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Monitor: The Creation of the Television Arts Documentary

Mary M. Irwin

Monitor (BBC, 1958–65), a series which showcased the arts and their creators and was presented by Huw Wheldon, is now remembered as the flagship of late 1950s and early 1960s arts documentary television broadcasting.

In *Arts TV: A History of Arts Television in Britain*, John Walker describes *Monitor* as ‘a crucially important early series’ (1993: 45), arguing that ‘no one could deny its ground-breaking achievements’ (ibid.: 49). John Wyer, in *Vision On: Film, Television and the Arts in Britain*, called *Monitor* ‘among the BBC’s most celebrated contributions to “good broadcasting”’ (2007: 27).¹ In the edited collection *Experimental British Television*, Jamie Sexton refers to *Monitor* as the ‘BBC’s critically acclaimed arts series’ (Mulvey and Sexton 2007: 90), while Kay Dickinson, in the same collection, refers to it as a ‘well respected fortnightly Sunday arts magazine programme’, pointing out that this was where Ken Russell first made his name (ibid.: 70). Indeed the series is now most admired for Russell’s innovative composer biographies, the highlight of which is generally accepted to be his film on Elgar (BBC, 11 November 1962). Indeed, this film was chosen to mark the hundredth edition of the programme.

Monitor, a magazine-format programme, contained a rich, dynamic and hugely exciting mix of contemporary interviews, discussions, performances and films. Unfortunately very little now remains of the series, aside from a handful of fragments of films. Adding up to about only four hours of material in total, these provide tantalising glimpses

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of the programme's astonishing treasures: interviews with Dame Ninette De Valois, Jerome Robbins (with dance extracts), Georges Simenon and Rudolf Nureyev, and an early film by John Schlesinger, following a class of first-year students under the instruction of drama teacher Harold Lang, shot at the Central School of Speech and Drama.

Using the full programme schedule records, which were meticulously maintained by *Monitor* production team member Anne James, it is, however, possible to appreciate the huge wealth of material presented by the series. James worked on *Monitor* throughout its life and kept a complete list of all the items on each programme. It is not within the scope of this article to go through in any great detail what the lists reveal; however, the selection below will give a taste of the range and quality of material covered.

Thus, for example, we find in the edition of 8 June 1958 an interview with actor Charles Laughton, 12 October of the same year saw John Lehman interviewing Aldous Huxley, on 20 December Stravinsky was interviewed by Robert Craft while 10 May 1959 witnessed Leonard Bernstein being interviewed by Wheldon and Paddy Chayefsky by Richard Hoggart. On 28 February 1960, Wheldon interviewed Mary McCarthy, while in the next edition he interviewed Orson Welles, complete with clips of *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942). On 22 May that year, sculptor Elizabeth Frink could be seen at work in her studio, while 12 February saw Michelangelo Antonioni in discussion about his film *L'Avventura* (1960) with Wheldon, Penelope Gilliatt and Karel Reitz. The 14 January edition contained a round-table discussion among Australian artists Sidney Nolan, Peter Porter and Murray Sayle. On 17 June 1962 Marcel Duchamp was on film interviewed by Richard Hamilton followed by a studio discussion featuring Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi. In 1963, Joan Littlewood was in discussion with Wheldon on 28 April, and Harold Pinter with Robert Robinson on 10 November, an edition of the programme which contained clips from *The Caretaker* (1963) and *The Servant* (1963). On 5 May 1964 Wheldon interviewed Hitchcock. Moving into the later period of *Monitor* under the editorship of Jonathan Miller, 17 November of that year saw Miller interview Susan Sontag, on 15 December Philip Larkin talked with John Betjeman, on 9 March 1965 Robert Lowell read from his poetry and on 13 July Susan Sontag introduced Andy Warhol's film *Cheese! Or What Really Did Happen in Andy Warhol's Studio*.

