



Natural

By Hal Trussell

One of the most unusual presentations on television is a program that utilizes a natural lighting style. Considering that this style of lighting is the current rage and demand worldwide in motion pictures, why is it rarely seen on "made for tele-

The Boy Who Drank Too Much

Dramatic use of a natural lighting style for a special CBS television movie, is demonstrated by "The Boy Who Drank Too Much." Two young stars, Scott Baio (Buff) and Lance Kerwin (Billy) portray two friends on the high school ice-hockey team who are brought closer together by Buff's drinking problem. Don Murray portrays Buff's alcoholic, but sensitive father. Ed Lauter is Billy's concerned father, reluctant for his son to get so involved with the underside of life.

Director Jerrold Freedman and producers Jerry McNeely and Don Baer felt the visual presentation of this special project would need to contribute to the reality and immediacy of the story. It was decided a natural lighting style would most completely enhance the story and drama to be shot on a four week schedule utilizing practical interiors and exteriors in Madison, Wisconsin, and extensive stage interiors in Los Angeles.

The still photographs which accompany the article are examples of the dramatic potential of scenes lit to appear "natural" when reproduced on the video screen. The director of photography was creative new-comer, Alan Davaiu, whose other dramatic television credits include "Streets of L.A."



Top: Buff and Billy leave the hockey rink after a game injury. Natural background lighting from mercury vapor lights is supplemented on the foreground characters by a 4K HMI bounced into a white card and color-balanced with pale green Rosco #83 gel. For "after hours" ice arena scenes, only selected rink lights were used, leaving intermittent pools of darkness. **Above:** Night interiors for Buff's apartment were kept warm by using 1/2 MT on some interior lights, and extensive use of dimmers. Here, motivated direction of the 750W Softlight key was the on-screen practical lamp. All interior lights utilized Rosco tough spun as diffusion for the natural look of practical lighting. The kitchen background was balanced at 3200K. The kitchen window was left unilluminated as a variation to enclose and isolate the protagonists from the reality of the world.

Lighting for Television

vision" presentations, or on original video tape presentations?

Naturally the first argument this question prompts is the old, "the gamma latitude of television can't carry it." But wait a minute. Can't carry what? Can't carry a made-for-theaters, artistic visual work like "Days of Heaven?" Well of course not. There's no argument there. But that doesn't mean you can't use a "natural" lighting style *specifically* for television.

Anyone who uses this first argument misses the critical level of understanding just what "natural" lighting is. Natural lighting is by definition rendering the results to look "natural."

Therefore, if your medium is film for theatrical distribution, you light it to look "natural" when it is projected in a movie theatre. It follows therefore, if your product is being made for television, your results *as reproduced on video* are what counts.

Barriers to Natural Lighting

Once this first hurdle of understanding has been crossed, there are two other fundamental barriers to be examined and understood.

One is an apparent lack of creative impulse or daring; the other is adherence to what is "safe" and "normal." Obviously these are interrelated and each supports the other. But the walls of Jericho are beginning to show the strain and cracks of change.

The old axiom of television — "you can't give them anything different" — is about to crumble, just as it did in the movie industry.

Remember how once cinema audiences were exposed to European films and their simple but beautiful natural lighting style, the old stalwarts of Hollywood had to stop and check their light meters? In just five short years there developed a new breed of cameraman willing to take

chances. No more special hair lights, lower exposure ranges, and higher ratios of fill-to-key.

While those adhering to the older style moaned and groaned their complaints, the proponents of natural lighting began to flourish. They were the ones who the creative new directors asked — even demanded — to photograph the movies that were to bolt to the forefront of critical acclaim and, interestingly, to the forefront of box office receipts.

In the past two years alone witness, *The Deer Hunter*, *Annie Hall*, *Coming Home*, *Norma Rae*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *The Black Stallion*, *Taxi Driver*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, *All The President's Men*, *Close Encounters*, etc.

And where did those adhering to the older, more formula-oriented style go? Turn on your television set. (Ever wonder why all the programs look alike?)

It is not just these formula-stylists who would have audiences be deprived of visual expression and mood (many of them would and can do much more creative photographic work). Rather, the genesis for the blandness seems to be a concept of "acceptable" visual presentation that has permeated and emulsified some minds in the echelon of programming and producing.

Everything Looks the Same

But why, and where did it start?

Why is a very good question. Why, in the face of the astounding audience response to the totality of mood created by natural style lighting, do television producers and programmers keep churning out (and demanding) a product that looks exactly like every other product?

Caution, fear of trying something "different," not wanting to make their audiences feel beyond a superficial level — these are the obvious and constant (albeit sometimes well deserved) complaints and rationale. But what is further; what's the

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deeper answer? Simple. No one has consistently done it.

Sure, every producer or programmer worth his salt is going to proclaim his last or greatest show did just that. But did it really, and when was that? For all those attempts, where is the level of constancy?

In practical application what it boils down to so often is that same old excuse: "it can't be done." *False*. With today's new equipment, you can even shoot video tape by candlelight. Film transferred to tape has even more latitude.

The equipment and technology are in daily use. Audiences are responding overwhelmingly to natural, rather than unexpressive formula-style photography. What is holding back implementation of "naturally" lit presentations? In the light of such information it would seem to be a matter of simpler recognition.

But, if you had gone to school and been told this was right and that was wrong, then gone on the job and been trained that, yes, that is correct, "this is right, and that is wrong," then worked in the profession for ten years and had



Above left: Outside the supermarket — two 4K HMI's through a 4 x 4 silk boost the shaded area one stop with a soft natural fill. **Above right:** Buff and his father visit inside the hospital. To match the late afternoon exterior, full MT2 is used to light the backing outside the windows and the 10K punching the hard rays of the sun through the windows. One-half MT2 was used on the 4K Softlight providing the interior fill.

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everyone around you echoing and reinforcing, "yes, 'this is right, and that is wrong,'" simple recognition *would be* difficult. In short, simple recognition of the truth is difficult when you are being brainwashed every day. However inadvertent, the simplest and most practical

form of brainwashing is conformity and adherence to the rules.

Well, your Oscar-winning cameramen are *wrong* when they ignore ratios and consider the mood of the scene and the visual effect. Picasso was *wrong* when he expanded his vision and introduced a new dimension to artistic expression. George

Washington was wrong when he fought the King. Benjamin Franklin was wrong, Columbus was wrong, Galileo was wrong, the Magna Carta was wrong, Alexander the Great was wrong, Socrates was wrong? Truth is more. Expression is greater. Watch out, Jericho, the walls are crumbling... □