Of, By and For the Kids: Turning the Camera Around
"What once was in my brain is now a movie.
I think that’s pretty cool."

This is what a young filmmaker said about his contribution to *Short Films by Short People*, as quoted by a newspaper critic who agreed that his short segment appearing on the occasional Nickelodeon offering was "pretty cool", adding "doubtlessly, so will young kids who watch and think, hey, I could do that." [2]

In the wide array of children's programming available to young children, the broadcast and cable providers offer much that its audience may consider educational, promotional, commercial, nostalgic, or sugary sweet. They serve up hours of programs representing the diligent research, lucky guesswork, tried-and-true experience, or well-honed intuition of network executives who decide what youth want to see on the screen. But in the five decades of children's television, few examples of excellent programming featuring the creative work of children, by children, and for children stand out as success stories in terms of popularity, critical acclaim, and ratings. At the same time, media literacy advocates have campaigned for more youth to become producers, not just consumers, of the media that surround them. This effort has manifested itself as video production courses in libraries, schools, and community centers, with the programs the youth produce often appearing on local cable access stations. Is there a demand for personal stories of youth not just in low-visibility cable ghettos, but in the mainstream media as well?

*The Locally Grown (and Locally Shown)*

The tradition of children and teenagers producing video content to be cablecast on local community access stations extends over 25 years. The Madison-area community of Sun
Prairie, Wisconsin established the first channel entirely for children in 1980. Its partnership with the American Council for Better Broadcasting yielded a respected model for youth involvement and direction of cable content. In it, forty randomly chosen youth produced "KIDS-4", ninety minutes of news and consumer reviews. [31] John LeBaron (1975) described his innovative work with fifth- and sixth-graders in an inner city, while in yet another project, a suburban library in Indiana acquired a local channel in 1976 and allowed participating youth to "completely control" the weekly, 30 minute slot, "Kids Alive" [31]. Video production was also integrated into the curriculum of schools, as in Millville, New Hampshire, which invited professionals to lead workshops in film and photography. Continental Cablevision gave the school "cable time, staff expertise, and video equipment." [31]

Unsurprisingly, then, the notion of youth on local cable TV soon became the plot for a short-lived television series "TV101," although the small but fairly widespread movement took thirteen years to register on the network radar. The script of the "TV101" pilot betrays many of the fears that adults harbored in the face of youth in control of media, specifically news. In it, Kevin Kegan returns to his alma mater, Roosevelt High, by special effort of his former journalism teacher, who a decade earlier recognized him as a ne'er-do-well with hidden talent. His decision as advisor to abandon the newspaper in favor of working on a morning television broadcast in every classroom upsets his mentor:

Ms. W: And what about the student paper?
Mr. K: The student paper is still there. We're just plugging in the electricity.
Ms. W: Kevin! These kids watch enough TV as it is! [ducks from camera field] (Would you shut that thing off?) They don't need to be producing more of their own.
Mr. K: Well that's where you're wrong. Look how you're acting. You know why? Because you're on the spot and you can't hide. That's what I wanna do. I wanna get these kids in front of the lens where they can't hide what's going on inside. That sense of reality is something the old student paper couldn't touch in a million years."
Later, turning the camera around to face his students, Mr. Kegan tells his students, "that's what you report on—yourselves….I want this newscast to reflect what's really going on out there."

Predictably, Good-guy Mr. Kegan butts up against his vilified old nemesis, Principal Steadman. The newscast produced by Mr. Kegan's students comes under fire by the principal, who asks them to replace the report on toxic waste on campus with a puff piece filmed in front of the azaleas, which Kegan disputes as "crank[ing] out public relations babble for Roosevelt High." Raising the stakes, Steadman threatens Kegan with seizing the video equipment to realize his dream of an anti-vandalism system in the school:
When [the school board members] see the kind of subversive swill you're producing, they should have no problem putting an end to this video anomaly of yours. I may have my surveillance system sooner than I thought.

