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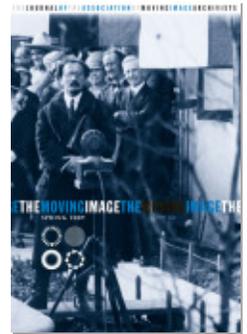
Between Sign-Off Films and Test Patterns: *Insight* at UCLA

Mark Quigley

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1960s, merged with others to form the less-conservative Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in the 1980s (ELCA.org). The ELCA has approximately twice as many members as the LCMS.

2. Fred Pankow and Edith Pankow, *75 Years of Blessings and the Best Is Yet to Come!: A History of the International Lutheran Laymen's League* (St. Louis: Int'l LLL, 1992). Elmer J. Knoernschild's background in religious broadcasting included the self-published *Evangelism by Radio* (1948) and his narration of *The Lutheran Hour* radio series, excerpts of which were released on LPs by RCA Victor in 1958.

3. Mark Quigley, "Hollywood Priest's Legacy to the Archive," *UCLA Film and Television Archive Newsletter*, Oct.–Nov. 2004, 11. See also Ellwood Kieser, *The Spiritual Journey of a Showbusiness Priest* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1996).

4. Pankow and Pankow, *75 Years of Blessings and the Best Is Yet to Come!*.

Between Sign-Off Films and Test Patterns: *Insight* at UCLA

MARK QUIGLEY

As an addendum to Paul Cullum's preceding essay, this article details the UCLA Film & Television Archive's 2003 acquisition of the



A looming statue of St. Paul, under *Insight* end credits. Courtesy of Paulist Productions.

twenty-three-year run of the religious television program *Insight*, and the ongoing efforts to ensure the long-term conservation, preservation, and accessibility of this significant collection of public service broadcasting.¹ Explicating UCLA's involvement, however, requires a personal anecdote. In the winter of 1994, jolted awake in the predawn hours by an unnerving aftershock to California's severe Northridge earthquake, I turned to my television for the reassuring local omniscience of Channel 7's Eyewitness News. Surprisingly, I found instead an eerie, obviously vintage teledrama featuring familiar actor Brian Keith hulking around a sparsely decorated set, devastated that his estranged son's bad LSD trip apparently contributed to a tragic murder. The episode, "The Sandalmaker" (1968), was unique in its earnestness and overtly grim tone—its 4:00 a.m. broadcast slot unsettling yet somehow appropriate. The end credits were equally stark—titles superimposed over an imposing religious statue (of St. Paul the Apostle) draped in shadow. The accompanying authoritative voice-over identified the series, its origin, and aim: "*Insight* is a production of the Paulist Fathers, a group of Catholic priests who serve their God by serving those outside their church."

Created, executive produced, hosted, and occasionally written by Paulist priest Father Ellwood E. Kieser (1929–2000), *Insight* was launched in 1960 and aired nationally in syndication for well over two decades, occasionally enjoying high-profile prime-time programming slots in major markets.² Over the course of *Insight*'s run, a remarkably diverse cross-section of Hollywood artists, from Irene Dunne to Flip Wilson, contributed their talents gratis to the dramatic series—drawn by the show's reputation for consistently stretching the creative boundaries of television. Offbeat and experimental by design, the lower-than-low-budget series won Emmy awards and received critical praise for addressing social issues (the Vietnam War, nuclear proliferation, and suicide, among others) from which network TV shied. The episodes often deployed black humor or stark realism, and nearly always with a humanist, as opposed to strictly Catholic, theme, in keeping with the Paulists' mission to "reach those outside the church."

