

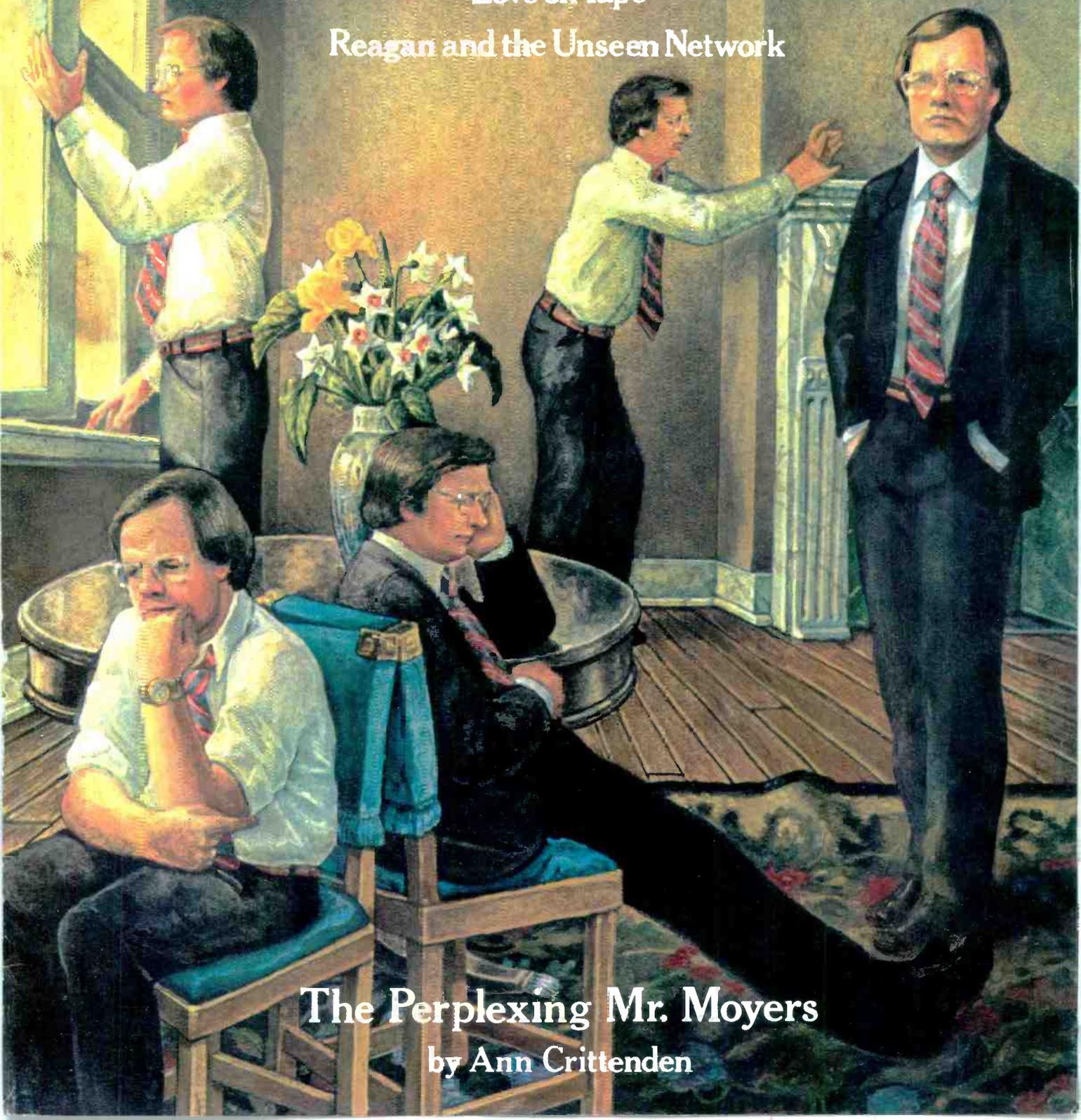
CHANNELS

O F C O M M U N I C A T I O N S

Why Everyone Is Afraid of Ma Bell

Love on Tape

Reagan and the Unseen Network



The Perplexing Mr. Moyers

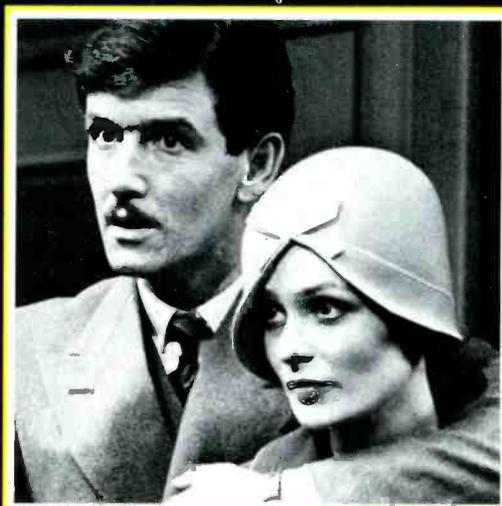
by Ann Crittenden

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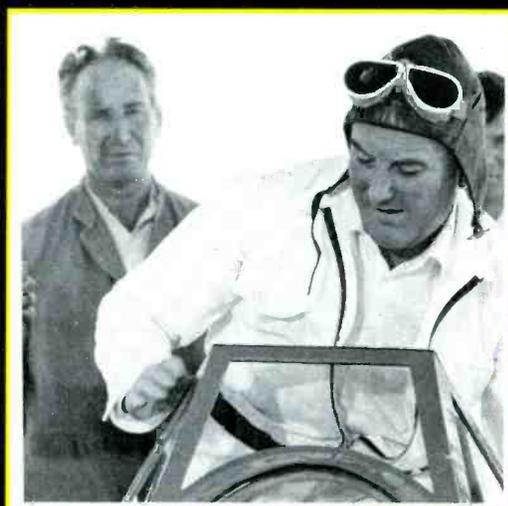
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Page 19

The Perplexing Mr. Moyers

by Ann Crittenden

This fiercely independent journalist will either change CBS News — or it will change him.



Page 24

The Struggle for Poland's Airwaves

by Rob Steiner

Solidarity's demand for freedom of information threatens the government's political power.



Page 28

Why Is Everyone Afraid of Ma Bell?

by Joel Swerdlow

The giants of cable, computers, and publishing are battling to keep AT&T out of their businesses.



Page 34

Critical View: Archie Bunker and the Liberal Mind

by Christopher Lasch

The traditional debate over Norman Lear's shows says as much about the debaters as it does about Archie Bunker.

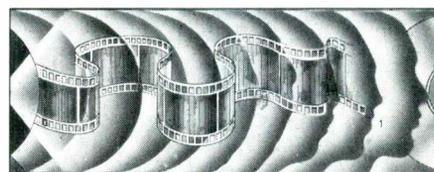


Page 38

Love on Tape

by Susan Heeger

An extraordinary video work opens a new window on both the medium and the people around us.



Page 42

New Tech: Video Disk versus Video Disk

by David Lachenbruch

The two versions of TV's "phonograph" have less in common than meets the eye.



Page 46

The Businessman on the Box

by Michael Pollan

A three-piece suit is a sure sign that a TV character is a bad guy. Why is television biting the hand that feeds it?



Page 52

And Gracie Begat Lucy Who Begat Laverne . . .

by Michael Malone

Television's family of sitcoms tells us who we think we are, and who we thought we were.



Page 64

At Issue: Should Television Advertise Contraceptives?

by Rick Horowitz

The Broadcast Code says no, but others argue that it would serve the public interest.

DEPARTMENTS

ISSUES AND IDEAS

Letters _____ Page 2

CrossCurrents _____ Page 7
Essays and Observations

On Air _____ Page 12
Commentary by Walter Karp, Mimi Sheraton, and Lawrence K. Grossman

The Public Eye _____ Page 17
"Reagan and the Unseen Network" by Les Brown

CRITICISM AND REPORTS

Book Reviews _____ Page 61
"Television as 'Art' — Science as 'Television' "

Quo Video _____ Page 67
Global and National Reports

TV Guidance _____ Page 72
"Morality in Marketing" by Roger Director

Cartoonist's View — Charles Barsotti

Cover illustration by Tom Woodruff

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We Too Sang the Blues

To the Editor:

Loren Jenkins's "Singing the Salvador Blues" [*Channels*, August/September], in which I and my colleague Frank Manitzas were immortalized in song, brought back many unhappy thoughts of the danger and difficulty in covering the El Salvador conflict.

Frank, as ABC News' Latin American bureau chief, and I, then as Southern bureau chief, had the terribly unpalatable task of lining up people literally to lay their lives on the line for us in El Salvador. There is absolutely nothing tougher in our business than being the person who has to send people into such situations.

During many nervous days and sleepless nights waiting for the phone to ring with bad news, we too sang the Salvador blues.

BILL KNOWLES
Washington Bureau Chief
ABC News

On Shortening the Campaign Trail

To the Editor:

Regarding your article by John V. Lindsay ["A Vote for British-Style Political Advertising," *Channels*, August/September]:

The difficulty with the adoption of the British system of prohibiting paid air-time for political candidates is that it gives an unwarranted benefit to the incumbent. Few challengers, especially for Congressional and Senate seats, could hope to match the name recognition of a well-established incumbent without the use of paid television.

By the same token, American political campaigns are too long. With the advent of the independent expenditures of political action committees, it was not unusual to find these groups running negative advertising—on the electronic media and in print media—well over a year before the general election they hoped to influence.

So I would suggest some modification of Mr. Lindsay's support of an all-out

prohibition of political television. An effort should be made to shorten the actual campaign period—both the long string of Presidential primaries and the early primaries for Congressional seats.

Within the framework of the shortened campaign period, broadcasters could provide meaningful time periods for the contending candidates to debate specific issues central to the offices they seek.

In that way, both the incumbent and the challenger would have appropriate exposure to the voters. We could then move to restrict the basically self-serving selling of candidates through paid television commercials.

It would be difficult to change a system in which so many now have a vested interest. But I agree with Mr. Lindsay that such a change is in order.

GEORGE MCGOVERN
Chairman
Americans for Common Sense
Washington, D. C.

For Third-Party Coverage

To the Editor:

John Lindsay is clearly right about the high cost of television campaigning and the impact of that media campaign on elections. We do ban television advertisements for liquor, for cigarettes (not for over-the-counter drugs) at what might be called the lower end of the spectrum of human needs and desires. Possibly it would be good to impose a ban at the other end of the spectrum—advertising for both politics and religion—leaving the middle open for deodorants, hair spray, laxatives, etc.

The causes of better politics and better government would be well served if television reporting on both or on either could be banned or limited, so that the electorate could pass a more reflective judgment on candidates and officeholders.

John Lindsay cites the British experience. It is not a good guide. In England, third or fourth parties are given fair coverage, as they are in Canadian provinces that support political parties. Even with the equal-time provisions of our communications law and the Fairness Doc-

trine, neither equity nor fairness is observed toward parties other than the Republican and the Democratic.

Not only do the networks refuse to give equal time to other than the two major parties, they refuse to sell time to make up the difference. In 1976 the Libertarian candidate, Roger McBride, was refused time by television stations because, they maintained, the Republican and the Democratic conventions had not been held, and McBride had already been nominated, so he would be given an advantage by the early sale of time.