Introducing the students' show to the school board, he tells them, "The subversive nature of this student television broadcast presents a clear and present danger to order and discipline at Roosevelt High." While the students publicize their show as "The Newscast they didn't want you to see", the real show, "TV101", generally devolves into an "after-school special"-like public service message: driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol is bad. As Checker, the ne'er-do-well in Kegan's class and presumably an echo of the teacher's younger self, struggles with his best friend's death, Kegan turns Checker's pain into a teachable, perhaps exploitable moment:

Mr. K: You decided not to go get high and you lived. Hang onto that, man, because you're going to need it.
Checker: I should've told him something, said something when while I had the chance. I keep thinking this wouldn't've happened.
Mr. K: Maybe somebody else needs to hear what you have to say.
Checker: What do you mean?
Mr. K: There's some tape left in this camera.

One can easily conjecture that the show exhibits a young Hollywood screenwriter's fantasy of the victory of the first amendment through the power of media production. The producers of this pilot no doubt unconsciously hoped to evangelize the importance of their medium, television, in revealing truths and affecting change.
Attention among non-profit filmmaking educational endeavors seems to have shifted away from the production of news and stories for cablecast to projects in which youth can produce short pieces to be entered into competitions and film festivals. The Artists' Rights Foundation, for example, not long ago developed a filmmaking curriculum being used by the American Library Association, The Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and Americans for the Arts, to name a few, in their partner organizations and local sites. Focus has shifted from working directly with youth to supporting adults (librarians or administrators, for example) who work with the youth. (Jennifer Ahn, personal communication) Three programs local to the Boston area that have met with wide acclaim are Somerville Cable Access Television's The Mirror Project, (hosting "Do It Your Own Damn Self" Film Festival annually), Artists for Humanity, and Youth Voice Collaborative. Big Picture Alliance, a fairly resource-consuming effort in Philadelphia, has also garnered attention in recent months. Modeling their programs after "apprenticeships in ancient China", co-founders Jared Martin and Jeff Seder provide tremendous support in finance and mentorship so that older teenagers may produce their own short subject or feature film.

_Here to Entertain You_

Such idealistic visions for what video should be (as those portrayed in "TV101" or produced by Big Picture Alliance) stand in stark contrast to what jumps out as arguably the most successful viewer-generated television series of all time: "America's Funniest Home Videos." Television commentators called it "a TV show by Americans for Americans" [4] and "a genuine TV first: a show produced by its audience" [7]. Months of footage rolled into ABC studios in response to a call for homemade video footage of family bloopers and slipups. By adding Bob Saget's commentary and some choice sound effects [30], a slapstick, slap-happy phenomenon was born. Vin di Bona adapted a popular series from Tokyo Broadcasting
Corporation into this instant hit, but the popularity probably owed a great deal to the earlier series, "Truth or Consequences," "Candid Camera," "Real People". [30] and "That's Incredible!" [7].

Screeners quickly discovered that the content of the tapes seemed repetitive, landing into a scarce few categories: "kids, weddings, falling down, adults, sports or hobbies, babies, birthday parties and animals" [7]. But while highlighting commonalities, the unusual process for production, that is, soliciting tapes from the audience, also illuminated" how regional American humor is" [7], something that is harder to come by in an industry which is manufactured largely in just Los Angeles and New York by just a few players. The most popular clip of the season won $100,000, and each week the show awarded $10,000 [21] to the audience favorite. Up to 2000 tapes per day arrived[4], then screened by twenty "video prospectors" who were paid $8/hour to watch seventy tapes per day [7] in an office that processed entries nonstop seven days a week [4].

Despite the monotony of content and the logistical challenges involved in pulling it off, "America's Funniest Home Videos" lasted ten years (www.imdb.com). Some attributed the show's success to its intergenerational appeal. Families could sit down on Sunday evenings and enjoy the show together. [21] However, producer Vin di Bona offered another explanation for the show's appeal: "...we're a nation of voyeurs and we're taking people to places they don't often get to go. Like their neighbor's house." [7] This voyeurism extended beyond just an innocent "peeking in", to the voyeurism that is "obsessive observ[ation] of sordid or sensational subjects." (American Heritage Dictionary) One viewer lamented her fellow citizens' love of the show, hoping it "surely will burn out soon; how many more family barbecues and drooling babies can we stand to watch?" [14] She was responding to a column accusing the show of institutionalized child abuse, in that parents were willing to
put their children in harm's way while they could capture a bonk on the head or a bruise to the bottom, not putting down the camcorder (to, for example, protect the child) for fear of missing a chance to capture the mishap on tape. [32] The show’s producers insisted on guarantees of the children's well-being, but nonetheless the angry campaigns against the show raged in the press.