The success of *Monitor* also provided a valuable starting point and training ground for a number of talented young producers who were

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recruited to the team. Thus future *South Bank Show* creator and presenter Melvyn Bragg, film directors John Schlesinger, David Jones and Ken Russell, director, producer and writer Jonathan Miller, theatre director Patrick Garland and future Head of BBC TV Music and Arts Humphrey Burton were all members of the *Monitor* team who went on to have great individual success as well as to have an important impact on the development of arts television and the arts more generally in Britain in the 1960s and beyond.²

A key element of the series' success was Wheldon. Presenter, editor and the public face of *Monitor*, he has been justly acclaimed for providing the series with a uniquely insightful and forceful editorial and production style, and above all for his key role in achieving the levels of originality and excellence for which the programme is now remembered. The series built for Wheldon a reputation as a skilled and knowledgeable patron of the arts, as well as a talented and inspiring manager of staff. His work on *Monitor* led directly in 1963 to his promotion to Head of a reinstated Department of Documentaries and Music, and then eventually to be seen as best choice for the role of Controller of BBC Television in 1965. Asa Briggs argues that 'the success of *Monitor* owed much to Wheldon who controlled the pace of the programme as well as its content. *Monitor* was indeed to use the newly fashionable language of the period a programme in his own image' (1995: 167–8).

Those who worked with Wheldon were very certain of his ability not only to get the best from them as young producers, but also of his strengths as *Monitor*'s editor and above all of his ability to communicate with a television audience. In interview, Humphrey Burton recalled: 'His ability was to get the guts of a film and to help directors to find more in their films than they were able to find themselves – one of his greatest strengths was to help people find themselves in their films. Wheldon's editing sessions, looking at rough cuts, giving opinions, were vital.'³ For Patrick Garland, Wheldon was 'terrific, a huge influence. He was generous and easy to work with.' He continued:

He told us 'you who are in music or arts will never get the audience of Michael Crawford on a Thursday night or the Royal Family or *Match of the Day* but at the same time I don't want you aiming for a minority audience. What you must do is get the majority of the minority... Huw had this wonderful gift of knowing what it was you wanted to achieve. He could point out exactly where you weren't achieving it and do it with a rough cut... People used to complain about Wheldon and found him patronising. Members I think of the intelligentsia were jealous and

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wondered why *they* weren't doing it. The average person liked Wheldon very much because of his way of teaching them, and he knew what he was doing, all right.

Nancy Thomas, another producer on the series, highlighted Wheldon's ability to communicate his enthusiasm for the arts: 'He loved presenting; his watchwords were that anything could be made accessible and that there was to be no name-dropping.'

Much has been written of Wheldon's creative relationship with Ken Russell, whose own accounts of this are well documented, and there is additionally significant comment on their working relationship—see, for example, Baxter (1973), Gomez (1976), Tibbetts (2005) and Dickinson in Mulvey and Sexton (2007). A short passage from Russell's autobiography sums up particularly well the critical importance of Wheldon in helping Russell to put his films together: 'Whatever his [Wheldon's] personal feelings, he always helped polish my rough diamonds till they glittered. And when I disappointed him with a paste job, he worked even harder to make it shine—shaping and reshaping, cutting and chipping away until it was ready for his wonderful commentary' (1989: 21).

Monitor's story would seem, then, to be a straightforward, albeit fortuitous, coming together of talent, creativity and, in Wheldon, the ability to marshal and manage these skills and to put them to best use. Current histories of *Monitor* place their emphasis firmly on the vision, influence and achievements of Wheldon, and the talents of young film-makers like Russell, Schlesinger and Bragg. However, these seemingly unproblematic narratives circulating around *Monitor's* creation, narratives dominated by Wheldon and a select group of young ambitious producers, serve to mask what is in fact a far more complex, problematic and significantly less 'tidy' story which surrounds the series' actual gestation and development.

