcasting (hereafter PSB) to the fore in the 1960s, the arguments had been in progress for decades. *Small World* appeared – perhaps not coincidentally and certainly not incidentally – just as the debate was moving to a critical stage. Analysis of *Small World* is well situated in the larger discussion of PSB, documentary, and educational television as part of the continuous culture wars that are reflected in television both on and off screen. Examining the program's development, reception, and fate addresses the

feasibility of effectively blending information and entertainment, what we learn from television, and the role of television in a democratic society.

Shrinking the World, ca. 1958

Small World, which aired on Sunday evenings, gathered individuals from disparate parts of the globe into one virtual space. Murrow introduced the first episode as “a four-way intercontinental conversation dedicated to the proposition that talking over each other’s back fences is a good idea, electronic or otherwise.”⁴ Each episode featured Murrow as unobtrusive moderator along with (usually) three guests, all filmed simultaneously by a camera crew in different locations and communicating by shortwave radio and telephone circuits (satellite technology was not yet available). Murrow himself, on official sabbatical from CBS during the show’s production, was filmed in various locations such as London, Geneva, Milan, Hong Kong, Honolulu, and Jerusalem.

Murrow reaped the benefits of his status by assembling illustrious public figures and arranging intriguingly diverse triumvirates. His guests included heads of state, writers, scientists, musicians, and actors discussing a range of topics including politics, education, art, entertainment, science, technology, foreign affairs, and human nature. After introductions and pleasantries among guests – “What time is it there?” “What’s the weather like?” (with guests at times betraying the awkwardness of the technology by initially shouting at each other) – Murrow would “simply be the man in the middle who starts and helps the conversation rolling” (Pett). Each guest would hold forth for a bit and respond to one another when so moved, occasionally interrupting just as in a face-to-face conversation. Murrow’s presence on screen was minimal. American writer John

Lardner described Murrow's role as "organizer of responsible thought...a planner and shaper of discussions rather than a participant in them" (Lardner 103).

For the content Murrow and Friendly had in mind, there was ample material to address in the international social and political atmosphere of the late 1950s, and Murrow was just the trusted ambassador to deliver it. Peter Lunt writes:

The age of television coincided with a particular moment in the liberal democratic politics of Western societies in which the imperative of postwar reconstruction, the developing conflict of the cold war, and the emergence of consumer society combined. These conditions of social change, new opportunity, increasing threat from abroad, and dispersal and fragmentation at home created the context in which television was both constitutive of individualism and consumerism and also offering the potential for social cohesion by connecting people together through a shared, mediated culture and the provision of public information (129).

It would seem that *Small World* was perfectly timed given the state of affairs, and their success with *See It Now* had earned Murrow and Friendly a reputation for taking on controversial subjects and making them palatable, or at least digestible, to the viewing public.

As if these skills and advantages were not sufficient to bring in viewers, Murrow was also adept at addressing lighter issues. While his heart may not have been in *Person*

to Person, it was the vehicle for his wide appeal and imbued him with requisite faith for the more serious issues addressed on *See It Now* and *Small World*. If he could alternate gracefully between talking with Marilyn Monroe and German World War II General Fridolin von Senger, then a viewer might feel less intimidated watching the latter. *Small World* was an antidote of sorts to *Person to Person*, a program to which Fred Friendly was particularly opposed (he was not a co-producer), characterizing it somewhat derisively as “an entertainment program” [Unger] and about which Murrow said, “To do the show I want to do [*See It Now*], I have to do the show that I don’t want to do” (Barnouw 51; Kendrick 360-62). John Lardner referred to the Murrow of *Person to Person* as the “lower Murrow” and to his role on *Small World* as the “higher Murrow” (102).

The first *Small World* episode featured former New York governor Thomas Dewey speaking from Portland, Maine, English writer Aldous Huxley from Turin, Italy, and Indian Primer Minister Jawaharlal Nehru from New Delhi, India. Their discussion on foreign policy included such topics as diplomatic recognition, nuclear weapons, and totalitarianism versus freedom. The conversation was thoughtful, measured, and civil despite the presence of markedly different political perspectives. This episode stands in contrast to another with Irish writer Brendan Behan in Dublin, American actor Jackie Gleason in Philadelphia, and American drama critic John Mason Brown in New York. During the filming Behan was clearly inebriated, and his slurring and singing were so unfavorable for conversation that the show continued without him for the second half. Despite the distraction (spared for authenticity), the tone was still exceptionally high-minded though ironic given that the topic was the art of conversation.