The exploitation of children in "America's Funniest Home Videos" is less blatant than that, however, and the show has plenty of company in television history in its more subtle "child abuse": many television shows place children before the camera because, in their naïveté, they are funny—because often they do not know how funny they are to adults as they go about their business, as they try to answer questions from adults, and as they try to make sense of the world. [47] This is why "America's Funniest Home Videos" registers in this discussion of television made by children, for children. Compare it to, for example, another show which pretends to honor the child, yet in fact mocks children as a rule: "Kids Say the Darnedest Things". Based on a segment of Art Linkletter's "House Party" (1952-1969), the more recent series featured Bill Cosby in conversation with children he calls "virtually impromptu" [44]:

[On an]other show, we have writers. We have to rewrite. We have to write and make funny. With this one, you just talk to the kids. You prod them in one direction, you move them in another direction, you play with them. Sometimes you already have the answers, sometimes you don't.

Most children do not realize that the joke is on them, that the Cos' is playing with them. One Australian critic lashed out at "Kids Say the Darnedest Things" as well as an Aussie knockoff, "Kidspeak":

Kidspeak is a fast-track to convulsive nausea, the televised molesting of children—in this case, Australian youngsters.... Ridicule? Demean? Exploit? Yup, yup and yup. Let's start with the exploitation. It is not so much that Kidspeak wallows in sickening cuteness, but that it does so with no imaginable benefit to the kids themselves. Everyone else is a winner.... The kids get zilch.... If kids have any rights at all, surely they have the right not to be publicly ridiculed.
For youth to be visible onscreen without being "publicly ridiculed", they would need a forum in which they are respected and trusted on their own terms in a context that is personally relevant, where they feel like they share the power with adults. For examples of this, I turn to Nickelodeon and the show "Wonderama."

Adults are People Too

Nickelodeon grew to its current stature in the entertainment industry under the leadership of Geraldine Laybourne. During her tenure, "[m]ore youngsters watch[ed] more children's shows on Nickelodeon than on all three major networks combined" [23]. She summarized the network's successful approach:

We try to elevate the status of kid-dom, to make kids feel important. Kids today feel insignificant. Our goal is not to educate them, but to entertain them, and make them feel good about being kids. [23]

Linda Ellerbee, host of one of the network's most popular and well regarded properties: "Nick News", echoed Laybourne's philosophy:

I have always believed that the audience has at least as much sense as I do, if not more, and that it doesn't matter if somebody is 60 or 10…. Primarily, what we do is give kids a voice. We say, 'We respect your opinions, we're interested in what you say, we're interested in what you think, and we want you to think. [39]

While Ellerbee insists "You don't talk down to kids," [6], the network accomplishes this in part by making it a kid-friendly, adult-excluding zone. In the hour of programming from the late 80s I observed on tape, very little felt like it made any attempt to appeal to an older audience, and in fact the network posed itself in opposition to the world of adults. Particularly, most infamously, the "All Kids Weekend" [23] or "Kids Only Weekend" (ACT archive) brought criticism on the network by groups like Action for Children's Television. They accused such a campaign of being divisive of families. Promotional spots ended with
"If you’re not a kid and you’re watching, you’re busted," and promos included "Super Sloppy Double Dare," a very gooey, goopy, gooshy game show, the provocatively named "Don’t Just Sit There," and "Kids’ Court":

Big Man: Kids want a place where they can solve their problems without adults butting in with their solutions.

Dad: Go to your room!

Mom: No dessert!

Big Man: Nickelodeon’s got that place. Introducing Kids Court. Where kids solve their own problems.

Kid Clip 1: I just couldn't live with that guilt.

Big Man: Where no adults tell you what to do.

Kid Clip 2: It's none of your business.

Big Man: Where no one ever gets grounded.

Kid Clip 3: I didn’t do it.

