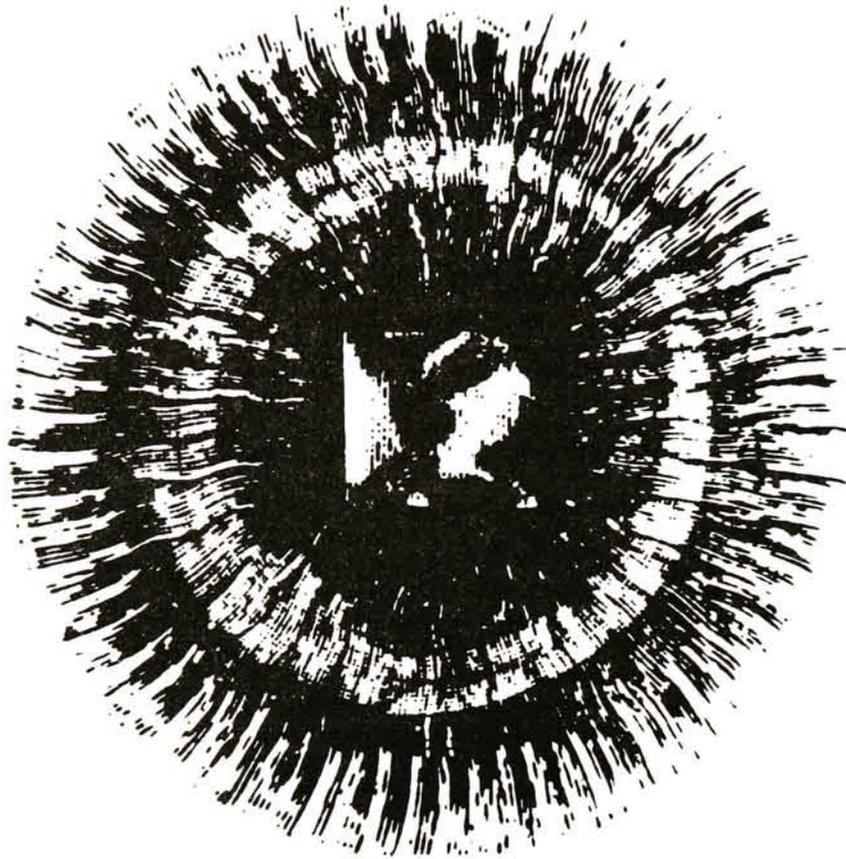


SCAN LINES

by Joyce Nelson

TV in the flesh



"Here's something to forget," says the male narrating voice over the blank TV screen. "You'll watch it," the voice continues in its matter-of-fact tone, "and then you'll forget it." The voice pauses for a moment: a moment in which there is neither sound nor picture. Then an image of a Dristan bottle is flashed on the screen for a millisecond, just long enough to be recognized before it disappears. Over the blank screen the narrating voice casually says, "Forget it", ending the ten-second ad.

There is a subtle, but slightly superior and knowing tone to the narrating voice, which matches the unqualified summarizing statements about "us" that the voice is making. This is the voice of the advertising industry itself, which has researched and studied "us" so thoroughly that it knows precisely how "we" will behave, especially in terms of the television medium.

This knowing voice first engages attention by speaking over a blank screen. In the context of television's non-stop imagery, this blank screen is at first a curiosity, especially because the voice is saying "Here's something..." where there is clearly nothing. But then, upon this initial paradox, the narrating voice builds a second one by completing its statement: "something to forget." We are moved from curiosity to fascination. We are not used to having a television ad call itself forgettable. What is this something-to-forget that we have still not seen?

The blank screen becomes riveting. We are engaged by its lack. Like this blank screen, the narrating voice is also withholding. "You'll watch it, and then you'll forget it," the voice says, refusing to name this "something to forget," further delaying the fulfillment of its verbal offering, and even slightly humiliating "us" with our utterly predictable behaviour that this industry knows so well. Our fascination has become more intimate: triggered by this voice which seems on familiar terms with us. It says "you", perhaps the personal you

of intimate address, and subtly it is teasing us: holding back the something-to-forget, holding back the image itself at the same time that it is suggesting it. The lack becomes expectant desire: a desire for the withheld image.

But then there comes a momentary pause, a pause in which there is neither voice nor image. Desire be-

comes mixed with dread, for suddenly there is nothing: an audiovisual void, a dark and silent screen, an emptiness that momentarily resonates beneath our aroused desire for the image. In this moment of dread and desire, where everything is withheld but the scanning process itself yielding a dark void, we wait in pleasurable agony for the "something to forget," for anything

but this nothingness, this pure television void impressing its scanned mosaic on the human brain pan.