On another episode, English writer Rebecca West, U.S. Vice Admiral Hyman Rickover, and American writer Mark Van Doren discussed systems of and trends in education. The subject of the Maria Callas, Victor Borge, Thomas Beecham show included the use of clagues (professional applauders) in the entertainment world, the relationship between performer and audience, the dearth of “trail-blazing” in opera, and the effect of hi-fi and other modern electronic methods of communication on the concert world. Other guests throughout the show’s run included writers Bertrand Russell and Martha Gellhorn, actors Ingrid Bergman and Lauren Bacall, political cartoonist Herblock, humorist James Thurber, film director Otto Preminger, poet Robert Frost, pianist Arthur Rubinstein, hydrogen bomb developer Edward Teller, Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy,⁵ and former U.S. president Harry Truman.

Conversations were unrehearsed and natural, at times discursive and meandering. In *The Noel Coward Diaries*, the English playwright claimed that his *Small World* appearance was the first time in his life that he’d talked impromptu for so long (Payn 404). Film was edited down to thirty minutes, and the spliced version attempted to retain spontaneity, interruptions, and genuine reactions. To break up long camera shots that were literally trained on talking heads, the final product would see interspersed images of listening heads. To observe, for instance, Illinois Senator Everett Dirksen’s reactions to American poet Carl Sandburg’s suggestion that Abraham Lincoln would in present day be “taken over by psychoanalysis” offered a rare sight. The total effect for the viewer was more akin to eavesdropping than consuming television.

The Medium’s Message

Small World followed in a long line of discussion programs that had been broadcast first on radio – e.g. *America's Town Meeting of the Air* (1935-43 NBC; 1943-56 ABC),⁶ *The University of Chicago Round Table* (1933-55 NBC)⁷ – and then on television – e.g. *Meet the Press* (1947-present NBC), *Face the Nation* (1954-present CBS), *Wisdom* (1957-65 NBC), *The Great Challenge* (1958-61 CBS). While the program's disparate-gathering format was not an entirely new conceit – in 1938 Murrow, William Shirer, and William Paley had organized *World News Roundup* for CBS radio which aggregated critical news from around Europe (Halberstam 43; Persico 431)⁸ – the configuration on television was novel with its ability to allow four people in as many countries to communicate simultaneously and approximate customary conversation. The *New York Times*' John Shanley referred to the setup as “a chain of exercises in electronic legerdemain” (Shanley).

Though the format and tone of discussion programs was well established in radio, the visual added the engagement of a markedly persuasive sense; seeing speakers speak is more powerful than merely hearing them. In exploring the effects of the widespread use of electronic media as compared to print media, Joshua Meyrowitz writes:

There is a greater sense of personal involvement with those who would otherwise be strangers – or enemies...The sharing of experience across nations dilutes the power of the nation state. While written and printed words emphasize ideas, most electronic media emphasize feeling, appearance, mood...There is a retreat from distant analysis and a dive into emotional and sensory involvement. The major

questions are no longer “Is it true?” “Is it false?” Instead we more often ask, “How does it look?” “How does it feel?” (58).

In comparing radio to television, “How does it look?” is instantly answered and can affect a viewer’s receipt of factual information more viscerally than an image-free experience. “When the conventions of sound broadcasting were incorporated into a medium which allowed a fuller projection of personality, of meaning and feeling (through facial expression and gesture), and often of context too,” writes John Corner, “the social relations of the interview became defining not just for contemporary broadcasting but for contemporary culture and politics” (*Critical Studies* 37). The televised informational mode of communication became a standard and expected way of learning about the world and its citizens, and *Small World* – which relied on precisely such benefits from the visual medium – was a relatively early illustration of this.

Small World took full advantage of television’s strengths based on what was technically possible as well as what the producers thought those strengths were. Murrow had a longstanding interest in experimenting with the visual limits and capabilities of the medium. Though he and Friendly presented earnest topics, *appearance* was vital, and they did not take the power of images for granted. On the first episode of *See It Now*, Murrow had presented simultaneous live telecasts of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans – for viewers this was nothing short of wizardry. *Person to Person* gave the “impression” that Murrow saw his guests and their homes from where he sat in his studio chair, but he was actually looking at a blank wall (Baughman *Same Time* 243). Likewise on *Small World*

the viewer was led to perceive the participants in a regular discussion fixed in place and time.

According to A. William Bluem, *See It Now* contributed the “cross-cut” interview, a technique later imitated by many film and TV documentarists wherein clips of recorded interviews would be fragmented throughout the program. Though it was inventive and effective, users of the process could be criticized for presenting clips out of context (Bluem 98). Since editing was crucial to the production of *Small World*, the show was not immune to censure. One letter to the show claimed that Murrow did not invent the “technical miracle” used to impress the audience (Murrow Papers, Tufts). CBS colleague Howard K. Smith (presumably responding to criticism of his own work on *The Great Challenge*) charged Friendly with being “spoiled by the cutting room.” In rationalizing *Small World*’s success, Smith wrote to Friendly in 1961: “You can take three or four hours of film...spend three weeks editing that down, juxtaposing it in the most dramatic way... and in the end you come up with a fine half-hour...” (Ford Foundation Archives).