Big Man: Kids Court. The only court where you rule. [29]

The opening lines of the show emphasize that children control the activity of the show:

Got a beef?
Need to sound off?
Want a fair shake?
Kids are judge and jury
and kids give the verdict.
It's the first court where kids rule [29]

A girl acting out a role in the mock trial of Kids Court tells her side of the story.
Yet, in the end, an adult directs activity onscreen in "Kids Court", asking for opening statements and passing around the microphone. Adults in the Ottawa-based sketch comedy "You Can't Do That on Television" also acted in a peripheral but supervisory role, although they were bungling buffoons ridiculed in the children's' jokes. Such mockery brought serious criticism on the successful channel. A network gained respect for children, who in turn, some felt, learned to disrespect adults:

But the line between empowering children and pandering to them is fuzzy, and some critics argue that Nickelodeon's effort to make kids reign supreme goes too far, becoming anti-grownup at times and teaching children that talking back is cool. [23]

Interestingly, the show also sparked a debate in the Toronto paper about the merit of the show, which points to the limits of the target market of the channel:

I am writing to express my disgust with the children's program You Can't Do That On Television. As a 17-year-old student, I consider myself liberal in many respects, but I draw the line at the exploitation of children.—Robert Schumann [36]

As an 11-year-old, I find this show entertaining. Schumann may not because he is 17! —Masooda Shah [37]

Of course, the network remains popular today, and it has toned down its anti-adult rhetoric.
One might consider "Wonderama" a cultural ancestor to the variety shows on Nickelodeon. After its last host, Bob McAllister, left the show, kids were put in charge of the show. This might be a natural progression for a show which made the song "Kids Are People Too" a smash hit. One reminiscing fan called this "a bold statement to make." To illustrate the pride the audience sensed by getting included on-air, another fan, Ira Goldwyn, wrote "I remember once sending in a piece of news about me and coming to school on Monday and having everyone say they heard my name on 'Wonderama'." Several men hosted the show over the years, but the strongest memories are of Bob McAllister's stint. One woman shared her TV log from when she was a child; it included these entries:

Sunday, January 16, 1977:
Two girls came on the show who made an statue of Bob McAllister out of plaster! Also the new Mouseketeers were featured.

Sunday, May 22, 1977:
Wonderama featured two magicians. Some kids participated in the Olympiad while others made things out of paper - origami I think!

1 Unable to obtain a copy of any era of "Wonderama" to observe and analyze, and including it based on the recommendation of a friend, I rely on quotes from the websites, Sonny Fox's Wonderama (http://www.tvparty.com/lostkids1.html) and Bob McAllister's Wonderama (http://www.tvparty.com/lostwonder.html)
Two memories of two eras of the show describe how two young boys were welcomed into
the production of the show, at least for a short time, and how their memories still affect them
several decades later:

I was always a major Wonderama fan as a kid, so I wrote a letter to Arthur Forrest the show's
director when I was 12 years old to ask if I can come down to the control room to watch the
taping. He said yes, and this became my routine every 6 months or so.... I always wanted to be
a cameraman on Wonderama but the show went off the air when I was 21 and never made
it....That show really help me make up my mind about being a cameraman. — Howie Zeidman

Likewise, a fan of the earlier show, recalls his encounter with host Sonny Fox when he was
chosen for a game:

[Sonny asked.] "Who do you want to be? " Most kids said Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, Floyd
Patterson....when it came to me....I stuttered, dribbled and said.....I......want to be you....So
Sonny sat me at his desk and had me take over his job...The next kid told me that he wanted to
be a cameraman so I sat there and did nothing....Sonny took over and gave the kid a TV
camera. Sonny played Hide Go Seek with the Camera, sticking his tongue out, acting like
Sonny......He was a really great sport who loved kid's and his job. I'm 44 years old, a father and
husband and still think back to that wonderful day. — Richard F [46]

At its best, children's television produced by adults involves kids in the production of the
show in a respectful way, and these examples from Nickelodeon and "Wonderama" move in
that direction. Three more titles were (and, happily, in the case of "ZOOM", are) even more
intentional about their commitment to including youth in the production process.

Ceding, and Seeding, Control

The 1990s programs "In the Mix" (PBS) and "UtoU" (Nickelodeon), as well as the 1970s and
revived, ongoing 1990s series "ZOOM" (PBS) explicitly invite contributions from viewers in
order to fill out an entire show.