In that same campaign year, although polls showed me holding from 8 to 12 percent of the vote at varying times, I was mentioned only nine times in the four months of the campaign (from August through the election date in November), five on CBS news reports and four on NBC, according to network testimony before the Federal Communications Commission. CBS, NBC, the FCC, and eventually the courts, thought this adequate coverage for a third-party candidate, under the provisions of the Equal-Time Law and the Fairness Doctrine.

Difficult as it is for a candidate to raise enough money for television advertising, I think that unless fairer coverage is given to non-Republican and non-Democratic candidates, banning televised political advertising would give the networks even more control over the political process than they have now.

EUGENE J. MCCARTHY
Woodville, Virginia

(The writer is the former Senator from Minnesota.)

Primer Facie

To the Editor:

I tried skimming the August/September issue of *Channels*, and found it impossible.

The range and quality of the articles, for someone both professionally and personally interested in all aspects of television, is amazing. For example, Jack Pitman's piece about British television ["Why Britannia Rules the Airwaves"] is the most concise and best "primer" I have read.

Of course, as an industry insider, I dis-

agree with several points raised in some of the articles. But that does not diminish *Channels'* role in stimulating deeper thought—and action—about "television."

EDWARD BLEIER
Executive Vice President
Warner Bros. Television
New York City

Redrawing the Delicate Line

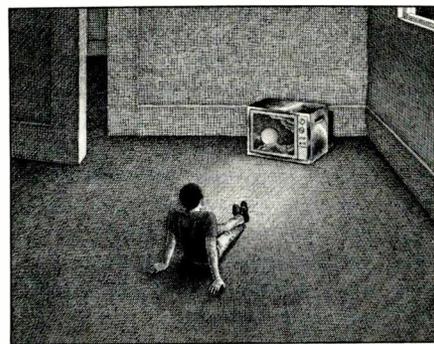
To the Editor:

Broadcast television is essentially generated by a few hundred individuals and advertisers and is received in hundreds of millions of homes worldwide. I assume that everyone can agree and understand that special-interest groups have a right to care about the way in which their concerns are portrayed on commercial television.

"Overstepping the Delicate Line" [*Channels*, June/July] expresses concern that in recent years some such groups have overstepped the boundaries of legitimate interest and now appear to have a powerful effect on commercial television's content.

What I fail to understand: Why is it okay for a few hundred to decide what comes into hundreds of millions of homes, when it is not okay for special-interest groups to have any influence?

ROBERT THAYER JORDAN
Alexandria, Virginia



Spare Us Despair

To the Editor:

Few people are better qualified to remind us of the despair-filled lives of many of the nation's children than Robert

Coles. His article in the June/July issue of *Channels*, "What Harm to the Children?", is a moving piece on the plight of our young: their loneliness, anxiety, bewilderment, anger, and sense of hopelessness. Under the guise of writing about children and television, Dr. Coles has addressed the entire gamut of children's problems in our society. As he says, "The real issue . . . for many children is not Maurice Sendak or various stupid television shows; the issue is the character of family life that is the inheritance, these days, of thousands and thousands of children."

Dr. Coles is right—children and adolescents face much worse problems in their lives today than their relationship with television. Reading Dr. Coles's article, I felt that in addressing these problems he appears to have fallen victim to the very despair he has documented in so many young people. His article seems to suggest that there is no sense in trying to give children something better than what he calls "tube junk," because, in their problem-ridden lives, neither "good" nor "bad" television can be a significant influence. In addition, he seems to say that children receive such an overload of visual stimuli each day that most of the television they see doesn't really penetrate their consciousness.

I do not argue with Dr. Coles's description of many children's pain and despair. But I do argue with his own sense of despair and with his apparent belief that it is useless to try to improve young people's television-viewing experiences. Television cannot lift a child out of the ghetto, or give him his parents' attention, or spare him from physical and emotional abuse. But some television programs can help some children with some problems some of the time. Believing this, I am convinced that it is important to encourage television producers and programmers to offer children and young adolescents the greatest possible diversity of programs designed with their special needs in mind. Because if a few children are reached, comforted, enlightened, excited, or even just entertained by television, then some amount of pain has been alleviated. And that is enough for me.

I also believe that it is important to continue helping parents to maintain better control over their children's television

viewing. Children in this country watch much too much of it, and the vast majority of them do not benefit from an average of twenty-seven weekly hours in front of the set. Some parents aren't home to turn off the set, some won't, and some don't care. But some parents, when reached with encouragement and advice, will try. And their children will usually be the better for their concern. Again, that small success is enough for me.

Dr. Coles's article is persuasive, and his despair is contagious. But there are antidotes to the disease. One of them is to watch an episode of KQED's *Up and Coming*, a series about black teenagers in a strong, supportive family, or Blackhawk Cable Communications' *Reach for the Sky*, a local cable program of exceptional warmth, for young children in Hurst, Texas. Television programs like these *can* help solve some of the problems. And if the hopelessness expressed by Dr. Coles in his article keeps programs like *Up and Coming* and *Reach for the Sky* from getting funding and air- or cable-time, then perhaps despair is a sin after all.

PEGGY CHARREN
President
Action for Children's Television
Newtonville, Massachusetts

Turning On

To the Editor:

Educators have not begun to think sensibly, let alone carefully, about the impact of television. They are afraid of the medium, and very few of them have succeeded in using television constructively.

I was impressed by Grace Hechinger's article, "Tuned-Out Teachers and Turned-Off Kids" [*Channels*, August/September]. I have had the idea for some time that educators and television people should stop hurling accusations at each other and find a way for some constructive conversation. But I suspect that the first move in that discussion will probably have to come from the television side. Maybe some cable owners, if not network people, would be willing to sponsor a symposium to start the conversation. At least at the top of the structure something has to happen or the situation will not improve. To be sure, there is a long dis-

tance between conversations of that kind and a series of in-service training programs to help teachers overcome the threat of omnipresent television.

Of course, it would be a significant break if the symposium spent no time at all on whether kids see too much violence and sex, and on whether commercial television sells the kiddies too much junk food. For that reason, among others, I would not be delighted to see the FTC or the FCC invited to the discussion. Rather, I would like to see a discussion on the ways television can be used by teachers to improve teaching.

SHIRLEY M. HUFSTEDLER
Los Angeles, California

Tuning In to Kids

To the Editor:

I read with interest Grace Hechinger's article, "Tuned-Out Teachers and Turned-Off Kids." While many of Ms. Hechinger's claims about teacher resistance to technology and television ring true, she did not mention an area of television programming that teachers *are* using in significant numbers.

According to a recent Corporation for Public Broadcasting study, instructional television (ITV), programming specifically designed to complement classroom teaching, is currently being used by some 750,000 teachers and watched by an estimated 15 million students. ITV cannot be effective without teacher involvement and student interaction. Because ITV programs and print materials are developed by educators, they contain the "structured linear material" Dr. Boyer claims is missing in television for the classroom. Among the most frequently viewed ITV series, production and entertainment values have been mixed so skillfully with the educational component that several have won national television awards, including an Emmy and a Peabody.

WNET, the public-television station in New York City, is also involved in producing a critical viewing-skills series that wasn't discussed in the article. TUNED IN will be available to public-television stations beginning in March, and will have a great advantage—access to those 750,000 teachers already using ITV.

In addition to the ITV service, public television has found tangible support within the higher-education community for its Adult Learning Program Service, launched August 29. Through this service, an estimated 500 colleges and universities and over 200 public-television stations will work to bring telecourses for credit into the household and workplace. The traditionally conservative institutions of higher education have recognized that an organized television curriculum offers one reasonably attractive, educationally sound way of bolstering falling student enrollments and reaching a growing number of nontraditional students that demographic studies say exist.

Public television's major role in educational broadcasting is frequently overlooked, when in fact it offers the only extensive on-air programming established by and implemented with the cooperation of educators.

BETSY VORCE
Assistant Director
National Program Publicity
Public Broadcasting Service
New York City

Street Smarts

To the Editor:

Grace Hechinger's "Tuned-Out Teachers and Turned-Off Kids" [*Channels*, August/September] indicated that Dr. Boyer's son, at kindergarten age, could read his ABCs. My son is one-and-a-half years old and can read the alphabet with ease. My wife taught him with the help of *Sesame Street*. The teaching-learning process must be started at birth. Why wait for first-grade classes six years later?

B. WAYNE ABBOTT
Northbrook, Illinois

On Herbivores

To the Editor:

What will those of us who write about television for a living do when we don't have Herb Schmertz to attack anymore? Well, as a way of preparing for that day, I propose we stop attacking him now.

Here is a man who has convinced a major corporation to devote an enormous

amount of money to making television — and in particular, public television — very much better. A man who has the temerity to suggest that his company's point of view does not get equal or even reasonable time on television network news programs. And a man willing to risk his career for a leave of absence from a major oil company, to work for—of all candidates — Senator Ted Kennedy.

For this he is sniped at by every television critic and newspaper reporter in America.

One wouldn't mind if any of these stories suggesting that Schmertz has an evil influence on television would print a fact or two that might prove their point, but they don't. And Linda Charlton's story ["Upwardly Mobil," *Channels*, August/September] is no exception.

She speaks of "taints," "lingering questions," and "suspicious minds." She quotes only an "associate," or says "it has been suggested that," without saying by whom. And not once does she prove that Schmertz has done anything illegal, immoral, or unethical.

Schmertz deserves better, and our readers deserve better, than unnamed sources and unattributed suggestions of wrongdoing. That sort of writing belongs in gossip magazines, with their concocted stories and doctored photographs, and not in a magazine like *Channels*.

My only wish is that every corporation would take Mobil's path to public relations, a path that AT&T and Hallmark have used very successfully in the past.

It would enrich our television beyond measure.

DAVID WILLIAMS
Television Critic
Portland Press Herald
Portland, Maine

Writing Rings Around Beckett

To the Editor:

In "The Silver Screen Under Glass" [*Channels*, August/September], James Monaco states that a "sophisticated" critical approach to the arts would "view the popular and elite arts as faces of the same phenomenon." In defense of his notion that popular culture should be regarded in as serious a light as "elite" culture, Monaco asks himself, while watching *Monty Python*, "What is it that Samuel

Beckett does that these boys don't do just as well, or better?" He goes on: "It is crystal clear to me that the *Monty Python* people can write rings around Samuel Beckett. Plus they can act. Plus they are funnier. Plus they have a more intelligent attitude toward the world. It seems incontrovertible to me that in cultural history books, *Python* will loom relatively large and Beckett will be relegated to a respectable footnote."



Well, it seems equally incontrovertible to me that Monaco is indulging here in the same sort of spurious judgments of value which he has condemned in those who snobbishly dismiss the *Monty Python* people because they appear on television, and who unquestioningly elevate Beckett's work to the status of "art" because it is found in libraries.

It is not necessary to denigrate Beckett so that *Monty Python* may be taken seriously. In fact, it undermines Monaco's plea for "sophistication" in such matters that he tries to compare different artists operating in different media in different historical periods. By defining artistic importance in terms of relative space allotted in various hypothetical "cultural history books" (even if such quaint artifacts will exist in Monaco's undefined future), Monaco sets his admirable cause back incalculably.

But as long as *Channels* is interested in such judgments, Mel Brooks can sure write rings around Milton.

STEPHEN FENICHELL
New York City

Open Invitation

To the Editor:

I welcome the opportunity to talk to your readers about the Federal Communications Commission and how it can play a role in determining many of our actions.