In the past, only limited critical attention has been paid to the complex nexus of institutional politics, strategic staffing decisions, and the work of unsung producers and backroom staff (particularly women) who were central to the development and eventual success of the series and who played such a crucial role in teaching its young and generally inexperienced producers how to craft and edit a piece of film. In particular there has been little focus on the initial pragmatic institutional decisions which put *Monitor* into production, decisions which had nothing whatsoever to do with Wheldon. Equally there has been only limited emphasis placed on how and why Wheldon came to take over management of the programme in the first place. Neither is

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there much, if any, reference made to his lack of specialised interest and expertise in the area of the arts. Nor does this history question at all his implicit preconceptions and prejudices around ideas of what constituted 'art' and 'the arts', still less the way in which he elected to present art to the public.

Monitor initially came into being after general management recognition that there was a significant gap in the BBC's provision of programmes. BBC television in the late 1950s was not making any programmes which might be seen to be addressing the broad category of 'the arts'. *Monitor*'s original producer Catherine Freeman (née Dove), then a young member of the *Panorama* team, remembered that at her annual staff review meetings in 1955 and 1956, 'I started to say that I think it is extraordinary that we didn't have a serious arts programme.'⁴

Competition was in the air: Independent Television (ITV) had had a huge effect on the BBC's viewing figures. By late 1957 the BBC's share of the audience, according to its own estimates, had plummeted to 28 per cent. The idea of *Monitor* came into being at this point primarily as part of an overall BBC strategy to fight the commercial opposition, albeit on the BBC's own terms. The idea for an arts programme which, *pace* Dove, had been proposed as meeting a gap in BBC programming suddenly became much more viable, in that it could provide a BBC response to the initial popularity of ITV. This was the suggestion which was put together in a draft paper by Kenneth Adam and Gerald Beadle, Controller and Director of BBC Television respectively, which was submitted to the BBC Board of Governors in 1957. This sought to articulate the nature of the BBC's response to the new television landscape necessitated by the launch of ITV.

Adam and Beadle's general proposal was to 'increase the numbers of programmes of intelligence and distinction' (quoted in Ferris 1990: 115). The key passage contained their proposals for arts programming: 'In order to strengthen Sunday night viewing we propose to establish as part of Talks development a regular magazine of the arts of a comprehensive kind which would attempt to do in this field what *Panorama* has done in the field of current affairs' (quoted in *ibid.*: 116).

Freeman remembers that, suddenly in 1957, 'I was summoned and told that there was going to be an arts programme and I was to be editor—I was amazed.' Her idea for an arts programme had become concrete, although it was far from the *Monitor* that it would eventually become. Instead its identity was being determined in response to specific outside forces, being envisaged as very much in the successful

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mould of the two extant magazine programmes dealing with current affairs: *Panorama* and *Tonight*. At this point the 25-year-old Freeman, with her enthusiasm for the arts, was to be the producer. However, Freeman generally features only as a footnote in those available official accounts of BBC television of that time which mention *Monitor*. Instead, a series of events occurred which resulted in Wheldon, with no background in the arts to speak of, becoming *Monitor*'s chief producer.

Wheldon joined BBC Television as a publicity officer in January 1952. He was recruited to the Talks Department in 1954 as a producer, and by 1958 he had become a successful presenter and producer, with a number of successful series under his belt. His particular interest was military history and strategy, evidenced by such series as *Men in Battle* (BBC, 1956–7) and *Men of Action* (BBC 1959–60). What he was *not* particularly interested in were the arts.

Freeman's credentials for being in charge of an arts programme were, by contrast, excellent. She had already worked as a trainee with television documentary film-maker John Read, who had made pioneering BBC TV films about artists and had pioneered the filmed artist's profile on British television. It was Freeman who had studied English at Oxford and it was she who invited her friends, John Schlesinger and the author Kingsley Amis, to create items for the early *Monitor* programmes. Freeman also remembered taking on the people who were to become key members of the *Monitor* production team – Peter Newington, Humphrey Burton and David Jones.