Within the sweeping broadcast landscape that Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chair Newton Minow rightly or wrongly christened a “vast wasteland,” the anthology series *Insight* represented a jarring disruption of television’s regimented flow of safe entertainment, interrupted in periodic increments by commerce. Presented without commercials, the series played unapologetically as high-quality, half-hour public service announcements, seemingly designed to provide an antidote to TV’s parade of falsely tranquil domestic spaces. Whether played for comedy or as searing drama, *Insight*’s concept of “home” was invariably a setting for characters in deep crisis—often involving the human frailties or mortality of family members. Perpetually set in a dark limbo or physical purgatory, the series featured such tormented archetypes as a lonely disfigured man forced to live in the shadows by his overly protective mother (“Teddy,” 1981) or a man certain that he will die upon turning forty (“Happy Birthday, Marvin,” 1973). Amid the show’s exceptional



Characters in crisis. Detail from *Insight*’s animated title sequence. Courtesy of Paulist Productions.

drama, admirable experiments, and occasional misfires, a thematic resonance can be found: an attempt to illuminate the consequences of ill-advised actions, frequently taken on the shabby edges of existence, and to point to a way out.³

By 1978, despite aggressive promotion, the program suffered a 41 percent decline from its coverage of 171 stations in 1970.⁴ The year 1983 saw *Insight*, one of the last descendants of the golden age of television drama, cease production—victim to the rise of paid airtime by televangelists and slack enforcement of FCC “public interest credit” for TV stations during an era of deregulation. By the early 1990s, the once celebrated series, which in its heyday enjoyed deep syndication over 195 stations and accolades in the *New York Times* and the Hollywood trades, was relegated to sporadic or unscheduled filler time slots. Reruns appeared in the twilight hours of the Sunday morning programming ghetto, alongside other broadcast ephemera nearing extinction, such as test patterns and national anthem sign-offs.⁵

Nearly a decade after my accidental encounter with this outré cathode relic, lingering curiosity (compounded by a dearth of detailed reference resources) prompted me to track down and cold-call Paulist Productions, the company behind *Insight*, to inquire as to the fate of the moving image legacy of their strange, ambitious series, which by 2003 had been driven from the airwaves altogether by all-night infomercials. To my surprise, the kind voice on the other end of the line at Paulist headquarters indicated that *Insight* holdings did survive, though entombed in the unlikelyst of places—the dank recesses of the infamous oceanfront property where, in 1935, screen star Thelma Todd (a.k.a. “Hot Toddy,” featured with the Marx Brothers in *Monkey Business* and *Horse Feathers*) was found in the garage, slumped over the steering wheel of her convertible, dead at age thirty.⁶

Built in the 1920s, the 15,000 square-foot landmark, a Spanish-Moorish three-level structure near the Santa Monica Pier, was once playground to Todd and her part-time lover and business partner, director Roland West (*The Bat Whispers*, 1930). Todd kept an ocean-view apartment on West’s vast property, which also featured a roadhouse restaurant, Thelma



A weathered 1-inch videoreel case as found in the improvised vault spaces of Paulist Productions (formerly Thelma Todd's speakeasy).

Todd's Sidewalk Café, as well as Joya's, a popular after-hours Hollywood watering hole and alleged gangland hangout. The club's volatile mix of clientele, ranging from starlets and movie moguls to mobsters, fueled speculation about the suspicious circumstances of Todd's demise. Accidental carbon monoxide poisoning, murder at the hand of West, and the work of extortionists connected to organized crime were among the conjectured causes of her death.

