



**From:** Controller, Programme Services, Television  
**Room No & Building:** 6034 TC **Telephone Extn:** 2121  
**Subject:** ARTICLE FOR THE TIMES 19th July 1967  
**To:** D.E.  
C.BBC-2

Here is the draft of my article for The Times. I would be most grateful if you would look it over for me in terms of accuracy and policy, and point out any areas of duplication or overlap with your own.

jat

(I.R. Atkins)

AS/20

Director of Engineering

606 H.W.H.

2000/1

20th July 1967

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C.P.S.Tel. copy to: C.BBC-2

I have read your article, which I think is very good, very interesting and correct. It in no way overlaps mine.

**F. O. McLEAN,**

FCMoL/MKPR



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## COLOUR PRODUCTION

DRAFT ARTICLE FOR  
THE TIMES

I.R. Atkins

Our length of experience in monochrome and the sophistication and docility of our present equipment have obscured the background on which television has been built - that of a team operation. For example, the experienced designer and costume supervisor now work in black and white on the same project with a very clear idea of what the other intends to do and with a, by now, instinctive appreciation of the limits within which they can themselves vary their own approach without a clash with the work of the other which would be to the detriment of the final result. This will be the same, in time, in colour, but not until we have the experience.

Meanwhile, the exercises in "Colour Familiarisation", which we have set up at Lime Grove, in which whole production teams headed by a director and his assistant, and including engineers, scene designers, costume and make-up staff, have made their, for the most part, first acquaintance with colour, have emphasised that the predominant characteristics of studio production in colour, as for all television, is the need for team work. Of particular importance is the complete interdependence in most fields of programming of scenic design, costume design, lighting and make-up. There is nothing new about this, it just means that, for the time being at least, we have to bring it more into the foreground of our thinking, and to build it more consciously into the production routine.

In monochrome an ill chosen background with fussy detail, or tone too near that of the faces, will distract from the people who are the subject of the shot. So will an elaborate floral dress on an unimportant extra in the middle distance. We know how to avoid this. Colour can equally distract, either because it dominates the attention when it shouldn't, or because the viewer knows it is being incorrectly reproduced on his receiver.

This means that the stronger colours should be on the subject in the foreground and that above all faces, the viewers' "frames of reference" should be satisfactorily shown. To do this the "acting area" where people will go must

be lit to the right level for the particular colour cameras in use. Colours in the acting area, therefore, costumes, upholstery etc., must be right. Colours in the background may sometimes be controlled in their appearance by lighting.

It follows that these materials and textiles will be less "versatile" than they were in monochrome, where only tone and pattern mattered. Their selection in relation to one another and to the background colour will be more critical and the relevant production decisions relating to their choice will have to be made earlier.

Programmes in the studio may be loosely divided into three broad categories each with its own shade of emphasis on the overall inter-relationship of the four component contributions to the visual result, design, costume, lighting and make-up.

First are programmes with what Richard Levin in his book 'Television By Design' has called a "studio background", programmes in the News, Current Affairs and Discussion field for example. There is no reason why the producer and his team should find great problems introduced by colour here. Such a background need in no way distract from the speakers in the foreground. They themselves will have advice on what to wear which will be almost word for word identical to the advice which used to be given, when such advice was necessary, when people appeared in front of black and white cameras. For men dark suits are acceptable, but a mid-tone in almost any colour is preferable. Avoid pronounced stripes or checks. An off-white or pastel coloured shirt rather than a bright one. Shave if possible to minimise "five o'clock shadow". For women muted rather than bright colours which tend to distract. Smooth, very shiny, fabrics may not flatter. Sequins and very bright jewellery are likely to reflect light and be a distraction. Go easy on the eye shadow and please don't use indelible lipstick in case we would like to adjust it.

The second group of programmes might be labelled "Fantasy". Programmes in the variety field, ballet and so on. Here again the frame of reference is the face. The viewer will not know the precise shade of the background and he will be satisfied with a result on his screen which is pleasing to him, even if it is not precisely as seen by the naked eye in the studio itself. The producer and his team should again not find great difficulty because so many black and

white variety programmes are seen by an audience in the Television Theatre or the studio, and designers, costumiers, and others are in the habit of taking full account of what the "live" audience will see in colour, and the correlation of costume design and lighting is already second nature.

The third group is that of drama and programmes in which the producer is seeking to create an illusion of reality. Here the viewers' frames of reference are many and varied, but his comparison is not with "objective reality" as could be measured with meters, but with his subjective impression of reality when his brain has subdued the irrelevant in what his eye can see and has concentrated on the significant.

The camera does not do this and, when it is looking at a small picture, neither does the brain. Because this is a "created" situation, one assumes that the notable is significant. If it were not, one assumes that it would not be there in that form. Equally, if over emphatic or unnatural seeming colour clashes between foreground and background, or between costume and furniture catch the attention, the illusion the director is seeking to create collapses. It is here that the combined efforts of design, costume, lighting and make-up are at their most important, and because it is impossible to declare in the abstract that, for instance, "the leading lady will wear blue and the setting will be yellow". Because it is neither possible nor desirable to insist that a particular artist wear a personally unsuitable colour, and because there will be an inevitable gap between the theoretically desirable and the practically possible, the correlation of these four component elements of the picture is of particular importance. It is probably at its most vital when the setting is that of "documentary realism" and the sordid. The rather galling paradox is that what you may accept in a documentary film because it is the "real thing" is likely to appear prettified in a play which is telling a story.

The foregoing might suggest an undue interest and concentration on the colour picture to the disadvantage of the many viewers who will see the compatible picture in monochrome on a normal black and white receiver. There are two in-built insurances against this. First, the majority of monitors in the Production Control Room will be monochrome so that every shot will automatically be judged in black and white as well as in colour. Second, the intention is not to exchange

the light and shade of black and white for a flat colour picture, but to add colour to a picture already fully dimensioned by highlight and shadow. Under these conditions the compatible picture is of first-class quality and, indeed, in some respects can be an improvement on the picture to which we have grown accustomed.

IRA/JAT

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