Newington was a somewhat unsung member of the *Monitor* production team who would go on to work very much in a co-producer role with Wheldon and who had a great deal to do with the success of the series. Of Newington, Jones recalled that 'he had an impeccable artistic conscience. He knew what was bullshit and just fashionable and of the moment. Huw was open to anything, but would always look to Peter.' In fact Newington's expertise and experience would turn out to be a very valuable weapon in Wheldon's armoury, as Newington possessed the skills and knowledge germane to the production of arts television which Wheldon clearly did not.

Yet while the 42-year-old Wheldon may not have had much expertise in the area of the arts, what he did have was drive, ambition, a desire to climb the BBC ladder and the kind of backing from management necessary to achieve such a goal. Leonard Miall, Head of Talks, said of Wheldon:

We were also anxious to find some suitable programme for Huw to present. With Celtic eloquence and an extrovert personality he was a very good performer on the screen. Traditional BBC practice then frowned

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on the use of staff as leading characters in current affairs magazines, but there was no such inhibition regarding arts programmes. (1994: 194).

In Miall's eyes, *Monitor* offered a good place to deploy the talents of Wheldon, while also setting the precedent of a 'behind-the-scenes' producer being at the same time a 'front-of-house' presenter.

However, Freeman's view of Wheldon's appointment and his underlying ambition is somewhat different:

Huw was alarmed that he had to work on an arts programme. He had just finished doing *The Battle of Cassino* with Brian Horrocks which he had done really well – [but] he saw the future was with big magazine programmes. *Panorama* had been a huge success, and then *Tonight* had been a huge success with Michael Peacock and Donald Baverstock, both younger men than Huw, and he [Huw] saw that was the way to go.

Meanwhile Jones recalls that 'it was a very important career move for him. Some of the other guys had *Panorama* or *Tonight* and he was just desperately looking for a programme to do, and *Monitor* just kind of fell into his lap.'

Wheldon's inclusion in the *Monitor* team seems to have emerged from a combination of management's ambition for making use of his abilities and his own desire to have his place within the upper echelon of BBC producers and programme-makers. As a young woman situated within the institutional culture of the BBC of the late 1950s and faced with the forceful Wheldon's considerable dynastic ambitions, Freeman was in an invidious position when it came to maintaining control over her arts programme. She remembers Grace Wyndham Goldie, then Assistant Head of Talks, first telling her about Wheldon's attachment to *Monitor*, and saying: 'You are very young – it would be good to attach Huw Wheldon to your group as a senior advisor – he is so much more experienced than you are.' Freeman observes: 'He wanted to do it and I didn't oppose it and that was the beginning of the end. When we started to work closely together there were real difficulties between us, to do with me being a young, educated woman, which was galling to Huw who wasn't Oxbridge.'

Anne James, who had applied successfully to be Freeman's secretary, recalls the clash between her original boss, whom she remembered as 'a very bright woman', and Wheldon: 'She thought she was running it as producer before they went on air, then they moved Wheldon in and she disliked him very much, and basically she went off and married [Charles] Wheeler. Huw began it and Catherine never really featured. She was very frustrated – Huw was very dominant.'

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Yet Freeman in interview was also quick to point out Wheldon's merits and to highlight the reasons why he went on, in her opinion, to make the success that he did of the new arts series, as well as to inspire loyalty and enthusiasm from the young production team who worked under him. What emerges from her account of the initial stages of *Monitor* is that, while clearly this would not have been his first choice of programme, Wheldon turned the situation round and began to respect and believe in the subject matter of his programmes. According to Freeman, at first 'he couldn't see how to make it work, and if there had been any other subject he would have been happier, I have absolutely no doubt—I think he very quickly learnt and genuinely came to understand. I'm sure that within the first year he was changed by *Monitor*.' Freeman also talked about Wheldon's ability to manage, which appears to be where his talent really lay, given that he rose eventually to become Managing Director of Television, the first programme producer ever to do so: 'He certainly did manage—always a question at the BBC of team building—and he did manage to get good people. He could marshal the troops. He was capable of understanding talented people.'⁵ She told Ferris that he was 'a bringer-out of talent, inspirational in his rhetoric, often very funny' (1990: 117).