Whether the *Channels* reader is an FCC licensee, a representative of a public-interest group, or a concerned citizen seeking information, the FCC's Consumer Assistance Office can help answer such questions as: Who has ultimate responsibility for resolving a franchise dispute? What is common carriage? What does "teletext" involve?

I extend an open invitation to make use of our services. Please write or call: FCC Consumer Assistance Office, 1919 M Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20554; (202) 632-7000.

PATTI GRACE
Chief, Consumer Assistance and
Information Division
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C.

To the Tune of 9 kHz

To the Editor:

In your recent "CrossCurrents" item on the possibility of 9-kHz AM-station spacing [*Channels*, June/July], you left off one cost of such a change that would be borne by consumers. The rapidly growing number of hi-fi tuners and receivers, car-stereo systems and even portable radios using digital (frequency-synthesis tuning) will be unable to pick up most of the new stations.

Those who already own such radios will be forced to replace them, or to forgo their use on AM, unless the AM stations they normally listen to happen to fall on to the frequencies their radios will pick up. This will mean further economic loss to the broadcasters who lose this audience.

IVAN BERGER
New York City

(The 9-kHz issue is academic now. The Federal Communications Commission under its new chairman, Mark Fowler, recently acted to kill the plan that had been adopted unanimously by the previous commission. For readers who missed the item, the plan would have opened the radio band to greater competition.—Ed.)■

Nevil Shute's

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Trial by Cable

THERE WAS JUBILATION in television newsrooms last spring when the Supreme Court ruled that states could make laws allowing television cameras to cover courtroom proceedings. This was an important milestone in the broadcasters' long quest for the same rights of access as the print media have.

But the court's decision represents little more than a victory for the *principle* of television access. In practical terms, it will scarcely affect the content of the newscasts. Television time is too precious for extensive coverage of any trial short of a Watergate. Commercial exigencies permit only one- or two-minute summaries of a day's proceedings, with pictures to show the principal characters and to catch the most emotional moments. And even these scant allotments are splurged only on the most highly publicized court cases.

Yes, there was that exceptional twelve-part documentary series on the air this summer, *Circuit Eleven Miami*, and yes, it was made possible by the Florida law permitting television access to the courtrooms. But the series was produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation, and it played in this country on only a handful of public-television stations. Commercial television does not usually fish in these waters.

The real opportunity for televised trials on a consistent basis is in cable, where

channels and time are abundant. All that is lacking is a structure for the coverage of jury trials—a scheme, a format—but that is bound to come. Someone is sure to dream up the idea for an all-courtroom cable network to join the other satellite services, those devoted wholly to news, movies, sports, music, culture, children's programming, women's programming, games, pornography, and Spanish-language fare.

In some respects cable more nearly resembles radio than television. With a capacity for more than one hundred channels a cable system is too large a forest for *programs* and so must deal in *programming*. Each channel must have a generic distinction, on the theory that viewers will look to it for a type of service rather than for any single program. In radio this is known as vertical programming: stations are tuned in because they specialize in rock, country, classical, or "beautiful" music, or news or telephone talk. Ideas being bruited about lately suggest that cable's future will hold, in addition to the existing services, all-science, all-documentary, all-talk show, all-game show, all-business, and all-soap opera networks.

If these are still incubating, it's because they involve large capital investments. An all-courtroom network, however, comes much cheaper. The material may be said to be in the public domain. Beyond the right of access, there are no performance rights to negotiate and no actors, writers, or set designers to pay. One can imagine real-life courtroom dramas starting opposite the networks' daytime soaps and, with video-tape delays, continuing clear through the night. Each trial is by nature a serial and a human drama, even if it turns on nothing more than a fender-denting incident. Drama is built into any legal proceeding: it is enhanced by the knowledge that no writer has manipulated the details and that no one can know the outcome of a jury trial until the jury foreman delivers his verdict to the judge.

Moreover, few of the all-anything cable services offer such potential for blockbusters. The recent Jean Harris trial, in the Scarsdale diet-doctor murder case (which NBC re-created weeks later as a docudrama), would probably have wiped

out the networks in prime time if it had been cablecast day by day in its entirety.

Of course, there will have to be commercials during the recesses. One can imagine how the rates will break down for advertisers: peanuts for the traffic and small claims courts, a bit more for family court, and the limit for a soupy mass-murder case.

Cashing in on the judicial process, selling small-ticket merchandise at intermission—the idea does have its repugnant aspect. Yet that's what the highest court has actually made possible, along with the chance for every citizen to see how the judicial system works and to learn the difference between law and justice. All trials are surely instructive, and many are educational. In the end, these public benefits may compensate for some of private enterprise's exploitative ways.

Where Credit Is Due

A PROCESS SERVER by the name of Carl Kornbluth stepped into a small niche of network history last summer when he strolled straight past the security guards at CBS News in New York to hand-deliver a subpoena to Dan Rather. The subpoena came courtesy of the Writers Guild of America, which accused CBS News of violating its contract by not giving writers' credits to producers who wrote segments for *60 Minutes*. But Rather never had to testify, because CBS and the guild settled their dispute while arbitration hearings were still pending—a settlement that process server Kornbluth probably helped to precipitate.

It all started about a year ago, when the Writers Guild asked CBS who wrote the scripts for *60 Minutes*. An innocent enough question, to which the guild received a plausible answer: The correspondents do. But while the guild knew that this might be true of some correspondents, they believed others (including Rather) relied heavily on producers to do their writing.

It would be difficult for them not to: *60 Minutes* correspondents are expensive commodities, so CBS has to use them ef-

ficiently, teaming one correspondent with five producers, each responsible for a separate segment of the program. No matter how dedicated Mike Wallace, Morley Safer, Harry Reasoner, and Dan Rather may be, they cannot possibly be expected to keep up with all the information the program's research staff spends full time gathering for their use. For better or worse, a correspondent's job is less to know his subject in depth than to understand it, ask good questions, and convey information persuasively. Wallace, Rather, Safer, and Reasoner are masters of their craft. So beguiling is their art that when we hear them speak, it is difficult to imagine anyone else might be putting words into their mouths.

Indeed, CBS acknowledges that in practice the correspondents aren't entirely their own men, and that by the time a piece appears on the air, it can be difficult to say where one person's contribution ends and another's begins. Robert Burstein, director of administration and business affairs, says, "The public is sophisticated enough to know that programs like *60 Minutes* are cooperative ventures." Burstein also points out that *60 Minutes* has tried "to highlight rather than diminish the importance of producers. The most prominent credit on the show goes to the producer, whose name appears on screen behind the correspondent introducing a story."

spondent's testimony would bring attention to its case. Whatever the reasons for the move, Kornbluth's brief foray into CBS's inner sanctum does seem to have helped break the deadlock. The initial publicity was bad enough: Kornbluth himself ended up filing suit against CBS, charging that the network guards summoned by Rather had detained him against his will. But it was the added prospect of seeing Dan Rather's credibility challenged at an arbitration hearing that must have given the CBS chiefs second thoughts. Within weeks the two sides reached a settlement—and neither made much of a public fuss about it.

CBS acknowledged that since October 1976, *60 Minutes* producers had actually written more than 300 program segments for which they had not been credited. In the future, producers who also write will receive a separate credit as "Newswriter" at the end of the program. CBS also agreed to make retroactive payments to the union's pension and welfare fund.

How could the normally amicable relations between CBS and the guild ever have deteriorated to the point that a process server was called to slap a subpoena on one of the network's most respected correspondents? We can only speculate that a larger issue looms behind the superficial argument. By questioning the authorship of correspondents' material, the guild may have threatened basic conventions of

nificant-sounding "newswriter" credit is merely another tacit reminder that behind the correspondents' seamless delivery, there stretches a long and sometimes messy collaborative process. But this new scrupulousness in assigning credit where it is due might just signal the beginnings of a slightly different kind of network truth-telling.

His Ugliness & Theirs

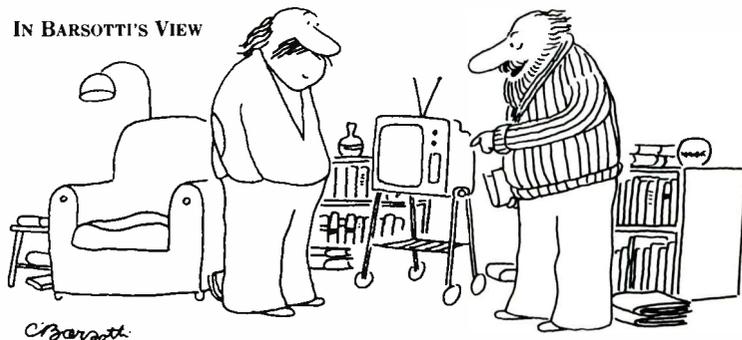
A FEW JUICY CLIPS from *The Ugly George Hour of Truth, Sex, and Violence* may seem like unfair ammunition, but that's just what's been used lately to justify censoring public-access programming on cable television.

Ugly George (the epithet refers more to his moral sense than to his physiognomy) appears on New York's public-access channel three nights a week, decked out in silver lamé jump suit and Porta-Pak, conducting what could generously be described as a variation on the man-in-the-street interview. The main difference is that George's subjects are exclusively women whom he cajoles into removing their clothes before his camera, usually in some dimly lit Manhattan doorway. Manhattan being what it is, several women each week invariably oblige, dreams of television fame no doubt dancing in their heads. *The Ugly George Hour* is one of the most popular shows on both Teleprompter and Manhattan Cable (Manhattan's two cable systems), and "His Ugliness" is notorious as New York's, if not the nation's, premier cable sex-fiend.

Teleprompter and Manhattan Cable, owned by Westinghouse and Time Inc., respectively, do not consider Ugly George an ideal symbol for their systems, and there have been skirmishes over the years between Ugly and his reluctant disseminators. These have escalated recently, making George something of a *cause célèbre*. New York State legislators, with the encouragement of cable operators, have introduced legislation that would effectively remove Ugly and his off-color cable confreres from the air. The bill, which has been pushed by Teleprompter and several other cable operators, would give cable owners the right to censor public-access shows for "indecency," a standard Ugly George might find inhibiting. Despite the New York Civil Liberties Union's opposition, the bill made it out of committee (where legislators had the benefit of studying excerpts from Ugly's show). It got lost in the last hectic days of the legislative session but is expected to resurface later this year.

On the face of it, these efforts to clean

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



Barsotti

"SO, WALTER, WHAT'S THIS?"

Fair enough, but the guild contended that CBS was still violating its contract by not specifically crediting producers for writing as well as producing. By pressing their claim for proper credits, the guild also stood to expand its membership among producers (only guild members can get writers' credits) and to win added payments from CBS to its pension and welfare funds.

The two sides first tried to settle their differences through the established grievance procedure, but could reach no compromise. It is unclear exactly why Rather had to be subpoenaed, but the guild no doubt thought the prestigious corre-

network journalism that turn stars like Rather, Wallace, Reasoner, and Safer into Olympian figures on whose shoulders rests their institution's credibility. If the networks were to announce that their correspondents, like actors and politicians, regularly spoke words written for them by people whom viewers didn't know and hadn't heard of, they would shake the very foundations of television truth they've worked so hard to establish.