Despite the innovative use of technology, it seemed that for a short while it was enough to see things that one had only heard before. Journalist Mitch Stephens comments that media critics are most pleased by television when it imitates radio, and he describes how television adversary Neil Postman conceded admiration for a few American programs, all of which were comprised of televised conversation (50). Postman described erstwhile public affairs program *Firing Line* (1966-99 PBS) as one that “shows people in the act of thinking but who also happen to have television cameras pointed at them” (Postman 91). On this point television critic John Crosby wrote approvingly of *Small*

World, saying that “great minds...need no props but their tongues, their opinions, their personalities. Their convictions alone carry more drama than *Playhouse 90*” (Crosby).

The notion of “radio with pictures,” however, was also waged as a criticism. As critic Richard Schickel wrote, “Informative as discussion programs sometimes are, they appeal mainly to the ear, and unless the educational broadcasters can give the eye some more pleasing prospect than a speaker’s face to gaze upon, they might as well be doing radio...” (467-68). Critic Gilbert Seldes countered such arguments in the *Saturday Review*: “The complaint that *Small World* is only a radio talk-program with cameras to film the speakers is not only beside the point – it actually indicates the program’s great virtue, that the talk is as simple as radio talks used to be” (Slide 181). And as one press release stated, Murrow himself did not classify *Small World* as a “bold new idea” but as one “rather obvious and simple” (Pett). Murrow and Friendly might have agreed with Schickel that “the dilemma is that visual stimulation...is fundamentally at odds with the desire to discuss a subject with real seriousness” (467-68). This conflict was an important component in the evolution of PSB; if (albeit vague) mandates were to be complied with or programs were to gain any viewers, there had to be some eventual compromise between the visual and information-providing aspects.

Critical Response

Despite the popularity of quiz shows, westerns, and sitcoms in the U.S. in the late 1950s, *Small World* was well received and critically acclaimed. One reporter referred to *Small World* as Murrow’s “most significant series,” calling it “the kind of bold experiment in international togetherness, in weekly electronic roundtable conferences,

which proves how intelligently the medium of television can be exploited; how far it can move from the daily diet of trivialities and tranquilisers and still remain exciting.”⁹ In his chronicle of talk shows, Bernard Timberg wrote: “*Small World* established a precedent. It showed that a host could balance serious news talk with light-touch celebrity journalism, while encountering some of the world’s greatest thinkers on the air and recording them for posterity” (28). As Murrow biographer Joseph Persico wrote, “For lovers of good conversation, the format worked” (431). *Variety* critics described the show as “literate electronic entertainment at peak performance” (Prouty, 15 Oct. 1958), as bringing “out some healthy airings on many questions, with Murrow...steering the discussions into exciting channels” (Prouty, 31 Dec. 1958), and interesting and provocative showing excellent technical quality (Prouty, 18 Nov. 1959 and 13 April 1960). In 1959, *Small World* was the recipient of the Robert F. Sherwood award for “its unusual and international approach to topics related to the traditions of American freedom and justice” as well as a prestigious Peabody award in the category of Television Contribution to International Understanding. The latter praised *Small World* for “[narrowing] the distance between men’s minds and hearts” and described it as “universal in scope, yet intimate in approach.”¹⁰

Small World had an impact not only on viewers – “instructive, interesting and alive,” wrote one (Murrow Papers, Tufts) – but on the careers of guests as well, some of who would be on TV for the first time. Guests wrote to Murrow telling him how their appearance affected them and about letters they received after the program aired. Dancer and choreographer Agnes de Mille began lecturing about the importance of the arts after her stirring 1959 guest spot with actors Simone Signoret and Hedda Hopper (Easton 373).

Published criticisms of the show were few, citing superficiality, brevity, skipping from topic to topic too quickly, leaving out one of the speakers for too long, and lacking in controversy. Gilbert Seldes wrote that it “runs the danger of becoming chummy, of coming apart into separated threads of conversation” but concludes that it is better than other talk shows, not because of its “world-spanning techniques” but because Murrow and Friendly managed to capture the right tone (Slide 182). Implicit comparisons to *See It Now* were unavoidable. “It was important and useful,” wrote Murrow and Friendly colleague and former CBS News executive, Sig Mickelson, “but hardly stirred up intense emotional response; compared to *See It Now* it was flat” (Mickelson 162).