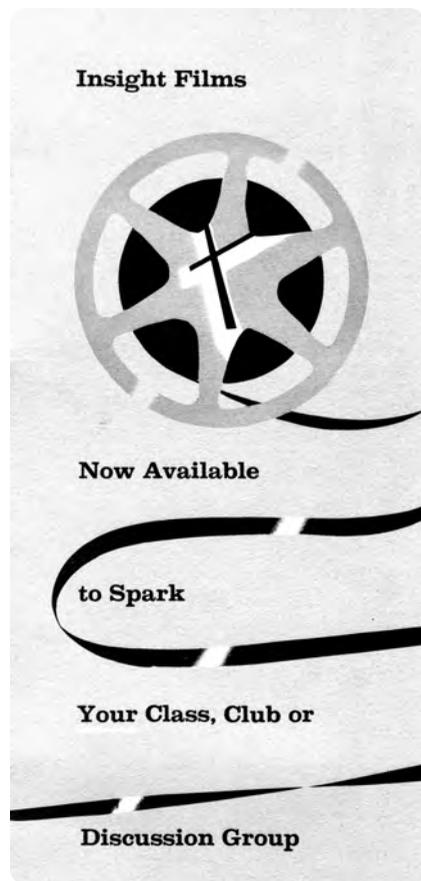
The ornate original doors to Joya's speakeasy, with its name emblazoned in etched glass, survive as the portal to Paulist Productions. The storied building found its way to the Catholic group via West's second wife, actress Lola Lane of the singing Lane Sisters (and costar alongside Bette Davis in 1937's *Marked Woman*). After remarrying and converting to Catholicism, Lane and husband Robert Hanlon became taken with Father Kieser and allowed him to utilize the ground floor for production offices, eventually selling the entire property to the Paulists at a fraction of market cost. The irony of the site of Todd's scandalous death as the setting for a religious

production company was not lost on the notoriously resourceful Father Kieser, who only half-jokingly told a reporter that the Paulists “exorcised the place before we moved in,” and that his screening room was once the “night-club's men's bathroom.”⁷

After decades of active television production, the Paulists adapted several sections of the humid underbelly of the speakeasy for storage of their master and circulation film and tape elements. Through these dark, damp, expansive catacombs of Todd's former haunt, a Paulist Productions staff member led UCLA's television archivist Dan Einstein and me to the Holy Grail—hundreds of kinescopes and videoreels of *Insight*. Our first assessment of the find brought both relief and concern. On the positive side, Paulist staff and volunteers had done an admirable job of shelving and organizing many of the legacy holdings—row after row of rusty 16mm cans and weathered but sturdy 1- and 2-inch videoreel cases. More worrisome was the lack of suitability of the physical space—dusty, balmy, with exposed pipes snaking through the basement area and a saggy, water-stained ceiling overhead. For environmental control, only a tiny electric home-use dehumidifier chugged away in a corner. Thankfully, our initial inspection of the films and magnetic media revealed no signs of mold or other severe condition issues.

As befits a religious nonprofit, these improvised vault spaces were the only fiscal option available to the Paulists for their collection's substantial storage needs. Father Frank Desiderio, successor to the late Father Kieser and president of Paulist Productions from 2000 through the summer of 2009, welcomed UCLA's intervention.

“*Insight* represents something that doesn't exist anymore: faith-based, scripted, quality TV programming, delivered free to television stations for broadcast,” says Desiderio. “It was both entertaining and helped raise consciousness about social concerns and questions of spirituality. I was very concerned about the conditions under which these important videotapes and films were stored. With the sea air and summer heat our masters were in danger of deteriorating. *Insight* was such a unique show that I wanted to make sure it was preserved for future media



In addition to receiving decades of television syndication, *Insight* was actively marketed via catalog sales and rentals of 16mm prints. Courtesy of Paulist Productions.

researchers, especially those interested in religious programming.”⁸

With Father Desiderio’s blessing, formal deposit terms were agreed upon which allowed UCLA Film & Television Archive to become the long-term custodian of Paulist Productions’ physical *Insight* holdings. As the series was prolifically syndicated for decades and actively marketed on 16mm to schools and churches via catalog sales, the Paulists held redundant copies of many episodes across multiple physical formats. Our first task was to sort through these holdings to locate

2-inch videoreel masters where extant, or best available copies on 1-inch videoreels and 16mm prints where they were not. After numerous visits to the Paulist offices, UCLA accessioned over 450 items, representing nearly the entire run of the *Insight* series: 82 two-inch videoreels, 151 one-inch videoreels, and 228 twelve-hundred-foot reels of 16mm film. These holdings were inventoried, and in some cases recanned, at UCLA’s “vaults” headquarters, located at the Television Center complex in Hollywood (formerly the historic Technicolor laboratory, built in 1924). After accession, the *Insight* holdings were transferred for safekeeping and conservation storage at the University of California’s Southern Regional Library Facility on the UCLA campus—a secure, temperature- and humidity-controlled, high-capacity space designated for UC library materials, archives, and manuscript collections.