CBS and the guild agree that the resolution of their dispute won't cause any changes in actual production procedures at *60 Minutes*. Nor is it likely to alter the kinds of programs broadcast. The insig-

up New York's public-access free-for-all seem straightforward enough, coming as they do in the decade of the Moral Majority. But what makes one wonder about the current sanctimoniousness of New York's cable operators is another censorship battle, this one in Utah, where cable operators took precisely the opposite side of the issue. A group of operators, joined by the National Cable Television Association (to which Teleprompter and Manhattan Cable belong) and by HBO, won a battle to have struck down as unconstitutional a state law that made it illegal to distribute by wire or cable any material deemed indecent. The language of the New York bill and the Utah statute was surprisingly similar, except that the former carefully excluded everything from the decency standard *but* public-access shows.

"Do you really think," Ugly George asked a reporter recently, "the [cable] execs believe the Mormons' right to sex should be preserved, but it's too dangerous for us innocents in New York?" As Ugly sees it, the cable companies have big plans for "tiers" of pay sex programming, and public-access sex, shown free, will present competition. Cable operators in Utah will invoke the First Amendment when their own right to show "indecent" shows—on HBO or any of the soft-core sex networks—is challenged, but when Ugly George and his friends air their sex shows for free, Teleprompter pontificates about moral standards.

There are other reasons why cable operators resort to a double standard when it comes to public-access sex: Ugly George sullies the image of Manhattan Cable and Teleprompter in their current franchising forays. Indeed, both companies are now competing for franchises in Brooklyn and Queens, where the prospect of Ugly George crossing the river has many citizens upset.

Sex is big money on cable, and it's bound to become even bigger money in the future. At the moment, cable operators fighting franchising battles want to keep sex on the back burner, where upholders of the local morality won't be as likely to notice it. Once sufficient cable penetration is achieved and all the franchises are licensed, the current crop of "tasteful" hard-R sex networks—which are multiplying like rabbits—are bound to escalate into hard-core X programming. But for now, Ugly George poses a problem for New York cable operators, not because he is particularly obscene but because he makes no concessions to "respectability." And worst of all, he's simply giving away one of the most lucrative things cable has to sell.

Yet even as New York cable operators try to drive Ugly George and his colleagues from their systems, there are signs that Ugly's future may not be so bleak after all. He reports that a number of cable companies—some of them owned by the pious cable giants—have approached him recently to discuss future distribution deals for his *Hour of Truth, Sex, and Violence*, which in fact has already been syndicated in some places, and "stripped in" in others as part of *Escapade*. All of this suggests that it won't be long before the system makes its peace with His Ugliness.



Confetti Rains

IN THE SEVENTIES, when we were all chagrined at being lumped under that derogatory label, the "Me Generation," none of us knew how easy we really had it. Now, like it or not, we are about to be conscripted into the "Confetti Generation" of the eighties and nineties. We may soon be hankering for the good old "Me-ist" days of the last decade, when our only crime was narcissism.

Young & Rubicam Advertising has decided it knows enough about our self-centered ways, and our increasingly high-tech, media-blitzed lives, to offer the following musings:

"The Me Generation does not possess the cultural tools to absorb . . . an explosion of information and entertainment . . . When ideas and experience float down like confetti and just as cheaply, how will [the Me-ists] choose?"

The quote is from an analysis entitled "The Confetti Generation," the sixteenth in a nine-year series of studies, varying in subject matter and scope, distributed by Young & Rubicam to aid advertising clients planning long-term selling strategies. In "The Confetti Generation," Y&R tries to predict how the Me-ists will choose products in tomorrow's media

maelstrom so that Y&R's clients can plan the most appealing ways to offer those products.

Once, long ago, says the booklet's strategist, man was "guided by an inner compass . . . unaffected by the opinion of others . . . inner-directed but not rich . . . [like] Hemingway's 'Old Man.'" After several transitions, and abetted along the way by advertising's constant appeals to our greed and vanity (which go unmentioned in the report), we arrived in our present state: "an autonomy generation which assumes . . . it has nothing to learn from any prior human experience . . . reluctant to accept authority and suffer[ing] fractionated identity crises."

This "autonomous" consumer, confused by the swirling "confetti" of choices he must make, will spark what Y&R calls the "age of promotion." Each advertiser will work to make his own bit of confetti "stick" in the mind of the buyer, whose shrinking attention span and swelling self-absorption will begin demanding "products with ever-shorter life cycles and the gloss of faddishness."

Studies like Y&R's are important to every ad agency's clientele. When "megabucks" are about to be invested in the appeal to tomorrow's consumer, any self-respecting advertiser feels more secure with some research in hand on that consumer's soul.

And coining a name for the emerging generation is merely Madison Avenue's way of getting a firmer grasp on our perplexing, unwieldy modern society. Let's just hope the label doesn't stick. Not only does it lack the poetry of earlier names, like the Lost Generation or the Beat Generation—but some of us narcissists find it downright unflattering.

Cable News Blues

IT SEEMED FOR A WHILE that Ted Turner's Cable News Network might turn out to be a gushing oil well to compare with Time Inc.'s cable bonanza, Home Box Office. But that was before Group W (Westinghouse Broadcasting) darkened the picture.

Turner had made the classic preemptive strike in establishing the first twenty-four-hour-a-day television-news network from his base in Atlanta. He had the field to himself. It would have been folly for anyone to try competing because cable systems are not inclined to pay for more than one all-news network. Any competitor crazy enough to go up against CNN would have to persuade the existing large-capacity cable systems to take its service in preference to Turner's—a very difficult task and one that would com-

pound an already high financial risk.

The extent of the risk is exemplified by CNN's losses in less than two years of operation. They exceed \$50 million, with about a million more in red ink added every month. Some oil well, you say. Well, consider this:

The great profit prospects for CNN are not in the existing cable systems but in future ones, and growth is rapid. Cable has not yet penetrated most of the large American cities, and there was little question that every new system would offer the news network as an inducement to subscribers. CNN ad sales have become encouraging the last few months, even with the network's present limited audience universe of around eight million homes, and commercial revenues were expected to explode with the wiring of the cities.

Moreover, if at any point Turner ran out of money and decided to sell CNN, he was secure in the knowledge that there would be at least three bidders in the wings for it—ABC, CBS, and NBC. The three networks coveted CNN, because owning it could turn any one of them into the largest independent news organization in the world.

But this happy outlook for the news network prevailed before Group W's recent purchase of Teleprompter Corporation, the second largest cable owner in America. The acquisition put Westinghouse in a unique position to compete with Turner. And indeed, almost as soon as the Federal Communications Commission approved its purchase, Group W announced plans to begin a new cable-news network next spring, in partnership with ABC Video. This network, to be entirely supported by advertising, would follow the pattern of the Westinghouse all-news radio stations in providing an eighteen-minute "wheel" of national and foreign news, with ABC providing the news film. Five minutes every half-hour would be turned over to individual cable systems for local news.

The acquisition of Teleprompter, with its 1.3 million subscribers, gives Group W a significant base on which to build a news network competitive with Turner's. The Teleprompter systems now carrying CNN may be expected to switch to the Group W/ABC service. Teleprompter has a partnership with Viacom in Showtime, the pay-cable competitor to Home Box Office, and that alliance could pay off in additional affiliations for the new network. Viacom is the eighth largest cable owner, with almost half a million subscribers. As a commercial broadcasting company, Group W is also likely to win support from other large cable companies owned by broadcast groups, such as Cox

and Storer, which have been antagonized by Turner's constant public disparagement of commercial broadcasting. Their defection to Group W would add a potential of perhaps another million-and-a-half viewers.

With two all-news cable networks to choose from, it is no longer certain that all new urban systems will carry CNN. They might as easily provide their subscribers with the Group W/ABC channel, especially since Group W, a company with far greater financial resources than Turner, is offering its news channel free of charge to all cable systems. CNN charges cable systems about fifteen cents a subscriber per month for its round-the-clock service.

Turner has met the devastating Group W/ABC ploy with the announcement that he too will offer a day-long channel devoted to news headlines, in addition to CNN, and that like his rivals he will offer this second channel free. That, of course will further drain Turner's resources, but it is intended to demonstrate that the Group W style of newscast presents no competition to CNN. Next, one of the news services will secure its position by paying cable systems for carrying it, just as the commercial networks pay television stations for carrying their programs. That would make the stakes yet higher for Turner.

Very quickly the CNN gusher has turned back into a waterspout.



Weighing Anchors

UNTIL ROONE ARLEDGE came on the scene in 1977 as president of ABC News and Sports, network news was the most stable and refined precinct on Broadcast Row. People who made it in the CBS and NBC news divisions (with a few exceptions, like Harry Reasoner and Barbara Walters) were thought to be lifers: the atmosphere was clubby and the competition, well, something like Har-

vard versus Yale. Arledge, as the parvenu from the field of television sports, wrecked all that in his fierce effort to raise the stature of his news organization and make it a contender in the ratings race.

Raiding the rival camps for talent, he began the wild spending for superstars that fostered the free-agency climate now prevailing in network news. Never has there been such mobility on the marquee of electronic journalism. CBS News and NBC News have both experienced a changing of the guard, and the catalyst for each upheaval was Arledge.

Tom Brokaw and Roger Mudd snared NBC's big prize a few months ago after frenzied negotiations; jointly they will replace John Chancellor as anchor of the *Nightly News*. This move up, when it occurs next spring, will follow by about a year Dan Rather's ascent to Walter Cronkite's prestigious chair on the *CBS Evening News*.

Like Cronkite, Chancellor graciously retired early from anchoring to give his network the bargaining chip that would keep a younger hot property from defecting to the competition: star billing, and with it a ballplayer's salary. If Arledge had not interfered, Cronkite and Chancellor might now only be contemplating stepping down.

Confounding the skeptics, Arledge succeeded in making ABC News a potent and respectable competitor. The network frequently runs ahead of NBC News in the early-evening ratings, and at least twice during the summer it outpointed both opponents. For these achievements, Arledge is assured a place in broadcast history. But what may earn him a page in *Ripley* or *Guinness* is another feat: In effect, he has selected the news anchors for all three networks.

For it was Arledge, and not the CBS brass, who actually picked Cronkite's successor. The CBS management had narrowed the field of candidates to two, Rather and Mudd, but couldn't decide between them. "It was a very close call," said Bill Leonard, president of CBS News, when he announced Rather as his choice. But it was Arledge who made that call by pursuing Rather for ABC News. That broke the stalemate. If Arledge had gone after Mudd instead, Cronkite might have had a different heir.