As they considered the series "In the Mix", its producers spoke with "'hundreds' of local kids
[who...] wanted to see 'real kids talking about issues that concern them.'" WNYC-TV had
tenagers both "front the show [and]—backed up by adult advisers and experienced
producers familiar with teen programming—they also generate the ideas." [19] In its final, earnest execution, teenagers felt it missed the mark. A *Boston Globe* reporter interviewed three students from a local high school, who felt that the show was "guilty of stereotyping teenagers", especially in its visual style, which they claimed was a stale, "overused", "distracting," and ineffective imitation of MTV: "jiggly, strangely cropped and colorized visuals." They most enjoyed a personal "unique story and unrehearsed behavior" by a girl sharing her struggle with cancer, in part because it lacked these camera effects. On the other hand, a high school reporter in the Midwest lavished praise on the show:

"In the Mix" provides an alternative to regular nightly news broadcasts, hiding the monotony of informative segments beneath a fast, upbeat and eye-catching format. ... If you think public television is boring, you're in for a wonderful surprise with "In the Mix." [20]

 Shortly after introducing "In the Mix" for the teenage audience, PBS revived its popular children's series "ZOOM" for the 7- to 12-year-old set. Children generate the ideas for this chestnut through web site submissions and postal mail-ins. Many of these were surprisingly unoriginal: riddles I recall from my childhood, two patty-cake chant patterns, the tried-and-true egg-drop experiment, the craft segment featuring the making of a panty-hose doll head, and a science report observing plant growth. The series perpetuates traditional childhood favorites as much as it encourages originality and creativity.

Ask and they shall receive: Like the surge of interest visited upon "America's Funniest Home Videos", "ZOOM" could receive "more than 25,000 letters a week." [26] As I watched an episode at the Media Lab, a precocious boy of about seven whom I'll call Jordan wandered over to enjoy the program with me while his father attended to his work, and he offered me,
utterly unsolicited, his appreciation and experience with the show in a running commentary. When two of the hosts (all the hosts are children) asked the viewing audience to send in their own letters, Jordan quietly offered, "I don't know how to get something on there." I said I thought there was a website, and he replied, "Well I think when I send stuff to them, they never get it to do it." As an illustration of this, a few moments later, after a joke was read from incoming mail, Jordan said, "I did something like that before, but that's not my name so it's not me." Jordan's comments indicate the lopsided interaction prevalent in the audience-submission format. His contributions must necessarily go largely unacknowledged by the screening staff at PBS. The fine print charmingly attempts to define property for items submitted, appropriating work for wide usage:

All submissions become property of ZOOM and will be eligible for inclusion in all ZOOMmedia. This means that we can share your ideas with other ZOOMers on TV, the Web, in print materials, and in other ZOOMways. So, send it to ZOOM! [49]

The ideas come to ZOOM in myriad forms. The website offers an overwhelming palette of choices (see figure, previous page). It's unclear if the webforms and many categories are meant to streamline submissions or spark ideas among the youth. The parents' site explains its online forum as:

ZOOM is one of the most ambitious Web sites ever created just for kids, and we've rebuilt it for ZOOM's fourth season. The ZOOM site has more than 35 interactive features, and 35 Shockwave movies. WGBH Interactive brings to a massive Web audience a "by kids, for kids" world parallel to that of the PBS TV series. Nearly 100 separate areas are updated every week with new content from ZOOMers all over the world. [50]

Many segments on ZOOM are clearly scripted by adults, as one of the girls seemed to be reading from a cue card as she reviewed "ZOOMsci Feedback", a science report on the

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2 He joined me for about ten minutes, and my transcript is based on the notes I typed in seconds after he spoke each thought. I asked him if it was all right for me to jot down his comments. Poor kid wandering around the Media Lab and subject to all this hungry scrutiny, I thought. As the son of two researchers, he seemed totally unfluffled by this.
growth of seeds. An earlier piece sharing the craft of doll-head sewing using pantyhose and cotton seemed less so, in that the girl presenting that segment mumbled through some steps of the explanation and waved her hands about quite a bit.