Educating the Masses: Traditional v. Popular PSB

In the late 1950s, U.S. citizens were still cowed by the effects of McCarthyism, and topics of hot debate were daunting. “To be controversial was the kiss of death at that time,” said Murrow biographer Ann Sperber (*Murrow His Life*). CBS had taken a daring step in airing the *See It Now* episodes with Communist-hunting senator Joseph McCarthy and was on delicate ground with the concurrent quiz show scandal.¹¹ While the network had to weigh the risk of losing credibility due to the scandal against that of alienating sponsors due to coverage of contentious issues (Murrow’s bailiwick), providing factual programming (also a strength of Murrow’s) was an ameliorative measure.

Small World subject matter and its presentation flattered a viewer’s intellect. With no overbearing moderator, interlocutor, or translator and with little mediation except for Murrow’s gentle prodding, it was a viewer’s task to grasp unfamiliar concepts. The questions raised on *Small World* were often ponderous. In addition, the ideals of

nonfiction programming in the 1950s included advocating for American exceptionalism, patriotism, and the presentation of the U.S. as a model world leader. While Murrow and Friendly may not have stated this mindset as an explicit goal, the concept of American greatness was often implicit in their content. Murrow asked conservative British parliamentarian Lord Robert Boothby, “Are you saying that no nation has ever been great unless greatness has been demanded of it by its leaders?” Senator Kennedy asked, “Do we have sufficient self-discipline [to achieve greatness] or must it be imposed by the state?” In the Nehru-Huxley-Dewey session, Murrow raised the subject of “how to educate man to his best potential.”

Even the entertainment figures invited on *Small World* were pressed into high-minded conversation topics. Paradoxically, Murrow and Friendly had hoped to engage the citizenry with *real* issues but might have achieved the opposite effect with content not meaningfully relevant for many viewers. Detractors often see the content of certain types of factual programming – documentaries, discussion/roundtables, political debates, and interviews – as elitist and of no functional value to the daily lives of average TV viewers.¹² Michael Curtin delineates the case that documentary TV targeted not the regular viewer but the elite whose concern was “education of the masses” (219).

Person to Person lacked the critical approbation of *Small World* but had twice the ratings and was on the air significantly longer (Baughman *Same Time* 244). As James Baughman explains, “...viewers greatly outnumbered the nation’s TV columnists” (Baughman *Same Time* 239). Indeed, *Small World*’s high marks came from critics who were generally part of the crusade for better television (Curtin 224; Baughman *National Purpose*) and not from “the masses.” A specific audience – *New York Times* and *Variety*

reviewers and readers predisposed toward high-level public affairs programs – hailed the program. The general public may not have been so charmed, preferring entertainment programming with which they could engage via participation and consumerism, i.e. quiz shows, soap operas, sitcoms, sports, and fan magazines. Moreover, the objective stance of many documentaries (and presumably other forms of factual or educational television with the exception of, for one legendary example, Murrow’s *See It Now* McCarthy interviews) often did not educate but rather left viewers ambivalent (Curtin 218-220).

Arguing that U.S. public television has failed as a democratic force, Laurie Ouellette echoes these ideas and explores the disconnect between high mindedness and relevance. Where Murrow and Friendly strove to exist and inform above mass culture, Ouellette advocates embracing it:

The public affairs philosophy articulated by [former Corporation for Public Broadcasting president John] Macy differentiated good citizenship – cerebral discussions of state affairs, calm and guided deliberation, ritualized voting – from disorderly conduct. The ability to participate in televised democracy hinged on education, social clout, and approved decorum – not just in terms of who was “qualified” to appear on the programs, but also how they addressed imagined viewers at home...For most television viewers, adopting the subject position of a good citizen as constructed by public television meant accepting an aesthetic order governed by a higher authority (120-21).

Murrow strongly believed that television had the power to teach, illuminate, and inspire (Murrow RTNDA), and Friendly was of the same mind. The two were among the first to engage in the perpetual challenge of finding a balance between education and diversion on American television. Hartley and others have continued to argue that television has the potential to engage and mobilize citizens and that it “generates societal involvement and a sense of citizenship” which it achieved because of its existence as “a popular medium of communicative entertainment” (Hartley *Republic* 412). While Murrow and Friendly fostered these elements well before any practice or results were theoretically deconstructed, the implementation and content related to “engaging” and “mobilizing” has moved, in many instances, a great distance from the pioneers’ ideals.