This perception of Wheldon is echoed by another of the women who worked on *Monitor*, Nancy Thomas. Thomas had had a long career at the BBC which began after the Second World War, when she worked as a secretary to art historian Kenneth Clark. Then, when he left, she moved into production, where she built up a good knowledge of studio techniques. She was with *Monitor* from the beginning, eventually becoming an associate producer and film-maker, and even running the series in the period after Wheldon had left and before Miller took over the editorship of the series. It is important to note here that the major role which Thomas played in the production of *Monitor* throughout its lifetime has never been thoroughly explored or fully acknowledged. However, in Thomas's account in interview of her working relationship with Wheldon, she states that she liked him very much and felt he was extremely good at his job, but also that 'he wasn't very encouraging to women'. She felt, for example, that it was only the fact that she took the initiative on an item about Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudon* (BBC, 26 February 1961), which she wanted to make, that Wheldon began to respect her ability as a professional.

Wheldon's relationship with the women he worked with at *Monitor*, in comparison to the extremely cordial and well-documented relationships which he enjoyed with his team of male producers,

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presents in microcosm the limits of a notional BBC public sphere. In the rubbing out of Catherine Freeman from the *Monitor* story and the downplaying of Nancy Thomas' role in events, we see not only something of Wheldon's attitude toward women in the workplace, but the difficulties in general faced by women in the BBC workplace of the 1960s. Additionally it is worth noting that the limited visibility of the backroom staff in *Monitor* histories, by comparison with the position centre-stage of its young and confident middle- and upper-class producers, might have something to tell us about discourses of class within the Corporation at this time.

Wheldon was essentially very much a man of his time, and *Monitor* therefore very much a programme of its time. It is important to be aware of the extent to which, while *Monitor* represented freedoms and opportunities for some, it was also representative of the period in which it was made, of the particular prejudices and beliefs of Wheldon and more generally of the BBC. The dominant narrative of *Monitor* with which we are presented serves in fact to reproduce the power structures and inequalities of treatment which sat at the heart of the series; thus, for example, women's stories are at best marginalised or are simply not told at all.

This has already been touched on in relation to Freeman and the way in which the achievements of Thomas – a member of the *Monitor* team for its entire run as producer, film-maker and, for a period, overall editor – have been quite wrongly represented in earlier accounts. The women who worked for *Monitor* were the victims of a complex set of double standards which were applied to many of the women working in BBC television during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s.

Anne James, for example, has very vivid memories of how things were, and how hard it was for the women on the series to attain the same freedoms that their male equivalents both assumed and were granted without question. What is noticeable about her reflection on her experiences, as in the case of the other women interviewed, is the complexity of trying to make sense of her position as a woman and as a television professional. James remembers that, having managed initially to get into the BBC as a secretary, and having worked successfully to get into the production side of television, the attitude to young women remained very much, as she puts it: 'You've done well, dear, to hold your job down.' She also observes that: 'It mattered if you were a young lad and had done well at university – men wanted to make film immediately, women served', and talks about what she called the 'stars' of *Monitor*. The reference is clearly to the male producers such as Burton, Jones, Garland, Russell and Bragg: 'It is infuriating the way

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they will only talk about the stars. They came in with their speciality, writing, and theatre, whatever it was. But the people who held the place together were the women.’ According to James, women were sometimes asked to perform the role of personal assistant, on top of any production duties which they might have had. She recalls that the young male producers would not consider the practicalities involved in setting up shoots: ‘There was a film on Betjeman’s poetry, and Nancy Thomas was sent to “keep an eye” on Ken Russell. I was sent off on Ken’s *Elgar* because I was a good “Man Friday” – I had to do the post-production scripts. Men didn’t bother with that.’ James particularly remembers the first film that the then young *Monitor* producer Melvyn Bragg was asked to make: ‘Huw’s attitude was “it’s time you made a film, boy, go off and enjoy yourself” whereas for women it was “what makes you think you can do it?” The young men were just shoved forward into the battlefield.’