Disappointed, Mudd left for NBC, which promised him Chancellor's post at some not-too-distant future time. Arledge then set out to capture Brokaw, whose NBC contract was expiring. Presumably the plan was to team Brokaw with ABC's principal anchor, Frank Reynolds. CBS also got in on the bidding. The demand for Brokaw gained him the fattest contract in

(Continued on page 58)

**HOLOCAUST.
CENTENNIAL.
JAMES CLAVELL'S
SHOGUN.**

**AND NOW
MARCO POLO.
OF MICE AND MEN.
SPLENDOR
IN THE GRASS.**

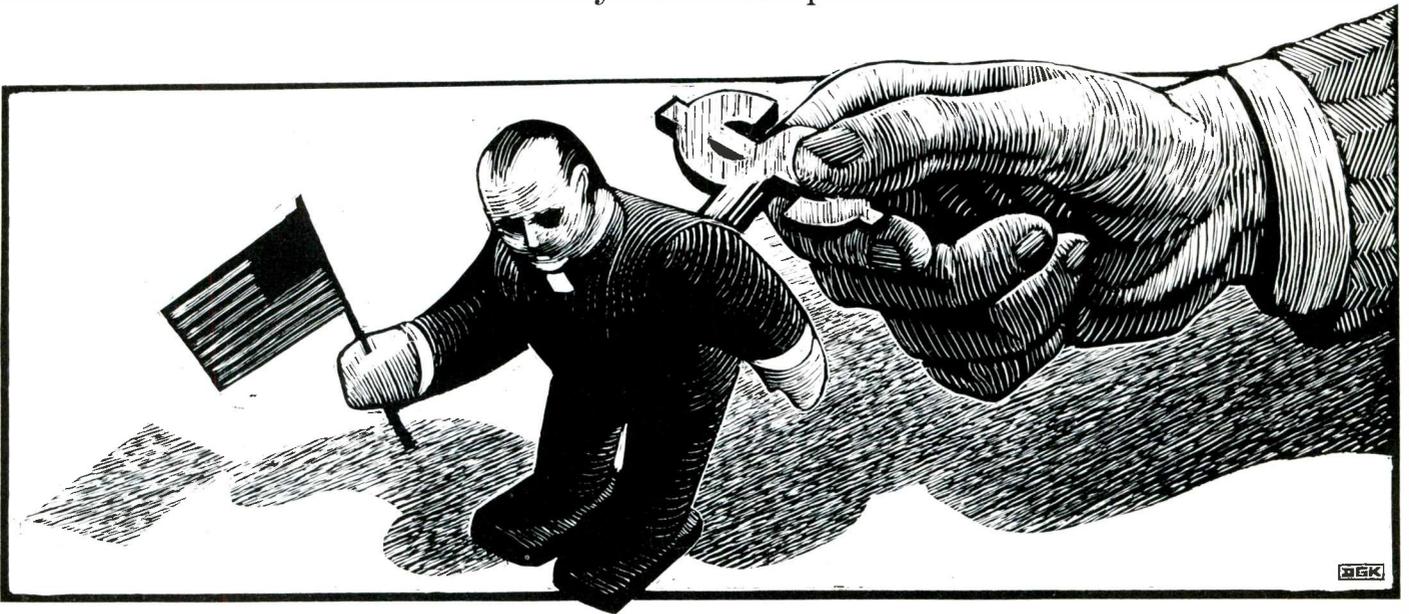
THE PRIDE CONTINUES.



Big Business and the Little Minister

by Walter Karp

Illustrations by David G. Klein



VICTIMS OF EXTORTION don't often eulogize their extortioners. Should it happen, however, you can bet that some mighty tricky game is afoot. Indeed, just such a game is afoot in the television industry today. It got its start on June 15 when the president of Procter & Gamble gave a speech in praise of a bevy of New-Right groups that threatened to bring giant corporations to their knees if their television ads were seen on shows too heavily laden with sex and too deficient in a "constructive contribution to society." These enemies of smut, obviously, are the recently formed Coalition for Better Television, a clutch of right-wing organizations headed by the Reverend Donald Wildmon of Tupelo, Mississippi, a man known to relatively few until Reagan's landslide victory last autumn. The tool that the reverend and his crew intended to use in bending corporate America to their will was a national economic boycott of its products, a weapon often brandished in America, usually with no success.

On the face of it, Procter & Gamble had little reason to praise the Reverend Wildmon. Back in 1980 he had branded P&G the "top sponsor of both sex and profanity" in his newsletter, a charge meant to hurt the company's sales, which had the additional demerit of being quite untrue. On June 15, P&G's president, Owen B. Butler, had still less reason to curtsy to the minister from Tupelo. June 15 was a mere two weeks before Wildmon and his coalition were going to launch their long-threatened, repeatedly announced boycott of the heaviest adver-

tisers of televised sex and nonconstructiveness. To bow to the minister on June 15 could have only one effect: It would enormously increase his influence (until then nil) over the content of television programs. It would make him seem an insuperable power in the land, despite the demonstrable fact that the overwhelming majority of Americans do not share the minister's conviction that "damn" is excessive profanity, that *Little House on the Prairie* is the only morally acceptable hit on prime-time television or, for that matter, that a boycott is a legitimate weapon for altering the content of your neighbor's television. To bow to the minister on June 15 would, in short, put the semblance of incalculable power into the hands of a small right-wing faction comprised, to a large extent, of "pro-family" organizations whose leaders turn out to be far more enthusiastic about "stopping communism" in El Salvador than about strengthening the family in America.

So what did the honorable Mr. Butler do on June 15? He bowed — and he scraped. For one thing, he told his audience, the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, that P&G had withheld sponsorship of fifty television shows that it deemed excessively smutty, violent, or profane. Moreover, he went out of his way to endorse the Reverend Wildmon. "The coalition," he said, "is expressing some very important and broadly held views." He virtually admitted to his audience that P&G, television's biggest advertiser, was frightened of the coalition's thus-far undemonstrated power. "I can assure you we are listening very carefully to what they say and I urge you to do the same," he warned the assembled writers and packagers of television shows.

Walter Karp is a political writer whose latest book is The Politics of War, published by Harper & Row.

A Thought-Provoking Idea for Holiday Gift Giving:



CHANNELS AT A SPECIAL HOLIDAY PRICE

CHANNELS "The provocative new magazine that is getting even people who rarely watch TV to take television seriously."

CHANNELS sorts out and interprets the developments in the booming business of telecommunications with a view to the public's stake in them. And it's written by Pulitzer prize winners like Robert Coles, William Henry III and Ron Powers. And by such outstanding writers as Nicholas von Hoffman, Jeff Greenfield, Frances FitzGerald, Lewis Lapham, Christopher Lasch, Richard Reeves, John Simon, Ann Crittenden and James Chace.

CHANNELS "The important new magazine that insiders, and those who'd like to be, are already turning to regularly."

Give Your Friends Something To Think About.

With a gift subscription to CHANNELS, they'll be enlightened, challenged and entertained throughout the year, long after most other gifts are worn out or put away.

And you pay just \$12 for the first subscription (one-third off the cover price) and \$10 for each additional gift subscription — more than 40% off. So now's *also* a good time to save by starting or extending your own subscription.

Do your holiday shopping the easy way — We'll even sign the gift card for you. Just return the convenient postage-paid reply envelope for speedy pre-holiday handling. If the envelope is missing, write immediately to: CHANNELS, P.O. Box 2001, Mahopac, N.Y. 10541.

After Procter & Gamble's curiously limp performance, matters quickly got curiousest and curiousest. On June 24, one week before the coalition's boycott was about to fall on corporate America, the mighty moguls of the corporate world repeated P&G's performance. They did so by holding a top-secret meeting with the Reverend Wildmon at an unspecified location somewhere "in the Memphis area." That the meeting took place, and that it took place on the Reverend Wildmon's southern turf, so to speak, was all the press was allowed to know. Exactly who attended the meeting has never been announced. Exactly what was said has never been revealed. Perhaps nothing whatever was said and the meeting itself was the "message." Faced with the alleged eco-

For the first time in history, prime-time television has become the center of a titanic political struggle.

nomie force of a national boycott, the moguls of corporate America went down on their knees before the minister, begging his mercy and promising to sin no more. On June 29, the now-mighty little minister announced from his brand-new headquarters in Washington, D.C., that the dreaded boycott had been called off. The big advertisers, he told the press, had pledged to help him "clean up" television in the future.

Like P&G's Butler, a number of corporate magnates had gone out of their way to make the little minister from Tupelo look like the great god Juggernaut. Had they let the Reverend Wildmon launch his national boycott, he would soon have been back in Tupelo peddling his sex-crazed cranksheet. It seems perfectly obvious that a number of giant corporations have deliberately contrived to transform the minister and his right-wing cohorts into the semblance of Juggernaut. It seems equally obvious that they have made the Coalition for Better Television into a television power in order to use that power for purposes of their own — and lowering the smut level of television has precious little to do with those purposes.

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN WITNESSING might best be described as a subplot in the larger political drama of the Reagan Administration, a drama that President Reagan calls, not without reason, a "revolution." In an August editorial, *The New York Times* described that "revolution" well. The President's "economic remedies," noted the *Times*, "mask an assault on the very idea that a free people can solve their collective problems through representative government." Under the pretext of "economic recovery," what the Reaganites have been doing — and what they intend to keep on doing — is unleashing big business from the restraints of law, from the regulations of government, from every limitation set by a decent regard for the common good. Under the ludicrous pretext that government is the cause of all our woes (except when it pours a trillion dollars down Pentagon ratholes), they want to restore to the giant corporations their lost power to poison the air, the water, and the workplace. The Reaganites want to see the interests and opinions of the Fortune 500 dominate American society, and the venerable American principles of liberty and equality buried under an avalanche of corporate propaganda. They want the American people to submit utterly to the self-serving power of private monopolists and to look upon representative government — the foundation of our political freedom — with loathing and contempt.

Such is the Reagan "revolution." But it faces one enormous and inescapable obstacle. The Reaganites' anti-democratic creed, their belief that the very rich are *entitled* to rule over the

rest of us, is the plutocratic doctrine of a quite small minority, albeit one in temporary control of the machinery of government. For the Reaganites to succeed in unleashing monopoly capitalism, they must persuade a majority of Americans to think as they do, to cast away habits of mind — a belief in equality, in democracy, in the ordinary guy — that have been part of the American consciousness for two centuries.

Here is where prime-time television comes in. Previous presidents merely wanted television news slanted in their favor. The Reaganites, of necessity, are after bigger game. They are fighting for the American mind. In consequence they must gain control over the sitcoms, the specials, and the shoot-'em-up melodramas — the entire province of prime-time network television. That is because prime-time network shlock has become, willy-nilly, a formidable barrier to the designs of the Reaganites and their corporate clients.

One barrier is simply the fact that the three major networks, not the corporate advertisers, control prime-time television. Not for a dozen or so years have the major advertisers had much to say about television content. They were quite happy to buy time and viewers and let it go at that. Until the right-wing gained control of the White House, prime-time television was too politically insignificant to bother about.

The second barrier follows from the first. The major networks, by their very nature, stand on the side of the popular party, which is to say they reflect in a hundred different ways the tastes, prejudices, and opinions of the ordinary citizens of America. And what do the plain people like? Among other things, big bosoms and defiant underdogs. What do the plain people hate and distrust? Big business and wealthy bullies. In a study of "businessmen in TV entertainment," a business-dominated watchdog group called The Media Institute made it abundantly clear why the Reaganites desperately need to wrest control of prime-time television from the professional vulgarians of the networks. According to the institute, "two out of three businessmen are portrayed as criminal, evil, greedy, or foolish" in television entertainment. (See "Businessman on the Box," page 46.) One reason for this, The Media Institute rightly noted, is a powerful popular tradition in America. "We have never liked large, powerful corporations. Americans admire the little guys — the entrepreneurs — and the guts, determination, and hard work that made them successful." This is one aspect of America's "traditional values" — the noble antitrust tradition — that the Wildmons, the Jerry Falwells, the Phyllis Schlaflys, and the whole gang of corporation-paid moralists will never even mention, let alone extol. The American dislike of big business is regarded by The Media Institute as mere "ignorance" and "bigotry." To erase it, says the institute, will require "a radical change in the message being sent to the public" by prime-time television. Indeed it will. How can the Reaganites persuade us to submit to the rule of unshackled capitalists if the networks continue, in their vulgar way, to pander to the "bigotry" of a nation that still cannot be persuaded, not even after 100 years, that giant corporations are a Good Thing, and that persists in thinking them a Bad Thing indeed?