PSB in its conventionally conceived form¹³ was no match for commercial interests, and U.S. broadcasters have long found ways to fulfill public service responsibilities in resourceful ways. Over recent decades, commercial broadcasters have leaned towards a more comprehensive approach that appeases advertisers and viewers. Increasingly, some scholars categorize entertainment as providing a quasi-public service. Peter Lunt explores an alternative genre of PSB – talk shows, reality TV, lifestyle TV – which directs itself to individual consumer-viewers rather than the collective public of citizen-viewers. He contends that traditional authoritative sources like news and documentary “are replaced by a new form of expertise grounded in practical advice and aimed at the problems of everyday life. The programs aim to help people to improve their lives rather than raising them to the higher plane of knowledge, experience, and consciousness that was the purpose of the public knowledge project of traditional [PSB]” (Lunt 131).¹⁴

In describing a similar role of the popular press in the nineteenth century, Hartley describes television as “the place where and the means by which, a century later, most people got to know about most other people and about publicly important events or issues” (Hartley *Republic* 411). On modern talk and reality shows, for instance, viewers can use guests/participants as stand-ins for themselves, unlike those guests on *Small World* who perhaps seemed inaccessible. This brings to bear the very definition of public service and the ways in which it is interpreted and implemented and is a reminder of the perennial “public interest” conundrum, i.e. is it that which benefits the public or which interests the public, and are they mutually exclusive? Whereas the BBC’s conception of PSB includes a mandate to inform, educate, and entertain while remaining independent from populism (Lunt 130), in the U.S. it seems that populist content is a new form of PSB.

Lest the suspicion arise that such modern definitions of public service were invented spontaneously to justify reality television, in 1960 cultural critic Richard Hoggart wrote, “Who...can estimate the liberating, the kneading effect of this detailed and intelligent presentation of the day-to-day texture of other people’s lives, assumptions, hopes? Who can, indeed, estimate the effect such things may have? If we do allow them to work in this way, television may well be a most important primary educator” (38). In 1985 Elihu Katz said that PSB allowed “the opportunity of shared experience... contributing to authenticity by connecting the society to its cultural center and acquainting the segments of society with each other” (Blumler 11).¹⁵ While Katz’s words accurately describe *Small World*, one could argue that they equally describe *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Though Murrow believed that “exposure to ideas and the bringing of

reality into the homes of the nation” (Murrow RTNDA) was critical, his definition of “reality” television manifested itself in the traditional PSB model rather than in the populist, participatory model. In observing the exigencies of programming fifty years ago, we begin to see the fissures in traditional public service and how entertainment was ultimately determined to be an essential binding ingredient.

The Fate of *Small World*

Though classified as traditional today, *Small World* was a creative endeavor in 1958. Novelty’s price was high maintenance, and production logistics provided no minor challenge for *Small World*. On the part of the guest, it was akin to a benign home invasion. British statesman Harold Nicolson described his turn as a guest on the program in December 1959 in London:

In the afternoon, three vans arrive bearing Mr [Bill] McClure of the Columbia Broadcasting System, two French electricians and three others, together with vast trunks and suitcases... They establish their apparatus in the kitchen and dining-room and store-cupboard. I am sat down in a chair by the fire and the lights are adjusted. ...I talk to Ed Murrow in St Moritz, to Mrs. [Clare Booth] Luce in (I think) Los Angeles, and to [former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union] Chip Bohlen in New York. I do not see their faces, since the television pictures are put together later, but I do hear their voices, and we indulge in a three-cornered

discussion on the function of diplomacy...At the end they take a final shot of me, pack their many trunks, and sloop off into the night... (373-74).

On the part of the network and its staff, the burdens were manifold. Friendly was only given \$1000 per week to produce *Small World* and it was not enough, given the time and energy it required of him and his staff (Engelman 149). The international aspect of the operation was a fragile situation, too. CBS London bureau chief Charles Collingwood wrote to Murrow on October 10, 1958:

Small World imposes demands on a much more regular and continuous basis [than *See It Now*]. Moreover, because it depends so much on the BBC's help in communications, it involves our relations with them which have been carefully built up over the years...In other words, the operations of you and Fred, which were once a peripheral enterprise of the London Office, now engage a good deal of our time, energies, and even prestige... (Murrow Papers, Mount Holyoke).

And in another letter on October 23 Collingwood wrote:

There have been some minor flaps and difficulties about getting the services you need from the BBC, but I think we have straightened them out. ...We sometimes have to ask the BBC for television studio facilities and that sometimes raises the old bogy of the tie-up between BBC TV and

NBC. Down the line, at least, there is sometimes a feeling that we are the opposition as far as television goes and that they shouldn't go out of their way to help us (Murrow Papers, Mount Holyoke).

Other signs of discomfort and malaise were cropping up. In addition to the burdensome production, Collingwood also raised the politically touchy issue of who were to be the invited guests, especially given the show's international reach. In the same letter of October 23, 1958, Collingwood wrote to Murrow:

We have the customary problem of political balance which, even though we have no FCC [Federal Communications Commission] looking over our shoulders, is nonetheless real. So far, for obvious reasons – because they are better known in America, are more articulate or just plain more interesting – you have tended to schedule from England people who are figures of protest and in one degree or another in opposition to the main stream of English political life and opinion. Simply from the point of view of the Bureau here it might make our role a little easier if we were able to balance the Muggeridges and the Russells with, say, a Hailsham or a Bob Boothby. This is particularly true if the program is going to be carried here...I realize that these may seem petty considerations and, in a sense, they are. But

politicians are petty people and we have to live with them
(Murrow Papers, Mount Holyoke).