Finally, thankfully, an image is given: a millisecond flash appears out of the void. Something familiar, something wonderfully familiar, in the midst of momentary dread. A glimpse of a Dristan bottle: entirely mundane, ordinarily forgettable, but in this moment of aroused desire and dread, it has filled the nothingness, filled our expectant desire for the withheld image. This flash of the Dristan bottle is pleasurable. "Forget it," says the narrating voice, and, on some level, we know we never will.

Pleasure and desire are founded in an urge to repeat, and subsequent viewings of this ad slightly alter but do not diminish the activation of desire utilized in these ten seconds. "Here's something to forget," says the knowing voice, and immediately we recall, though we have been told not to, that first time. Now the momentary pause, where there is neither voice nor image, is filled not so much with desire and dread, as with the pleasurable knowing thrill that the image is coming if we wait for it, wait and...aahh, it fills the screen, even if only for a moment. And, yes, it's the same Dristan bottle — the familiar beloved, forgettable and yet unforgettable.

But there is one key difference between that first time with the Dristan ad and subsequent viewings. The first time, in our state of aroused desire and dread, it was satisfying enough that the image fill the screen only for that brief millisecond of pleasure. But on repeated viewings, we may want the image to linger, dally, maybe fade slowly from the screen, rather than disappear again suddenly like a phantom lover. For a more lengthy gaze upon this familiar beloved we will have to find Dristan in-the-flesh, so to speak. It is there waiting on the supermarket shelf. Our eyes will light upon it and in that flash of recognition, that remembrance of things past, we will reach for one another and nothing will be withheld.

BOOKSHELF

Standard procedures, concepts and techniques involved in the use of computer-assisted editing systems are expertly discussed by Diana Weynand in **Computerized Videotape Editing**. This practical and clearly written volume, part of a hands-on professional training course, provides effective solutions to a complex process (Weynand Associates, Woodland Hills, CA, \$34.95).

Tracing the roots of a popular movie genre, David Annan in **Cinema of Mystery and Fantasy**, uncovers striking historic precedents to 50 years of sci-fi and horror films. He finds such precursors in the mythical gods and demons, flying monsters, soulless humanoids and natural phenomena that have frightened and awed the human race since the dawn of time (Ungar, NYC, \$8.95).

Over 3400 Westerns made since 1928 are listed in **Shoot-Em-Ups**, a definitive reference guide assembled by Les Adams and Buck Rainey. Alphabetized entries — cast-&-credits and production data — are preceded by informative summaries reflecting consistency of cinematic style during given periods of time. Numerous stills and a full index complete this encyclopedic survey (Scarecrow, Metuchen, NJ, \$49.50).

John H. Lenihan's **Showdown**, an insightful study of the Western film, reshapes our perception of the genre's romantic formula into a realistic view of the American frontier's growing pains. Well-researched and stimulating, this book opens new approaches to the concept of popular culture (U. of Illinois Press, Champaign, IL, \$10.95).

With acknowledged assistance from

the comedian's widow, David Robinson's **Chaplin: His Life and Art** records with insight and skill the successive stages of his career, analyses his work methods, discusses his films, and unfolds the many-stranded tapestry of his public and private life (McGraw-Hill, NYC, \$24.95).

Profiling a versatile actress unafraid of daring roles in controversial movies, Ian Woodward's intimate biography **Glenda Jackson** reveals the complex personality of an intelligent, witty and outspoken star. Winning awards in France, Canada, Great Britain and Hollywood (2 Oscars, 2 nominations), she alternated between flops and hits with equal dedication and visionary purpose (St. Martin's, NYC, \$14.95).

Doug McClelland's **Hollywood on Hollywood** compiles a rich and diver-

sified variety of quotes from film personalities on nearly every facet of growing, working, living and playing in the movie capital. Insightful comments hit their intended targets, often with masochistic accuracy (Faber & Faber, Winchester, MA, \$16.95).

What are the functions of talent agents, business managers, and public relations people who guide top performers' destinies? Agent Whitney Stone answers this question expertly in **Stars and Star Handlers**, an entertaining and fast-filled survey of a most maligned, but generally legitimate, profession (Roundtable Publ., Santa Monica, CA, \$17.95).

George L. George