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Science on American Television: A History by Marcel Chotkowski LaFollette

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Konrad Zuse und die Schweiz should be useful for researchers interested in the history of computing in Europe, especially in the German-speaking regions. It is certainly not the definitive account of the history of computing, but it is one of the few published efforts dealing with the emergence of computers and scientific computing in Switzerland. It fills some interesting gaps in our previous knowledge about Konrad Zuse's computing machines, especially the Z4 and the rediscovered M9.

RAUL ROJAS

Marcel Chotkowski LaFollette. *Science on American Television: A History.* x + 306 pp., illus., bibl., index. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2013. \$45 (cloth).

Science on American Television gives a valuable overview of the actors—television producers, professional popularizers, and scientists—involved in the display of scientific knowledge to American television audiences in the second half of the twentieth century, with a focus on the vagaries of the Smithsonian Institution's involvement with the arch-medium of the period. The tone, overall, is rather pessimistic. Throughout the volume Marcel LaFollette bemoans television's (mis)handling of science. She eventually reaches the conclusion that although television could have offered "a remedy for the age-old separation between scientists and society" (p. 219), it has not lived up to expectations. The blame rests mainly with television's capitalism-inflected culture but also a little bit on the shoulders of scientists, who in five decades have not quite managed to learn how to tame the medium.

The story starts with *Serving through Science* (1946–1947), a series of half-hour *Encyclopaedia Britannica* films followed by studio discussions. Hosting the series was Miller McClintock, board member and consultant to Encyclopaedia Britannica Films. This "clever entrepreneur" (p. 10) with a pronounced interest in advertising and public relations techniques saw television as a means for marketing educational films. According to LaFollette, this is the seed from which U.S. television science was to grow in the following decades. The history of science on American television would therefore be one of the hijacking of science as a marketing tool to serve the commercial interests of corporate sponsors and underwriters.

The rest of the book forwards this analysis, through case studies on such topics as the presentation of medical knowledge (Ch. 5) or the rise of entrepreneurial popularization, exempli-

fied by Carl Sagan (Ch. 11). Most of it rests on reviews of the existing secondary literature (although some recent works are, surprisingly, omitted), except for the three chapters devoted to the Smithsonian Institution (Chs. 7, 8, and 14) and based on papers kept in the institution's archives. This is the best part of the volume, LaFollette offering detailed accounts of the discussions held during the planning and production phases of such programs as CBS's 1971 *Smithsonian Adventure*, David Wolper's 1974 *Monsters! Mysteries or Myths?* and Adrian Malone's series from the 1980s, *Smithsonian World*. These chapters nicely present participants' sometimes conflicting beliefs about how best to communicate science on television—and why.

As a discussion of the place of television in the public culture of science in the United States during the past fifty years, *Science on American Television* lacks depth. For instance, the marketplace category is used in quite a sterile way, pitting commerce and economic forces against a supposedly pure and disinterested science. This approach leaves the reader wondering whether LaFollette's stark criticism of television's commodification of scientific knowledge is not a case of blaming the messenger. Recent works on the history of U.S. science in the period (e.g., Steven Shapin's *The Scientific Life* [Chicago, 2010]) indicate that it has been characterized by a move, among scientists, toward a commercialization of science. From such a perspective, television's treatment of scientific knowledge would be the expression of a broader sociocultural tendency, not simply the consequence of the medium's unholy alliance with the forces of capitalism. Or again, the book seems to work on the assumption that there exists such a thing as a self-evident distinction between entertainment and education. Yet works in the history of science over the past thirty years have made clear that such a dichotomy is a construct used as an instrument to demean public uses and appropriations of scientific knowledge, which are perceived as threats to scientists' cognitive authority.

Despite such weaknesses, *Science on American Television* is a well-researched empirical account that will undoubtedly be a source of inspiration for historians of popular science. In particular, it helpfully points toward a wealth of possible avenues for future historical work—for example, comparisons between the American case and European ones.

JEAN-BAPTISTE GUYON