

THE CONVERSATION SOCIETY

presents

Dialogue #14: Sherwood Schwartz and Charles Douglass

(This legendary exchange between the producer of The Brady Bunch, Sherwood Schwartz, and the inventor and operator of the Laff Box, Charles Douglass, took place on August 23, 1970, at Paramount Studios in Hollywood, CA.)

Sherwood Schwartz: I'm across the hall listening to what you're doing and I'm not crazy about where you're putting the laughs.

Charles Douglass: I'm putting the laughs where you told me to put them.

SS: No you're not. You're giving all the big belly laughs to Florence Henderson. Alice B. Davis gets the big belly laughs. The comedy's in the kitchen. I told you that.

CD: Florence Henderson isn't funny, so she needs a little bit more. Alice isn't funny either, but she can get by with less.

SS: What the hell do you know about funny?

CD: Enough to save your show from absolute mediocrity.

SS: My show is Nielsen Top 20.

CD: That's because it's filthy.

SS: Filthy?

CD: Yes. People don't watch it for the comedy. They watch it for the obscene living arrangement. It's an orgy waiting to happen. The whole set-up's depraved.

SS: The set-up reflects a social reality in America. There are plenty of homes that look just like the Brady's.

CD: I've seen very few homes that look like theirs, and even fewer in which the breadwinner is a homosexual.

SS: Mike Brady is not a homosexual.

CD: No, but Robert Reed is.

SS: Bob Reed's a pain in the ass, but he's not a fag.

CD: He propositioned me in the hallway last week.

SS: With what?

CD: Manual stimulation, among other things.

SS: Maybe you should've gone for it. Would've loosened you up a bit.

CD: I'm going to pretend you didn't say that.

SS: You're as square as that box you wheel around, Douglass, a real four-pointer.

CD: I'm a professional, and right now you're invading my professional space. This is my thing, that I do, by myself. Leave me alone so I can finish.

SS: I don't want you to finish. I didn't even want you to start. The network brings you in because they're afraid to let the viewers think and feel for themselves.

CD: The people at home need me. They don't know what's funny. I'm giving them instructions. I'm giving them presence!

SS: The people at home hate you. They don't want you telling them when to laugh, how to laugh. Besides, your tracks are all outdated. How often do you refresh your catalogue?

CD: That's no business of yours, Mr. Schwartz, but I can assure that all my tapes are contemporary.

SS: Where'd you get them?

CD: I keep my sources confidential.

SS: I heard you took them from *The Red Skelton Show*. I used to write for that show, you know. So, technically, your laughs belong to me, and I should have final say as to where they go.

CD: Then I invite you to sit down and give it a whirl.

SS: I'm not touching that thing. It'd be like hugging an anti-semite.

CD: Why? Are you frightened by its bulk? Are you bewildered by its science? Are you threatened by its power?

SS: Of course I am. Look at it! It's a torture device. Only someone with the black heart of an executioner could run it smoothly.

CD: This box is an orchestra, and I am its conductor. You can talk all you want about how bad I am, but your show would be shit without me.

SS: You'd be shit without my show.

CD: I'd be fine. I can afford to walk out of here and never come back again.

SS: What do you think you got—a monopoly? You got the saddest market in the industry cornered?

CD: I'm the only ticket in town.

SS: Just put the laughs where I told you, Charley, all right. I don't want your delusions of grandeur. I don't want your personal take on the show. Florence gets the giggles, Alice gets the guffaws. The housekeeper is funny.

CD: The housekeeper is a lesbian.