Preservation efforts have focused on the migration of 2-inch videoreels of select *Insight* episodes to Digital Betacam. This work is conducted in the CBS Videotape Annex, part of CBS Television City, where many *Insight* episodes were originally produced. Founded in 1995 as a unit of CBS’s Videotape Operations division, the annex is fondly referred to as “Jurassic Park,” for its impressive collection of dinosaur equipment that remains in constant use. It serves as home to UCLA’s Ampex AVR-1, a 2-inch quad machine (as well as several additional 2-inch VTRs). Under a cooperative arrangement in place since 2002, CBS maintains and utilizes the AVR-1 for CBS/Paramount library projects and external clients, as well as gratis preservation transfers for UCLA—sometimes a considerable undertaking.⁹

“UCLA’s vintage AVR-1 has been extensively modified throughout the years, and all legacy format machines are a challenge to operate and maintain,” says David Keleshian, one of a team of video technicians at CBS. “Luckily, CBS has had the foresight, at considerable cost, to maintain in-house facilities and keep parts in stock.”¹⁰ To date, over three hundred of UCLA’s television holdings on 2-inch tape have been preserved at CBS, including four noteworthy episodes of *Insight*.

To support scholarly and professional access via the Archive Research and Study



Father Kieser introduces a moral dilemma in “Locusts Have No King” (1965), an *Insight* episode preserved by UCLA Film & Television Archive. Courtesy of Paulist Productions.

Center (ARSC) on the UCLA campus, Dan Einstein created bibliographic records with key credits and program summaries for the majority of the *Insight* holdings. These are available via the public access catalog (<http://cinema.library.ucla.edu>). With only a handful of *Insight* episodes released on VHS (for the religious educational market), and its reemergence on DVD precluded by potential clearance issues, access to the series is currently limited to ARSC. Researchers may make appointments to view more than 75 *Insight* episodes that have been transferred to VHS use copies. Episodes held only in legacy formats can be transferred for viewing per patron research request. Academic outreach for the *Insight* collection at UCLA has also included the presentation of a highlight reel along with a preserved episode (“Locusts Have No King,” 1965) at the sixth Orphan Film Symposium in 2008, where a late-afternoon screening substituted admirably for the series’ customary 4:00 a.m. time slot.¹¹

INSIGHT EPISODES PRESERVED AT UCLA FILM & TELEVISION ARCHIVE

“Locusts Have No King” (1965), prod. No. 157. Writer: Gilbert Ralston; director: Ted Post; primary cast: William Shatner, Geraldine Brooks, Kent Smith, Henry Beckman. Synopsis: A businessman must decide if it is his civic and moral

duty to stand against criminal political corruption in his municipality.

“The Hate Syndrome” (May 14, 1966), prod. No. 172. Writer: Rod Serling; director: Marc Daniels; primary cast: Eduard Franz, James Beggs, Harold Stone. Synopsis: A Hebrew teacher confronts a former pupil that has abandoned his Jewish heritage to become an American Nazi party member.

“The Sandalmaker” (April 22, 1968), prod. no. 200. Writer: David Moessinger; director: John Newland; primary cast: Brian Keith, Don Quine, Tim O’Connor. Synopsis: A young man accused of murder while under the influence of LSD clashes with his father over the morality of a dishonest legal defense.

“The Poker Game” (March 2, 1969), prod. no. 310. Writer: Jack Hanrahan; director: Ralph Senensky; primary cast: Ed Asner, Booker Bradshaw, Don Dubbins, Bill Bixby, Peter Haskell, Jeffrey Hunter, Beau Bridges. Synopsis: A card game becomes hostile when an idealistic young man reveals the hidden frailties among a group of middle-aged friends.

Executive producer and host (all episodes): Father Ellwood Kieser, C.S.P.