What is particularly striking about this institutional attitude is that, although Bragg and many of the other male producers were very intelligent and went on to make some very good films, they had limited practical experience of planning and making films. On the other hand, James and Thomas had substantial television, and in the case of James radio, production experience. Both had already gained a great deal of experience working at the BBC in a variety of departments. Additionally both had been with *Monitor* from its very first edition. Humphrey Burton’s thumbnail sketch of Thomas sums up this situation very well: ‘She was already a staff director inside Talks, having been earlier in her life secretary to the Chairman of the Third Programme, George Barnes. She had a very strong Reithian approach to getting things across. She was a very good organiser and a wonderful member of the team.’

The treatment of women at *Monitor*, and their absence from or ‘repositioning’ in narratives other than their own about the series, is mirrored in the place given to other members of the *Monitor* team. The people who held the programme together, along with these stalwart ‘Jills of all trades’ like Thomas and James, were the very skilled technical staff who actually made the films: that is, who could edit and cut, and who could operate the often unwieldy cameras and equipment needed to put the films onto the television screen.

Allan Tyrer was the film editor who taught the young, inexperienced male trainees how to put film together and who often covered for them if the films were not going to plan, helping to lick them into shape.⁶ Tyrer is remembered with the greatest respect and affection by all the *Monitor* producers. After all, had his expertise not been available, those

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making the films would not have had any real idea about how to put their ideas into a filmic form. Anne James states that 'Allan Tyrer was marvellous, got on with everybody. He was a highly experienced editor and was the editor of *Monitor* from beginning to end. He really was of major importance. Allan was diplomatic, and would protect whoever was there.' For Patrick Garland, 'Allan Tyrer was the best editor in the business. He taught me how to cut, and to my mind directing is two things, energy and how to cut. Almost everything is too long, and cutting and shaping is almost everything.' In this he is echoed by David Jones, who says of Tyrer:

He was the best. He was an amazing contributor to the programme. He always wanted to know where the centre of the film was. We forget that shaping documentary material is a great art in the cutting room, unlike a feature film where there is a script and things happen in a certain order. There is no guarantee that anything shot on location has any order until it goes in to the cutting room. Allan was a joy. His judgement was very good. He was superlative with Ken [Russell]. He was very honest.

Tyrer was more than a backroom boy: he was a creative force to the young production team in his mentoring role and, most importantly, in his ability to make sense of how film should look, with an understanding of the grammar of film developed during his time at Ealing Film Studios. That the directors were able to make films and put their ideas into filmic form owes a very great deal to Tyrer, and thus he deserves equal prominence in the *Monitor* story to what Anne James called the 'stars'. Tyrer is a constant in BBC TV documentary in the 1960s: for example, he worked as chief film editor on *Civilisation* (BBC, 1969). The presence of such 'old-school' Ealing film personnel at the BBC is an important reason why the *Monitor* staff were as successful as they were; indeed, Jones labels it 'the best film school in England'. For although Jones and his colleagues were certainly inventing the television arts documentary, all of this, ironically, was shored up by the experience of British cinema expertise in the shape of craftsmen like Tyrer, something that has not hitherto been widely acknowledged in either contemporaneous or retrospective accounts of this period of BBC history.

Monitor's final year saw a very dramatic change of leadership and direction when Jonathan Miller took over in late 1964. For some, this was to prove the death of the programme. Stephen Hearst, a very experienced documentary film-maker who went on to become Head of Arts Television and who oversaw the creation of *Civilisation*, states simply that in the role of editor Miller was 'hopeless'. He describes Miller's first programme as editor, which

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featured Miller and Susan Sontag discussing the concept of kitsch, as ‘almost incomprehensible. Jonathan had lost the audience in the first twenty minutes.’ For many of the *Monitor* producers, Miller was an intellectual who had no understanding of how to make television programmes about the arts which the *Monitor* audience, who did not share Miller’s brilliance, could understand.