Collingwood's "minor flaps" and casting anxieties were less threatening, perhaps, than CBS Radio executive vice president James Seward's correspondence to Murrow in March and April 1960 detailing the wavering of the CBS Television Division on the coming year's program lineup. Seward emphasized that President Frank Stanton and Chairman Bill Paley appeared eager to continue with *Small World* but the sponsor, Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation, was deciding between its continued sponsoring of *Small World* and participating in the new documentary series *CBS Reports* (1959-66).¹⁶ All the while Collingwood and Seward assured Murrow that, despite awaiting decisions from the sponsor and executives, nothing should alarm him with regards to the future of *Small World*. Within a matter of weeks, however, the show's cancellation was announced.

CBS perhaps could have tried to find another sponsor, but it chose not to (Kendrick 445). While the sponsor pulling out finally finished *Small World*, it was but the final blow to an enterprise that proved vulnerable in many areas. Due to the popularity of quiz shows, air time had become more expensive, and it was a cumbersome program to produce. Accumulated disagreements over recent years had strained Murrow's relations with Paley and Stanton (Sperber 525), and his exalted position at the network was no longer unimpeachable. *Small World* had characters and occasional drama but no plot and was therefore a weak competitor for popular entertainment like sitcoms (on which networks were beginning to focus) and for *Small World*'s close nonfiction cousin, the documentary. The documentary form, with its potential for incorporating storytelling and

other elements of Hollywood film (Curtin 237), held more sway with viewers than mere conversation. “The sponsors of *Small World* preferred to switch their investment,” wrote a Murrow biographer, “to the more resounding *CBS Reports*” (Persico 453). Despite its critical acclaim and highbrow critics’ optimism (or wishful thinking) that televised smart chat was in good stead,¹⁷ the quiet conversational period was waning, and *Small World* was perhaps not compelling enough on any front to stand out.

In April 1960, a spokesperson for Murrow and Friendly told the *New York Times* that because *CBS Reports* increased from eight to 26 one-hour episodes, working on both [*CBS Reports* and *Small World*] would “dilute our energies” (Shepard). According to Murrow and Friendly biographers, it was Friendly himself who suggested that the show had run its course and was sapping too much energy and too many resources from *CBS Reports* (Sperber 588, 593; Engelman 149). The last *Small World* episode aired in May 1960, and its time slot was filled with *Person to Person* then hosted by Charles Collingwood (Kendrick 445). While it would not be the last time television audiences saw Murrow, it was the last time he had a show of his own.

Murrow’s departure from television¹⁸ coincided with a sea change in American broadcasting. *Small World* aired during a pivotal point in his career as well as in television history. It exemplified traditional PSB – remote and authoritative broadcasters delivered didactic programs based on assumptions about and toward the establishment of common cultural ethics. Such explicit agendas have faded in the face of a pluralistic PSB that favors knowledge of self over objective facts and self-governing over imposed social order. Where *Small World* aspired to lift all boats, the new PSB aims to provide each viewer with his or her own dinghy. The evolution of PSB’s implied normative messages

indicates changing values, both television and individual. Though one would be hard pressed to categorize *Small World* as populist, it did share some goals with the new PSB: revelations of the beliefs and behaviors of fellow humans; provision of information/knowledge as tools for effective societal participation; and improved quality of life.

Discussion of *Small World* subsists as a relative footnote – if not neglected entirely – in published works about Murrow, Friendly, CBS, and broadcast history, and associated non-video archival material is disappointingly scant. Though it satisfied many of the ideals of informational and public service television – the format had strength as evidenced by other longstanding discussion programs like *Face the Nation* and *Meet the Press* (1947-present NBC) – *Small World* was a victim of unfortunate timing and was literally lost in a network shuffle. In fact, a satellite-powered version of the *Small World* concept called *Town Meeting of the World* (1963-67) was produced by CBS just three years after *Small World* was cancelled (the idea was credited to Frank Stanton [Sullivan]). It has fallen through the cracks of history and pushed out of collective memory because it happened along at the wrong time, cannot boast a galvanizing installment along the lines of a McCarthy on *See It Now* or *CBS Reports*' "Harvest of Shame," and was overshadowed by more popular and nostalgic television forms such as sitcoms and quiz shows. Fifty years later, the form and content of *Small World* is a reminder of broadcasters' one-time conception of television's potential and social duty. Revisiting such a program illuminates a time and set of circumstances important to our understanding of the world, social, and television history.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Susanne Belovari at Digital Collections and Archives at Tufts University, Nicolette Dobrowolski at Special Collections Research Center at Syracuse University, Sarah Wilkinson at Mount Holyoke Archives and Special Collections, Idelle Nissila-Stone at Ford Foundation Archives, and the Paley Center for Media for collecting, preserving and digitizing so many episodes of *Small World* and other historic public affairs programs.