While much of the content for both PBS shows "In the Mix" and "ZOOM" originated in minds of their youthful audience, adults still operated the cameras, organized, and produced the shows. The Nickelodeon program "U to U" offers both the opportunity to submit their own material and connect with adults who will help realize their rough drafts. The "U to U" segment "The Loading Dock" features "[v]iewer creations, including cartoon characters, board and playground games and future inventions". Another segment called "Links…provide[d] professional audio and video production equipment and crews to youths with creative ideas" [17]. Producer Bob Altman hoped to "empower kids" [41] using the form of home video to produce, write and direct TV in a way that they [the kids] have total control. It personalizes in a way that documentary never can, and that would be cost-prohibitive anyway, to go to as many countries as we've reached this way. But this gets adults out of the loop. We never change what they write, merely edit, but they get the power to speak their minds. [41]

Of course, editing counts for a lot and can change a piece from being unwatchable (in "America's Funniest Home Videos" terms "OFTTF: Only Funny to the Family") to being popular. Unfortunately, however, "U to U" did not survive long, and became another ratings casualty.

Keeping the Faith

Among the many examples of youth producing video for consumption by a limited audience, a few examples of video produced by youth who are furnished with video, time, and equipment by a major media outlet stand out, "MTV News Unfiltered", Nickelodeon's "Short Films by Short People," and Oxygen's "Trackers."
MTV put out a call for story ideas in 1995. Over 8000 viewers called into a toll-free number. This included many "bogus ideas" or "stupid pitches." [8] Of these, 50 submitted story concepts, storyboards, and scripts to receive their camcorders in the mail, checking in with story coordinators as they progressed, and seven stories finally aired in the first round. [38] Although this sounds suspiciously like a filtering system, not unlike traditional print and broadcast news media’s approach to getting tips and leads from readers [28], story coordinators never voiced opinions, just offered technical and emotional support. This endeavor realized creator Steve Rosenbaum’s dream of making his audience "an essential part of the story-telling process." [38] MTV’s news chief, Dave Sirulnick, said of the show,

"Nowhere else on television will you find news stories where the voice of the viewer shapes the coverage. It's the first MTV news show in which viewers tell us, and each other, what's news. [40]

There are risks. Much like Principal Steadman in TV101, television critic Verne Gay introduces the show as "a range of putative news segments supplied by - heaven help us - kids. Kids from all over the country. Kids of all ages. Kids who are surfers, students, skateboarders, whatever." [8]

Although the MTV series eventually slipped off the air, it did not prevent other stations from giving it a shot. Nickelodeon’s "Short Films by Short People" was supported by the rich talent of Nick’s Creative Lab. [35] This resulted in films directed by fifth- and sixth-graders that was "inventive enough to attract and hold interest," [2] yielding "ideas [that] could not have been born in the mind of an adult." [35]

Finally, Oxygen gave this approach a whirl with girls, teenagers who would fill a two-hour block, "Trackers" with "an on-air teen diary in which high schoolers express their feelings on a parade of subjects" [3] One participant, SuChin Pak prided herself in her performance in
the show, adding, "I don't have, like, any formal training. This is just me." [33] Pouring resources into it, the network ran over budget and suspended production indefinitely [15].

Time and again, it seems that efforts to put creative work by youth on the air are thwarted by the accompanying compulsion to work the material into broadcast quality. How could a similar effort with arguably less noble aims, "America's Funniest Home Videos", gain a reputation as a dirt-cheap operation in the entertainment industry, despite its rigorous screening process? Could a program produced, directed, and generated by youth ever succeed?

**The Challenge Ahead**

Two unfortunate characteristics color many portrayals of and offerings to children on television: disrespect and lack of trust. The best shows turn the tables on the deeply ingrained suspicion of youth which pervades our culture. They also turn the cameras around. Those programs which have respected their audience, offered them opportunities to get behind the camera and define what is important to them, and which trust youth with that responsibility, demonstrate a clear vision of what television, video, and film production could be. Sadly, market pressures will not make such a vision feasible in the near future. Media critic Eric Mink explains why:

The truth is, many of the problems of commercial television can be traced to the system's slavish obedience to the collective whims of its consumers, who already interact intimately with the distributors of TV programs through local and national ratings data. Nevertheless, the dubious notion that media will be better when their consumers have more power is enormously seductive, and that includes the gathering and presentation of news. [28]