Miller’s one-year editorship certainly produced a very different programme from those of the Wheldon period. However Miller’s thoughts about his own work and his comparison of it with that of Wheldon, as revealed in interview, are extremely interesting. While Miller discussed the rationale behind his own work, he also provided a very different perspective on Wheldon’s *Monitor*. He questioned not only the ‘cosy’ readings of *Monitor* which have been provided by many of the participants, but also the whole idea of what the arts actually are. In fact, Miller had little time for *Monitor*’s attitude to the arts, and saw Wheldon as:

A heavily tweedy figure, an English gent with an admirable war record. He was a middle class, middlebrow artistic big game hunter, who went out on the *veldt* with a shotgun and Henry Moore fell out of a tree. Just lots of famous, largely English, or, if foreign, very well established, names, and I was more interested in the rough edges. I wasn’t absolutely certain what art was. I always thought that arts is not a clearly established category, and out on the fringes of it you might find what was subsequently regarded as very important art of this particular period. The BBC thought that art should be a collection of extremely respectable art celebrities: ‘Arts are the province of the prosperous and a desirable acquirable commodity’. I don’t think there is such a thing as the arts. I was prepared to put on the programme all sorts of things.

For Miller there was actually a distinct whiff of cultural, and possibly racial, prejudice to the criticisms that people made about his choices for *Monitor*:

I got a lot of rage from the English critics about putting Sontag on – three unforgivable things for the English: she was a woman, she was American, and she was Jewish. The idea of a confident, serious woman talking as she did about rubbish – she introduced for the first time anyone had heard of it on television the notion of kitsch. She was the first person to talk about ‘camp’. I did a long interview with Alec Issigonis who designed the Mini. People were appalled by that – ‘That’s not art, that’s industrial design.’ People got frightfully angry. I put on things like *The Brig* [a 1963 drama documenting the brutal routine in a Marine Corps prison] or talked to Andy Warhol. Nobody had done that before.

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For Miller, *Monitor* had the arts sewn up in a kind of comfortable, middle-class ghetto which excluded anything that did not fit. Miller's remarks do, of course, have to be treated with some caution. Miller was and is a gifted and persuasive intellectual, with his own very particular views and prejudices. While lambasting what he saw as the class-ridden snobberies of the *Monitor* view of the arts, he himself unconsciously exhibits his own inverted snobbery and subtly implies his own rather superior cultural pedigree: 'I came from a world of shabby bohemianism which none of the BBC had any connection with.' Many of his *Monitor* colleagues who were interviewed by the present author had the greatest respect for Miller and his obvious abilities, but they also felt that his *Monitor* was too complex and sometimes over-intellectual, and just slightly dull to watch. David Jones sums up this attitude in his remark that 'Jonathan is a high-powered intellectual; he turned it into a programme about his enthusiasms of the moment. He didn't understand the average human being's level. He was not the right man for the job at the time.'

Nevertheless, Miller, in his own comments, puts his finger on a number of key themes which his struggles with *Monitor* illustrate in microcosm. *Monitor* afforded certain kinds of people considerable licence to explore their ideas and passions. Wheldon was a generous and supportive guide and mentor to this chosen group. However, membership of this group, this 'public sphere' of the arts, was afforded only to those who fulfilled particular criteria. They were in the main Oxbridge-educated, middle- and upper-middle-class young men (northern grammar school scholarship boy in the case of Bragg), relishing the opportunity to pursue their specialist areas of interest in the new medium of television. Those criteria are very similar to the ones which Grace Wyndham Goldie used when she selected the trainees who would go on to create and run the Talks and Features Department's most memorable programmes of the period: *Panorama*, *Tonight* and *That Was The Week That Was*. *Monitor* did not particularly welcome those who, as Miller discovered, wanted to use the programme to think 'outside the box'. There were unwritten standards which applied to the arts as much as to politics. Moreover, it was assumed that these were automatically the 'correct' standards, and that it was *Monitor*'s job to pass them on.