The oafish collusion between big business and the little minister is therefore readily understandable. The big corporations understand perfectly well that the Coalition for Better Television consists mainly of right-wing groups who care more about Reagan's success than they do about televised smut. They know, too, that a "constructive contribution to society" is a useful mask for promoting the Reaganite creed. That is why they go around pretending that the coalition is a powerful *popular* force. They want to use that "force" in order to frighten the networks into making a more "constructive contribution" to the Reaganite revolution. For the first time in its history, prime-time network television has become the center of a titanic political struggle.



Breakfast at Southfork

by Mimi Sheraton

IF YOU COULD CHOOSE to have a meal anyplace in the world, where would it be?"

Not too surprisingly, that is a question I am asked often, and undoubtedly the expected answer is the name of some lavish three-star restaurant in France, if not of a four-star restaurant in New York. A few might expect an unlikely hole-in-the-wall dishing up an especially lusty pizza or stew, but no one has ever guessed that the meal I hanker most for is breakfast at Southfork, the sprawling, sun-drenched, turbulent Ewing ranch that is home in the horse soap opera, *Dallas*.

Hooked on this Southwestern Gothic tale ever since the second episode, I like breakfast scenes most of all, whether the meal takes place outdoors on the terrace, behind the free-form Ewing pool, or in the sunny dining room with its leafy wallpaper and table set for seven. Meals are my favorite scenes in films and plays anyway, and I often lose the thread of the story as I speculate on what the characters are eating and whether it tastes good or bad.

Since I love big breakfasts—especially American breakfasts—and since little food is ever really in view as the Ewings reconnoiter after their trials, triumphs, and tensions of the previous night, my thoughts wander off to the covered silver dishes laid out on the sideboard, English-style.

Breakfast is a meal the Ewings serve themselves, for as usual, there is barely a servant in sight. But what do they take? Is it indeed an English breakfast with kidneys and kippers? One can only be sure of orange juice poured from a large glass pitcher and coffee in a tall silver pot. When granddaughter Lucy Goldilocks was younger, she was seen drinking milk and having something in a bowl that suggested cereal. I like to think the menu includes grits dripping golden butter, country ham with red-eye gravy, crisp rashers of bacon, and sage-scented sausages or, for variety's

Mimi Sheraton, food and restaurant critic of The New York Times, is author of Visions of Sugarplums and From My Mother's Kitchen.

sake, hotcakes oozing honeyed syrup. There would be hot buttered cornbread if I planned those menus, alternating with snowy, freshly baked biscuits, and on rare chilly mornings when appetites were sharp, perhaps crusty slabs of chicken-fried steak—this, after all, being Texas.

But no one at Southfork really eats those breakfasts. With all of the complexities and conflicts this family has to deal with, they would all be talking with full mouths, as much a no-no in front of the television camera as it is to Emily Post. There usually is some all-purpose food on plates, but rarely does anyone take a bite. For no matter what the family cook prepares, the Ewings serve each other more than the minimum daily requirements of venom and malice (the need for which in human nutrition has not yet been determined), and what begins as a cheerful, sunny meal ends in tears and dread, with at least one character running off angry and hurt. Only Lucy, when a young and carefree schoolgirl, left the table in bubbling high spirits. As she became more pubescent her breakfast was ruined also, usually with a look of disapproval from Miss Ellie, or by a sharp reprimand over schoolwork or an unworthy suitor from J. R., or from Jock, the Daddy of them all.

In the early days of *Dallas*, there was breakfast in virtually every episode, but last year there were hardly any at all. The omission evidently bothered Jock as much as it did me, for in one installment that did include a breakfast scene, he looked around the table and said, "It's been a long time since we've all had breakfast together." To celebrate that morning, he had meat (ham? bacon?) and scrambled eggs on his plate and actually did lift fork to mouth.

Insight into the workings of a Southfork breakfast comes from Rena Down, who wrote some ten *Dallas* episodes and who was one of its story editors.

"We don't do many big eating scenes anymore," Down said. "They are expensive and complicated and take half a day to shoot because of all the characters in them and the difficulties with close-ups."

Disappointing me by saying that the Ewings do not eat the lusty breakfasts I look forward to, Down said, "They are not ranch hands, you know—not laborers. They don't do heavy work and they eat like rich people everywhere else. They love sweet rolls—homemade, I guess—and I have written sweet rolls in several times. Before Lucy was married and moved away with Mitch, she was always late for school and so used to grab a sweet roll and run. The rest of the family might have eggs and ham or bacon, but no grits or red-eye gravy or chicken-fried steak. I asked a friend who lives in Texas, and she told me how such people eat."

Explaining that Sue Ellen never eats breakfast because she is too hung over and distraught by husband J. R.'s bed-hopping, Down said also that breakfast is useful for exposition. Everyone announces where he or she is going for the day, so the audience knows where Pam, Bobby, and Miss Ellie will be.

Are there any cooks or gourmets in the Ewing brood? "Well, I think J. R. is the only gourmet. Donna can whip up something nice, I guess. Lucy's husband, Mitch, probably can cook too, although he never will. Pam and her brother Cliff are always shown eating in Mexican restaurants. That's how the audience knows Cliff is broke."

Troubled though they may be, and sketchy as the breakfast menu apparently is, I would still trade a nod from a snooty headwaiter bearing truffles and foie gras for a simple glass of orange juice, a sweet roll, and coffee, spiced with the killer smile of J. R. flashed in my direction. Then I could be soothed by Miss Ellie, who might pour me a second cup, place her hand gently on my forearm, and say, "There, there, Dear. You know how J. R. is . . ."

Oh yes, Miss Ellie, I do, I do . . .



Arguing Against History

by Lawrence K. Grossman

THE CABLE REVOLUTION is already showing disconcerting signs that media history may repeat itself. It seems clear that cable, if left entirely to the commercial marketplace, will not, despite the profusion of channels, substantially improve the quality of television or the diversity of programming choice.

Half a century ago, radio was introduced with great expectations for its capacity to revitalize our culture, and indeed, big-time radio began with symphony concerts, dramas, classic children's stories, and grand opera. After World War II, television arrived with promise of being "the saving radiance in the sky" that would bring Shakespeare to the millions and extend the arts beyond the walls of concert halls, museums, libraries, and classrooms. In both cases, however, more mundane market forces applied; the media inevitably moved to fulfill more profitable mainstream needs.

In the 1950s, when FM radio opened up and the number of radio channels multiplied in each market, radio's program diversity and quality began to diminish rather than expand. That trend became more marked despite a steady growth in the number of radio outlets and the added enormous competition from new television channels. Today, there are scores of radio stations in almost every major community, but except for what is provided on noncommercial public radio, there is no longer any radio drama or educa-

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tional programming, and hardly any performing arts programming. There are also far fewer programs for the elderly and for ethnic groups today, and there is considerably less public-affairs and science programming than was available in the days of radio's comparative channel scarcity. A technology of abundance, far from enriching and expanding radio's programming choice, has managed to shrink it drastically.

In radio's dominant years, the program services that prospered were those provided by the companies owning major radio stations in the most important metropolitan areas. These programs were designed to attract maximum audiences. Thus it was not through superior programming that NBC, CBS, and ABC prevailed as networks, but through the competitive advantage they enjoyed by having built-in access to the main outlets of distribution—the major stations they owned. This followed the early pattern of the movie business, when the production companies that prospered owned the theaters in which their movies were played.

CBS and NBC held a virtual lock on television in the fifties, when channels were extremely scarce, and they competed for prestige and good will as well as for ratings. Along with light entertainment, their schedules boasted on a regular basis such distinguished series as *See It Now*, *You are There*, *Victory At Sea*, *Omnibus*, *Project XX*, *Studio One*, *Playhouse 90*, *GE Theater*, *Kraft Theater*, *The U.S. Steel Hour*, *The Voice of Firestone*, and dozens more, as well as scores of documentaries every season. All vanished with the growth of new commercial stations, the rise of ABC as a competitor, and the expansion of television in the UHF band. More competition has resulted in program schedules narrower in focus, more formula-ridden, less adventurous, more predictable.

In cable today, the old patterns are emerging at an accelerated pace. Cable's promise is that an abundance of channels will yield an unprecedented range of programming to satisfy all tastes and needs. Yet almost as soon as a host of new cable cultural channels announced themselves, most changed their programming direction in order to appeal to a broader, mainstream audience. HBO once talked about developing its second pay-cable service as a cultural channel; instead it came up with Cinemax, another movie channel. RCTV, the joint cable program entry of Rockefeller Center and RCA, first announced that it would introduce a cultural channel with quality BBC programming. It is now calling itself The Entertainment Channel. Bravo, a pay performing-arts service owned by several cable operators, is extending its schedule by filling out most of its programming time with foreign movies.

The other two commercial cultural entries, CBS Cable and ABC's ARTS channel, are both to be totally advertiser-supported and have the substantial handicap (as does RCTV) of not being owned by a major multi-system cable operator. Thus in cable, CBS and ABC lack what was fundamental to their programming success in radio and traditional television—easy access to the means of distribution. So far this has been a virtual requirement for the survival of all major programming services. Currently just about all the existing services owned by cable operators offer little else but movies (HBO, Cinemax, Showtime, and Warner's Movie Channel), supplemented by sports and entertainment specials. The new electronic highways, like the old, are delivering prizefights before prize drama and centerfolds before serious music.

Then what is it that has caused all the excitement and anticipation of better things to come with cable? Essentially, the mythical notion that channel scarcity was chiefly responsible for driving quality programming off commercial broadcasting. Because excellent programs tend to appeal to smaller, more select audiences, they are believed incapable of surviving in the intensely competi-

(Continued on page 56)

Reagan and the Unseen Network

by Les Brown

RONALD REAGAN'S adeptness with television, amply demonstrated these last few months and widely noted by the pundits, goes well beyond those skillful political addresses to the people and his polished, friendly comportment on the screen. What surely was one of the shrewdest "uses" of television and radio by any President took place off-camera last summer and went all but unnoticed. That was Reagan's enlistment of the entire broadcast industry to help swing Congressional votes for the Administration's budget bill, the keystone of his economic program.

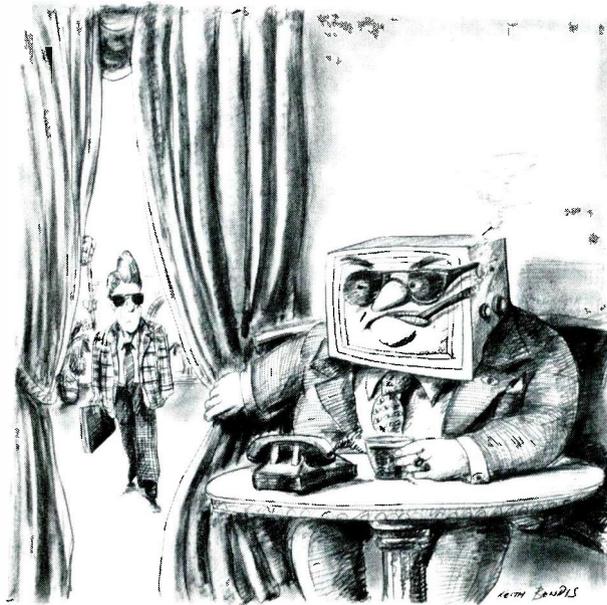
He did it simply by folding into the legislative package a few changes in the communications law. These appeared minor but were in fact monumental. They were the concessions long sought by the broadcast industry but always denied by Congress because they amounted to a giveaway of the public's stake in the airwaves.