NOTES

Special thanks to Father Frank Desiderio and the Paulist Productions staff for their ongoing support of the UCLA Film & Television Archive’s efforts.

1. *Los Angeles Times* television listings for October 16, 1960, indicate the date as the broadcast debut of *Insight*. According to Paulist Productions’ internal records, the last original *Insight* episode was produced in 1983.
2. “‘Insight’ Series Achieves Primetime Status on May 3,” *Hollywood Reporter*, Apr. 30, 1965.
3. In a 1984 interview, Kieser said “What we try to do around here [at Paulist Productions] is irrigate the wasteland, bring a humanistic perspective to television.” Ursula Vils, “Priest, Producer, and ‘Half a Ham,’” *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 16, 1984.
4. Ellwood E. Kieser, *Hollywood Priest: A Spiritual Struggle* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 240.
5. Bill Ornstein, “Father Kieser’s ‘Insight’ Show Now Beamed Over 195 Stations,” *Hollywood Reporter*, July 27, 1966; Jack Gould, “TV: Paulist Fathers Face Real Issues,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1969.

6. See also Robert W. Welkos, "A Mystery Revisited; A Building that Figured in the Unsolved Death of Actress Thelma Todd Is for Sale," *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 2002.
7. Cecil Smith, "'Insight' Calls God to Account," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 27, 1980.
8. Frank Desiderio, e-mail, June 12, 2008.
9. Pioneering Los Angeles television station KTLA donated the Ampex AVR-1 to UCLA in 1992. KTLA has partnered with UCLA in numerous preservation projects, including the preservation of the color videotape used for the 1958 NBC special *An Evening with Fred Astaire*. The work resulted in technical Emmy Awards for the UCLA Film & Television Archive, Ed Reitan, Don Kent, and Dan Einstein in 1988. The Archive's Ampex AVR-1 was relocated to CBS in 2002.
10. David Keleshian, e-mail, June 18, 2008.
11. The "Church and State" relationship between UCLA and the Paulists was humorously labeled "Strange Bedfellows" by Dan Streible for the Orphans 6 program, where *Insight* was coupled with Mark J. Williams screening an episode of *The Orchid Award* (ABC, 1953) starring Ronald Reagan and Liberace.

Tributes to Bill O'Farrell

ROSEMARY BERGERON AND SAM KULA (Library And Archives Canada)

Bill O'Farrell brought an amazing level of energy, passion, creativity, and a decidedly unbureaucratic approach to his work at Library and Archives Canada (LAC). He was always a strong advocate for the particular needs and interests of moving image preservation amidst the competing priorities of a large archival institution where film and television were just a part of the mandate.

Bill's career at LAC began in 1975. At the age of twenty-one, he was already an experienced laboratory hand, having worked summers at Crawley Films, where his father worked for over forty years. Family lore has it that Bill and his sister had several uncredited roles as toddlers in dad's documentaries. Crawley Films was Canada's most successful private-sector production company in the sixties and seventies. One of Bill's proudest



Bill O'Farrell, March 23, 2006, Columbia, South Carolina, at the Sixth Orphan Film Symposium. Courtesy of Rick Prelinger.

accomplishments at LAC was the acquisition of the Crawley Collection when the company was sold in 1982.

When Bill joined the LAC, the "laboratory," headed by Roger Easton, had a staff of five, with the safety films stored in the basement of an old office building in downtown Ottawa. Bill learned fast. He never stopped learning and acquired a university degree while on the job. He helped plan and execute several vault moves to increasingly better storage conditions. By the early 1980s, Bill was head of the film lab and still improving his skills. Everything he had learned about vault construction, vault management, and moving image laboratory practices went into his contributions to the design of the Gatineau Preservation Centre which opened in 1997. The film, video, and audiotapes preserved there today function as a testament to his years of service.

Bill was always as interested in content as he was in conservation. Mention a collection name and he would be able to describe its acquisition, condition, and value. He was continually researching early film production and frequently advised his colleagues about potential acquisitions. Bill spent so much time