Monitor in the Wheldon era undoubtedly did admirable work in introducing people to artistic experiences which they might well otherwise have missed. The programmes were made with genuine enthusiasm and commitment by people who knew a great deal about their subjects. However, there was a great deal less

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corporate enthusiasm when alternative perspectives and opinions were introduced and when taken-for-granted assumptions about what 'the arts' actually meant were questioned. Miller suggests that, at the BBC, 'people thought posh people were the only people licensed to talk. I think the BBC thought they could brush aside crumbs from the rather grand dining table, which could then be picked up by people humbly sweeping it up on their knees.' Miller here is referring specifically to the arts, but behind his remarks lie the more general implication that, within the Reithian concept of the educational responsibility of BBC television in that era, there was a tacit expectation that those who sat high up in the social hierarchy were generally expected to instruct those who sat considerably lower down the social scale.

Furthermore, it is in revisiting the story of the creation of *Monitor* that we encounter some sobering truths about the underlying power structures behind the Corporation's culture, structures which speak in particular of female marginalisation. Contemporary historical work on other early television programmes must now seek to move the stories of those currently on the margins into the centre.

Notes

1. Wyver is here mobilising the 1960 Pilkington Report's judgement that 'the BBC know good broadcasting; by and large they are providing it' (Pilkington 1960: 46).
2. Melvyn Bragg was writer, editor and presenter of *The South Bank Show* (ITV, 1978–2009) and was Head of Arts at London Weekend Television (LWT) from 1982 to 1990 when he was appointed Controller of Arts. He also presented BBC Radio 4's *Start the Week* from 1988 to 1998 when he was made a life peer, and has presented *In Our Time* on the same channel since 1998.

John Schlesinger (1926–2003) directed *A Kind of Loving* (1962), *Billy Liar* (1963) and *Darling* (1965). In 1969 he directed *Midnight Cowboy* which won three Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director. In the 1970s he directed the critically acclaimed and successful *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (1971) and *Marathon Man* (1976). For television he also made the acclaimed BBC films *An Englishman Abroad* (1983) and *A Question of Attribution* (1992).

David Jones was Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1973 to 1978. He emigrated to the United States in the late 1970s, becoming Professor of Drama at Yale in 1981 and directing successful feature films such as *Betrayal* (1983) and *84 Charing Cross Road* (1986). He also had extensive television credits for various contemporary American drama series.

Jonathan Miller went on to present television programmes on science and medicine, direct opera, produce stage works, lecture, write and sculpt.

Patrick Garland became a very successful director. His key productions have included the revival of *My Fair Lady* on Broadway in the early 1980s with Rex Harrison and the musical *Billy* with Michael Crawford.

Humphrey Burton was an associate producer and editor of *Monitor* and in 1965 became the first Head of BBC Music and Arts. He was LWT's Head of Drama, Arts and Music from 1967 to 1969. He left to go freelance but returned in the early 1970s

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to oversee the arts programme *Aquarius* (1970–7). He went back to the BBC in 1975 to head up a much bigger Arts and Music Department, resigning in 1981 to focus on freelance projects.

3. Unless otherwise stated, all interviews cited were undertaken by the author.
4. Catherine Dove later married BBC television interviewer John Freeman and was known as Catherine Freeman.
5. David Attenborough later recalled that it created a feeling of excitement and exhilaration in the organisation that someone was in charge who understood first-hand the nature of programme production. In his autobiography, *Life on Air*, Attenborough recalled of Wheldon that 'he believed it imperative that the organisation he headed should be actually and visibly controlled neither by management nor accountants, but by programme-makers' (2002: 216).
6. Allan Tyrer, a former Ealing Studios film editor, played an important role in the production of arts television at the BBC, both in the creation of *Monitor* and the editing of *Civilisation* (1969). It was also Tyrer who brought Peter Watkins to the attention of Huw Wheldon.

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