Quite a few Democrats in the House of Representatives, whose own budget bill was being reconciled with the two in the Senate, wondered at the time what those radio and television proposals were doing in a federal budget bill to which they had no apparent relation. A few journalists also wondered, but they were too distracted by the larger issues of the bill, and the partisan debate surrounding it, to pursue the question.

The answer, quite obvious in retrospect, is that the Administration was buying the muscle of one of the most powerful lobbying forces in the country: the owners and managers of some 9,000 television and radio stations, and their national and state associations. This is the unseen network, unseen because its medium is the telephone.

How large a role it played in the vote-switching that went on among Democrats in the House would be difficult to gauge, since the White House and a number of conservative national organizations were conducting telephone and one-on-one blitzes of their own in the bill's behalf. But there is no question that the broadcast lobby figured importantly in what had the outward appearance of a pure and simple victory for Reagan's economic policies.

The price paid for the bruising blitz this network staged to promote the President's bill was a lengthening of broadcast



license terms—from the long-established three-year period to five years for television and seven for radio. Adding a few years may sound inconsequential, but in fact it represents a radical alteration of the broadcast system in America, because it drastically reduces the broadcaster's accountability.

For the station owner it was the fulfillment of his fondest wish from government, short of a license in perpetuity. The longer term gives him greater business security and a certain immunity from the public he is licensed to serve. More important, perhaps, is that it immediately increases the market value of the stations, in the same way that changes in zoning laws can increase the value of real estate. Reagan's gift was

worth many millions of dollars to the industry. In one of the few newspaper articles to express outrage at what had happened, Tom Shales in *The Washington Post* called it "Christmas in July."

Several times over the last dozen or so years, legislation was introduced to extend the broadcast license terms. None of these bills ever got very far, mainly because there was never a compelling reason to cut away the public's rights to the airwaves the law says it owns. It remains even now a gift hard to justify, yet there it was in the budget-reconciliation bill—put there by Senate Commerce Committee chairman Bob Packwood, Republican of Oregon, who insisted against protests from House Democrats that it stay. This was the broadcaster's opportunity of a lifetime, and the unseen network made the most of it.

The industry's extraordinary influence over elected officials has to do with its control of access to air-time, vital to reelection campaigns. In an article detailing the workings of the broadcast lobby ("When Push Comes to Shove," *Channels*, August/September), Barbara Matusow observes, "The source of a station owner's power is the belief, widely held by politicians, that broadcasters can make or break political careers."

Richard Nixon, in his White House years, tried repeatedly to harness the power of the broadcast media, but his methods were too obvious to succeed. Through his own rhetoric and that of others in his Administration, notably Spiro Agnew and Clay T. Whitehead, Nixon made it all too apparent that he was using the government's powers over radio and television to intimidate broadcasters and whip them into line, especially when it came to

their news programming. Nearly everyone—even Nixon loyalists—could see the dangers in that. In striking contrast, Ronald Reagan, after a scant few months in office, won the allegiance of broadcasters not through fear but through generosity.

The master stroke was to build into the budget-reconciliation bill tantalizing incentives for the broadcast lobby's support.

The strategy held fat benefits for both the Reagan Administration and commercial broadcasters. Even public broadcasting, as the only genuinely budget-related element in the radio-television proposals, came out all right, having been spared a deep slashing of its federal funds over a long time.

The only losers in the deal were the rest of us.

Broadcasters knew
that something
precious was tucked away in
the President's bill,
but they preferred that the
public not be informed.

We have lost a large part of an admirable communications law that fostered vital interaction between the radio and television licensees and the people of their communities. With the longer license terms, our ability to participate in the broadcast system as citizens has been lessened by about half.

The Federal Communications Commission's basic tool in regulating the broadcast industry is its power to deny license renewals. Often that determination is made through feedback from citizens groups, for it is the way of citizens to become vocal when they find particular stations derelict in their obligations. The license challenges against such stations as WPIX and WOR-TV in New York and WNAC-TV in Boston forced them to increase their public service and upgrade the level of their programming in general, with no marked diminution of their profitability.

Five- and seven-year license periods impair the ability of citizens groups to be as effective as before, because they are able to act less often. Similarly, the application of the Fairness Doctrine (which safeguards the public's First Amendment rights in broadcasting) becomes limited, because fairness complaints are usually heard at license-renewal time.

Severely weakened by the change in the law, some of the leading organizations representing the people's rights and interests in broadcasting could lose their sources of funding and go under. This would certainly please broadcasters, since activist groups—especially those working in behalf of minorities, women, children, the elderly, and homosexuals—have been a nuisance to them, making demands on their time and occasionally disrupting the conduct of business. More secure, they have less reason to be responsive to what they consider "special-interest" groups. (The only public that is not a special-interest group, by the industry's definition, is the audience that watches television or listens to radio and is reasonably satisfied.) Thus the net effect of the new license terms will inevitably be to diminish the broadcaster's sensitivity to his public.

The National Association of Broadcasters was, of course, jubilant over the new freedoms implicit in the longer license terms. When the compromise was reached by the House-Senate conferees (Packwood's original proposals went even farther than the five- and seven-year license plan, verging on complete deregulation), Vincent Wasilewski, president of the NAB, declared, "This is an important step toward our overall goal of full First Amendment freedom for broadcasting."

It is all very well for broadcasters to wish for full First Amendment freedom, but someone ought first to ask the public, as owner

of the airwaves, whether it has the same desire. As a public trustee, the broadcaster differs from a newspaper publisher, who is not a public trustee, needs no permission to do business, and therefore enjoys full First Amendment rights.

An argument gaining strength in government circles today is that the technological explosion has brought so much competition to the electronic marketplace, and has produced so many new channels of programming, that it is appropriate to do away with all broadcast regulation and give the television and radio operators complete freedom of expression. The chief flaw in this reasoning is that wide-open competition is illusory and may not become a fact of life in this decade. Cable, broadcast television's chief competitor, is only in 25 percent of U.S. households, and according to the most optimistic projections, it could reach 50 percent by 1990. Moreover, the channels most frequently watched on cable are those carrying broadcast television. There are successful forms of pay television, but at least at the moment, they are in the movie business rather than the television business.

Whether the broadcaster should be allowed to operate unrestricted under the First Amendment is a worthy topic for national debate. The government's recent move in that direction, however, was not opened to national debate, or even to the normal public-hearings procedure.

What is equally disturbing about this sudden alteration of our broadcast system is that most people were unaware of its happening. They certainly didn't learn about it from the medium most Americans depend on for news—television—except perhaps sketchily, in a passing reference during a report on the progress of the tax-cut bill.

We may never know whether there was a deliberate blackout of this news by the radio and television executives who make up the unseen network, or whether the broadcast press was merely as ignorant of the story's importance as the pencil press. But we can be quite sure that the station managements, which knew better than anyone that something precious was tucked away in the President's bill and that it would come at the public's expense, preferred that the public not be informed. The broadcast media have a long history of ignoring on the air, or giving short shrift to, the issues to which they lend their sincerest lobbying efforts.

This tendency to withhold certain kinds of information from the people when the broadcast industry's own interests are at stake makes it hard to sympathize with the broadcaster's wish for full First Amendment freedom. Even those who profess total reverence for the First Amendment may well wonder how powerful the unseen network should be allowed to become before it becomes downright dangerous. Meanwhile, they may ponder the question of how critical or adverse a broadcaster is likely to be toward a President who has given him Christmas in July. ■

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW





Illustration by Phyllis Herfield

The Perplexing Mr. Moyers

by Ann Crittenden

ON NOVEMBER 1, BILL MOYERS, who has left public television to join CBS, will take over Eric Sevareid's old job and more. He will be the center of a new unit at the Number One commercial network, acting as evening news commentator, producing an occasional documentary, starring in a CBS cable series, and possibly launching a weekly news show. In the process, Moyers' audience will increase at least fivefold, from about four million viewers once a week to some twenty million people several times a week. His salary will quadruple, to almost a million dollars annually for the next five years.

The move could well transform Moyers into television's most influential newsman since Edward R. Murrow, whose widow once wrote Moyers that he was the only man on the air who reminded her of her husband. Moyers' new role will clearly be played on a bigger stage, but as Murrow discovered years ago, in television a bigger stage almost always means a more difficult part.

Ann Crittenden is a business writer for The New York Times.

Bill Moyers is a hard man to know. By all accounts, despite his soft, East-Texas style, he is one of the most complicated men that politics or the media ever produced. Despite his unparalleled ability to draw other people out—to talk to paupers and to princes, as a CBS colleague puts it—this most sensitive and perceptive of interviewers finds it extremely painful to talk about himself. In a revealing moment during last year's Democratic National Convention, which Moyers was covering for CBS News, colleagues Jeff Greenfield and Jack Kilpatrick were dissecting the Carter personality when Moyers suddenly commented, "I think that I would not want to be President because I would not want to be held up to the scrutiny of so many people trying to find out who I am and what I am."

Al Levin, a public-television producer who has worked with him for years and whom Moyers admits knows him better than almost anyone, says, "Bill has many more channels than the average person; he's about six or seven different people. He resists self-revelation . . . around here we were always asking

ourselves who it was we were working for."

This same vague sense of not quite knowing him seemed to hang around many of the people I asked about Moyers. One could detect a deep affection for him, and a conviction that in many ways he is the most talented, multifaceted journalist in television today. But associates often described a frustrating combination of intimacy and distance, reminiscent of Janis Joplin's description of herself as a person who went out on the stage every night and made love to 1,000 people, and then went home alone.

There was also a sense among some of Moyers' professional colleagues of having been gently—and effectively—manipulated by this former protégé of Lyndon Johnson. Certainly, in the tortuous year-long negotiations with CBS and ABC that preceded Moyers' departure from PBS last summer, he drove executives of all three institutions to despair—and in at least one case, to tears.

Typically, toward the end of a week of talks, Moyers would inform Howard Stringer, head of *CBS Reports*, that he had decided to come aboard. Stringer would be elated, only to receive a phone call on Friday night that no, Moyers had changed his mind; he couldn't possibly abandon *Bill Moyers' Journal*; he had made his final decision. Stringer would sink into a depression, wonder what he would tell CBS News president William Leonard on Monday, and generally spend a miserable weekend. Then on Sunday night, Moyers would call again: "Howard, do you think it might work if we just did this . . .", and the ritual would start over again.

Within days after he had finally decided to make the switch, the doubts and uncertainties began again. Moyers was soon

phoning and writing friends with worries over whether he had made the right decision, pouring out an agonized torrent of self-criticism. In one call, months after CBS had signed him on, he asked an old friend whether he should go through with the deal "and doom [himself] to a lifetime of unhappiness."

One theory about Moyers' vacillations (which CBS executives say lasted precisely until the network had given all it had to give) holds that this son of an unskilled worker in Marshall, Texas, christened Billy Don Moyers, and the brightest boy in town, enjoys stringing along and being courted by some of the country's most powerful corporations.