References

- Adams, Val. "News and Notes from the TV-Radio World." *New York Times* 2 Feb. 1958: X13. Print.
- Barnouw, Erik. *The Image Empire: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*. New York: Oxford UP, 1970. Print.
- Baughman, James L. *Same Time, Same Station: Creating American Television, 1948-1961*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2007. Print.
- _____. "The National Purpose and the Newest Medium: Liberal Critics of Television, 1958-60." *Mid-America* 64 (April-July 1983): 41-55. Print.
- Bluem, A. William. *Documentary in American Television: Form, Function and Method*. New York: Hastings House, 1965. Print.
- Blumler, Jay G. "Public Service Broadcasting Before the Commercial Deluge." *Television and the Public Interest: Vulnerable Values in Western European Broadcasting*. London: Sage Publications, 1992. 7-21. Print.

- Corner, John. *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. Print.
- Crosby, John. "Small World Program Discusses Big Subjects." *Hartford Courant* 20 Oct. 1958: 11. Print.
- Curtin, Michael. *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politics*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1995. Print.
- Easton, Carol. *No Intermissions: The Life of Agnes De Mille*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1996. Print.
- Engelman, Ralph. *Friendlyvision: Fred Friendly and the Rise and Fall of Television Journalism*. New York: Columbia UP, 2009. Print.
- Ford Foundation Archives. Letter to Fred Friendly from Howard K. Smith, April 20, 1961, Office Files of Fred W. Friendly, 1945-1980, Series I, box 2, folder 26, "Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) – Memoranda, 1955-1966."
- Friendly, Fred W. *Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control*. New York: Random House, 1967. Print.
- Halberstam, David. *The Powers That Be*. New York: Knopf, 1979. Print.
- Hartley, John. "From Republic of Letters to Television Republic? Citizen Readers in the Era of Broadcast Television." *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*. Eds. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson. Durham: Duke UP, 2004. 386-417. Print
- Hoggart, Richard. "Uses of Television." *Encounter* 14.1 (1960): 38-45. Print.
- Kendrick, Alexander. *Prime Time: The Life of Edward R. Murrow*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1969. Print.

- Lardner, John and Roger Kahn. *The World of John Lardner*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961. Print.
- Lunt, Peter. "Television, Public Participation, and Public Service: From Value Consensus to the Politics of Identity." *The End of Television?: Its Impact on the World (So Far)*. Eds. Elihu Katz and Paddy Scannell. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009. 128-38. Print.
- Mickelson, Sig. *The Decade That Shaped Television News: CBS in the 1950s*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1998. Print.
- Murrow, Edward R. *Edward R. Murrow Papers, 1927-1965*, Digital Collections and Archives, Tufts University.
- _____. RTNDA convention speech, Chicago, 15 Oct. 1958.
- <http://www.rtnda.org/pages/media_items/edward-r.-murrow-speech998.php>
- Murrow, Edward R. and Janet Brewster Murrow Papers, Correspondence, Box 5. Archives and Special Collections, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.
- "Murrow: His Life and Times, Parts 1-2." *All About TV*. Prod. WNYC-TV, 10 Oct. 1986. Interviewer Steven Scheuer, guests Ann Sperber and Patricia Aufderheide.
- Meyrowitz, Joshua. "Medium Theory." *Communication Theory Today*. Eds. David Crowley and David Mitchell. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1994. 50-77. Print.
- Nicolson, Harold G. and Nigel Nicolson. *The Later Years, 1945-1962, Volume III of Diaries and Letters*. New York: Atheneum, 1968. Print.
- Ouellette, Laurie. 2002. *Viewers Like You?: How Public TV Failed the People*. New York: Columbia UP, 2002. Print.

- Payn, Graham, Sheridan Morley, and Noel Coward. *The Noël Coward Diaries*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1982. Print.
- Persico, Joseph E. *Edward R. Murrow: An American Original*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988. Print.
- Pett, Saul. Press release, *AP Newsfeatures*, 3 June 1958.
- Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006. Print.
- Prouty, Howard H. *Variety Television Reviews, 1923-1988*. New York: Garland Pub., 1989. Print.
- Schickel, Richard. "The Television Problem." *Commentary* (Dec. 1962): 461-469. Print.
- Shanley, John P. "A Big Undertaking Called *Small World*." *New York Times* 23 Nov. 1958: x15. Print.
- Shepard, Richard F. "TV 'small World' Going off the Air." *New York Times* 28 April 1960: 71. Print
- Slide, Anthony. *Selected Radio and Television Criticism*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1987. Print.
- Sperber, A. M. *Murrow: His Life and Times*. New York: Freundlich Books, 1986. Print.
- Stephens, Mitchell. *The Rise of the Image, the Fall of the Word*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.
- Sullivan, Dan. "How Big Our Town Meeting Is Getting." *New York Times*. 27 Feb. 1966: X23. Print
- Timberg, Bernard and Bob Eler. *Television Talk: A History of the TV Talk Show*. Austin, Tex: U of Texas P, 2002. Print.