In children's television, the stakes are high. Spending by and for children ages 4 to 12 was $24 billion in 1997 [48], and it doubtlessly has risen even higher in the past five years. Advertisers look for high ratings, and ratings drive decisions in commercial television.
Shows like "MTV News Unfiltered" and "Trackers" which offer greater autonomy to youth don't garner the Nielsen numbers they need to survive on the air. And just as the markets balloon, the outlets contract—venues available for youth, or adults for that matter, to voice their story or offer a different opinion merge into major media conglomerates. "Once there were plenty of children's television suppliers. Now the game is down to three players: Viacom, AOL Time Warner, and Disney." [27] Can we expect the mainstream media to take a risk on giving space for the voice of youth? Not until we abandon some of the assumptions of childhood that William Kessen outlines: a "sentimental view" and "Romantic notion of childish innocence and openness." [16] Until we can consider youth as capable of making the same tough decision that we as adults can make, or until there are tools which raise the level of production, it is doubtful that the mainstream media will undertake the risk.
Acknowledgements

Because I have an insufficient memory, I was forced to pull in memories from friends and friends of friends, including some busy but generous people who work in the field of children's television. I am especially grateful to Lu Olkowski and Josh Weinberger for their insight. Other people who threw in their two cents include Jennifer Ahn of the Artist's Rights Foundation, Art Chung, Lygeia Riccardi, Yalda Nikoomanesh, and Kit Laybourne. I thank Gladys Dratch and Marylene Altieri for their help accessing two tapes in the Action for Children's Television Archive at the Gutman Library at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Lastly, Henry Jenkins and Justine Cassell also pointed me in interesting directions!

Final Nods

Television offerings that offer promise of being by and for children, but about which I was unable to discover in detail in my research, include: Elizabeth Hummer's "My Take" (which won an Emmy for teen programming in 2000-01), Disney's "Zoog TV" (promoted as: "It's not TV you watch, it's TV you do."))[48], Jerry Krieg's "Real News for Real Kids", BBC2's "Pass the Mic", Channel 4's "Look Who's Talking". Unpursued hunches by respondents also include some kid-produced bits on "The Great Space Coaster", "Captain Kangaroo", "Patchwork Family", "3-2-1 Contact", "Mr. Wizard", "Bill Nye the Science Guy", "Kids, Incorporated", and "Kids Express."
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Just want to write? Send Zmail
Got a great idea for the site or the show?
Choose what kind of thing it is below and send it to ZOOM!

Reviews
music, book, movie & TV reviews
Poems & Tales
culture vultures step this way
whatZup
join the discussions
one level down, questions to answer include:
Do you have a favorite ZOOM activity? What is it and why?
If you could be a character in a book/a part of the outdoors/a kitchen appliance, what would you be? Why?
If you could break any world record/change one thing in the world/eat anything you wanted for dinner what would it be? Why?
What is your favorite kind of weather/OlympicSport? Why?
What's your biggest achievement so far?

Z3T
travel anywhere in time (one level down, questions to answer include: If you could spend a day with one famous person who is not from your own time, who would it be and why?)

Zoops
share your embarrassing moments

ZOOMsci Experiment
send us new things to try (one level down, the site asks for a title, description, including experiences, "What did you think would happen? What happened, and what can you conclude from that?" includes numbered spaces for a materials list, instructions / procedure)

ZOOMsci Feedback
tell us your results

Gallery
send us your ZOOM art

Survey
tell us what you think

CafeZOOM
send a scrumptious recipe

ZOOMfunny
got a good joke or two?

ZOOMgames
got a fun game to play?

Playhouse
budding playwrights start here

ZOOMzingers
send a brainteaser

ZOOMdo
your arts & crafts go here

ZOOMphenom
weird stuff that happens

ZOOM Into Action
join the ZOOMteam

ZOOMvid
how to send us a video (one level down, it explains: ZOOMvid is your chance to show your home movie on TV. Drama, documentary, or just silly, we want to see it. Make sure you wrap it up well, so it doesn't get damaged in the mail. We can't return your videos, so make a copy to keep for yourself! Send us the original, because the quality needs to be really good for TV.)