Unger, Arthur. Interview with Fred Friendly, 15 Oct. 1984. Arthur Unger Audio

Interview Collection, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University

Library.

¹ While definitions are varied and related issues complex, the use of the term “public service” herein refers to programming intended to inform viewers, provide cultural uplift, and enhance quality of life. The U.S. definition is vague and subject to manipulation by commercial interests and weak regulation. “Public affairs” programming herein refers to a subset of public service addressing policy-oriented news and societal issues. For more on definitions, see Michael P. McCauley, “The Contested Meaning of Public Service in American Television.” *The Communication Review*. 5.3 (2002): 207-237.

² Louis Cowan, CBS Television Network president, helped Murrow and Friendly get *Small World* on the lineup thereby saving about half of the *See It Now* staff after its cancellation (Friendly *Circumstances* 93-4).

³ The idea of *Small World* began as a vehicle for Eric Sevareid, but sponsors would only sign on with Murrow as host (Friendly *Circumstances* 93-4). According to Engelman, however, Murrow wanted the host spot and tried to maneuver it (140-41).

⁴ All *Small World* episodes were viewed at the Paley Center for Media in New York. The collection holds 19 of the 32 episodes. Episode information is available at <http://www.paleycenter.org/collection>

⁵ Murrow had communicated with the senator even before *Small World* began. On June 3, 1958, after *See It Now* was cancelled, he wrote to Kennedy: “Meanwhile, I have designs upon you for a totally different type of program which involves the use of television for really long-range communication for the first time”; and on June 20, 1958, he wrote: “It is an effort to expand the range of television by tying together three interesting people in three remote parts of the world via old-fashioned radio links, running cameras at all three points simultaneously during an informal conversation...I think it has real possibilities...” (Edward R. Murrow Papers)

⁶ See David Goodman, “Programming in the Public Interest: America’s Town Meeting of the Air.” Eds. Michele Hilmes and Michael Henry. *NBC: America's Network*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2007. 44-60. Print.

⁷ See Hugh R. Slotten, “Network Practices, Government Oversight, and Public Service Ideals: The University of Chicago Roundtable.” In *Radio's Hidden Voice: The Origins of Public Broadcasting in the United States*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2009. 216-238. Print.

⁸ The show, which continues in a modified form, is the longest-running news program in broadcast history. Murrow credited William Paley with the original idea for *Small World*, calling him its “principal parent” (Sperber 534).

⁹ *Time and Tide* news clipping, 18 April 1959, from Edward R. Murrow Papers, Tufts University.

¹⁰ Peabody Awards <<http://www.peabody.uga.edu/winners/details.php?id=940>>

¹¹ Two months before *Small World* aired, there were accusations of a rigged CBS television quiz show, *The \$64,000 Challenge*. Investigations took place over 1958-59 and tainted the credibility of television content overall. Even pre-interview preparation for *Person to Person*, i.e. advance questions, was called into question (Halberstam 151).

¹² For discussions of elitism claim see Baughman 2007, Blumler, Lunt, Ouellette, Hartley 2008.

¹³ PSB in the U.S. was influenced by the U.K. Reithian model but could not operate in the same way given the different political and economic broadcasting systems.

¹⁴ For just two sources on a growing body of work on populist forms of public service, see John Corner, *Studying Media: Problems of Theory and Method*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998. 108-134. Print; Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, *Better Living Through Reality TV: Television and Post-Welfare Citizenship*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2008. Print.

¹⁵ Blumler quotes Katz’s paper presented at a conference on “The Individual and New Communication Technologies,” Heidelberg.

¹⁶ The series is known for several provocative installments including the Murrow-hosted “Harvest of Shame” that focused on U.S. migrant farm workers (aired 25 Nov. 1960). After its seven-year run as a regular series, occasional installments followed.

¹⁷ For instance, *Variety* (25 March 1959) called the era one of “conversational entertainment.” John Crosby wrote that “television has discovered conversation” (*Hartford Courant*, 6 Feb. 1959) and cited the success of David Susskind, Ben Hecht, Arthur Godfrey, and Jack Paar whose talk shows indicated a moment where “conversation flourished” (*Hartford Courant*, 12 January 1959).

¹⁸ Murrow left CBS in 1961 for an appointed post to direct the U.S. Information Agency.