Moyers rejects this suggestion. In an interview last July in Aspen, Colorado, where he was taping a series of conversations with philosopher Mortimer Adler, he agreed that "there might have been some pleasure in manipulating those big institutions. But I wasn't doing it deliberately—I was dealing with my friends."

One of Howard Stringer's theories is that Moyers has had so many options, in so many different worlds, that career decisions are terribly difficult for him. His range of experience has been phenomenal, outstripping that of most Presidential assistants, to say nothing of television correspondents. Another speculation is that Moyers, who was a national figure twenty years ago at the age of twenty-seven, simply had so much power so young that everything else seems second best. It was not just a matter of holding an important job—that of LBJ's most trusted domestic policy adviser for most of the Johnson presidency—but of being in history, a part of it.

In 1960, Moyers was with Lyndon Johnson at the Los Angeles Biltmore Hotel when John F. Kennedy talked

Johnson into becoming his running mate.

He was instrumental in launching and helping to run the Peace Corps. He was on Air Force One when Lyndon Johnson took the oath of office beside the blood-stained Jacqueline Kennedy.

He was responsible for the "daisy girl" television advertisement, in which a little blond girl pulled the petals off a daisy as a nuclear cloud rose in the background. The ad, now classic, was credited with helping defeat Barry Goldwater in the 1964 Presidential campaign.

The slender young former divinity student went on to help draft some of the key legislation of the Great Society, including the elementary and higher education acts. And even long after he had left office, the glamour of all this power still clung to him.

In Aspen, he told of the time in 1977 when his name appeared on the short list of new candidates to head the Central Intelligence Agency for the new Carter Administration. He was interviewing Fidel Castro in Havana when an aide to the Cuban leader brought in the news, still unknown to Moyers. Castro looked at the wire copy the aide had handed him, looked at Moyers, and began to turn the interview around, grilling his visitor on who was who in the new government. When Moyers got back to his hotel room, he discovered his wife had been frantically trying to get through to him from home. "When she told me the news, I just laughed, which was fortunate," he said, "because Castro later told me that he had listened to the phone conversation, and when he heard the laugh, he knew I was really a journalist."

When Moyers left government, after losing a battle to convince Lyndon Johnson that escalating the Vietnam War couldn't be done without raising taxes, he became the publisher of *Newsday* on Long Island. After the paper's sale to the *Times-Mirror Company* three years later, he traveled the country for three months and produced *Listening to America*, a best-selling book about average Americans and the mood of the country.

The book brought a deluge of offers to run various newspapers, magazines, and universities, but instinctively, Moyers says, he decided to join public television in a weekly news show. After a rather unimpressive start (pictures of him at that time reveal a serious, bespectacled young man looking suspiciously like teacher's pet), he evolved into a prize-winning television journalist.

In 1976, CBS wooed Moyers away from public television to become chief correspondent for the documentary series *CBS Reports*. He was later offered the job as head of CBS News, but he did not want to become an administrator, and by 1978 he

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



decided he wanted to leave CBS altogether, as he felt neglected and not in control of his work.

He rejoined public television in 1978, but still the offers kept coming. He could have become the head of NBC News while his friend from the board of the Rockefeller Foundation, Jane Cahill Pfeiffer, was NBC chairman. He might have become the first Secretary of Education in 1979, when President Carter offered him the new cabinet post. And several times, prominent New Yorkers have approached Moyers to consider running for the Senate from New York.

The stream of opportunities suggests an active cultivation of contacts. When I asked one of his colleagues who Moyers' best friends were, he remembered that when *Bill Moyers' Journal* had done a piece on David Rockefeller, the crew learned that Rockefeller had sent out Christmas cards to 35,000 friends. "Moyers is a little like that," this man said. "He has a Rolodex with every important person who ever lived."

Moyers vigorously claims a total commitment to journalism, and denies that he entertains any political ambitions whatsoever. But associates say Moyers has confided that he has dreamt of becoming President, however remote the prospect may be. At one point they even gave the idea a name: Project X. Some say it is one reason for Moyers' attraction to the far greater exposure he will have at CBS—where the joke is that Moyers is the only man waiting to be drafted as President. Whatever his private dreams, the briefest of conversations with Moyers reveals a deeply political animal. Bill, one colleague observes, doesn't see an audience, he sees a constituency.

At our first meeting, in his office at New York's public-television station, WNET, he looked me in the eye for a long time and asked, with an expression of near-anguish on his face, if I were really going ahead with this profile. When I answered yes, he immediately turned to his desk and cited from a stack of letters praising his *Journal*. Lady Bird Johnson, John Kenneth Galbraith, Warren Burger, a disillusioned Vietnam veteran who said he had been inspired to vote again, a "Junior League but not Moral Majority" eighty-six-year-old woman—all had been reached by his world of ideas. "I feel so guilty about leaving these people," he murmured. Later, he mailed me copies of the letters and a chart showing the thousands of transcript requests for many of his shows. At the networks, a few hundred requests for a program transcript is unusual.

Why, then, is Moyers leaving PBS? He gave me one reason: "Public broadcasting's delivery system is weakening all the

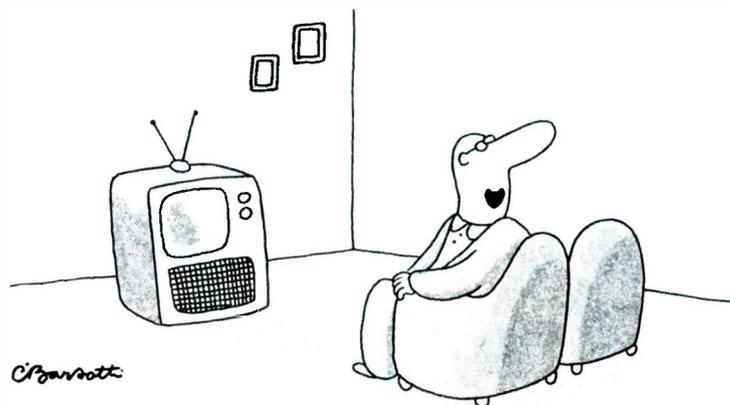
time. With an absence of funding, local stations don't have the resources to keep up what is necessary to support a national series. For example, a friend called me from a station in Texas and said the station was so impoverished it couldn't afford listings in some local papers. . . . It's better to be working within the context of a strong institution than from a weakening institution."

The qualities that make Moyers brilliant on television are those of the successful politician. With his youthful Prince Valiant haircut and seersucker suits, he looks like a New-South, Main-Street American. He is still married to the girl he met as a freshman at North Texas

"What is it like for a child to speak English, French, and German," he asked. "How does the mind translate?" Paraphrasing a line from Montaigne (without telling the audience, but signaling his sophistication to Steiner), he went on to ask how it was that the Nazis could be lovers of culture and still do the things they did.

Moyers brought the same personal quality to his documentaries. They broke the standard mold—in which a problem is presented, dressed up with statistics, and trotted out with a dozen carefully balanced opinions on either side of the debate. In Moyers' documentaries, the interviewer's vitality, his curiosity, and fi-

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



"HURRY, DEAR, IT'S A FABLE FROM MOBIL!"

State College back in 1952. He and the former Judith Davidson have three children, Cope, Suzanne, and John. And his genuine common touch inspires the confidence and the confidences of an astonishing range of individuals, from blacks in an unemployment office in Detroit to intellectuals like Rebecca West, Carlos Fuentes, Joseph Campbell, and George Steiner. The intellectuals are charmed partly because Moyers seems to have read with care everything they have ever written. But his real strength is his ability to escape the conventional pose of the all-knowing interrogator and ask what the average man would like to ask.

Moyers likes to draw from his humble Texas origins ("Keep things simple," he would tell writers and producers when they came up with something too complex, "or my Daddy in Marshall, Texas, won't understand it.")

In the George Steiner interview, he came across as the earnest young student he once was, asking Steiner what it was like to grow up in a town where the streets are named for writers like Molière and Voltaire. "In my town the streets were named for Texas heroes, like Bowie and Houston," Moyers said.

nally his point of view, became part of the show.

A good example was CBS's award-winning *The Fire Next Door*, on the destruction in the South Bronx. In one scene Moyers interviews an old Irish lady. While she is describing her life in the disintegrating neighborhood, someone comes to tell them that the old lady's apartment has been robbed. The two of them return to the apartment, and Moyers shares her emotions as she wanders around the vandalized rooms. "The scene was one of the best three minutes on commercial television," says Marty Koughan, a producer who has worked with him, "and it was pure Moyers."

At PBS, Moyers developed an increasingly passionate style, revealing a deep moral sense and a populist politics that are rarely seen on television. He attacked the new defense budget as ruinous to the economy, defended the right of abortions, and accused the New Right evangelists of demagoguery. One of his most brilliant programs was an analysis of President Carter just before the election, in which the preacher, the politician, and the journalist in Moyers all came together to ex-



COSMOS. THE RETURN FLIGHT.

Join Carl Sagan as he again explores the mysteries of life and the universe. Watch for the return of *Cosmos* on PBS. Check local listings for dates and times.

COSMOS is produced by Carl Sagan Productions and E.C.E.T., Los Angeles. Funding made possible by grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation and Atlantic Richfield Company.

ARCO 



plain the failure of his fellow Southerner with the surest, cleanest strokes.

A President can be forgiven his mistakes and inconsistencies, Moyers declared, "but he is never forgiven for communicating to the nation a loss of confidence in his own convictions. For it's the ability to translate his own confidence to the nation that inspires us, even if we disagree with his policies, to accept his leadership. In this, Jimmy Carter has been his own worst enemy."

"The country wanted a captain on the

bridge, charting the course," he summed up, and instead "it got an engineer who preferred to be down in the hold tinkering with the machinery."

As Moyers explains his ambivalence about his new job, it stems from the anguish of giving up the freedom to say these kinds of things on television. At PBS, he could put any interesting person on the air he wanted, for almost as long as he wanted. At CBS, almost none of the individuals he interviewed on the *Journal* would be allowed prime time.

Even more importantly, at PBS he completely controlled the form and the content of his shows, while at CBS, committees of executives have to approve all material ahead of time, as Moyers' experience had already taught him. Robert Chandler, a senior vice president at CBS, recently provided an example of the kind of restraints Moyers was subject to the last time he was with the network. He was filming a piece on the baby formula controversy in the Dominican Republic, and

(Continued on page 59)

Moyers on Moyers

SHORTLY AFTER this article was finished, I received a remarkable nineteen-page handwritten letter from Bill Moyers, in part apologizing for trying to evade an interview for the piece. (After avoiding a meeting in New York, he had to be tracked down in Colorado.) The letter was at once a plea to *Channels* not to do an article on this very private man, and Moyers' effort to write the article himself. Elaborating on some of the questions posed during our interview, Moyers revealed more of his own history and growth and self-justification. But beyond that, he offered some eloquent insights into the nature of television and of our current political mood. What follow are some of the more provocative passages.

A. C.

[I have become] as a journalist ought to be, what is meant by the French and Italian root of the word "amateur" — one who loves many things and cultivates those tastes not as a specialist but as a curious explorer who moves on to the next adventure, while others become professionals at what he loved for the experience itself. . . .

How does one explain the appeal to the left-wing *Village Voice* [newspaper] and a right-wing evangelical group of a program like [Bill Moyers'] *Journal*? I think it is that people are excited by learning — we are all potential amateurs ("lovers of many things") . . . Television, of course, is a marvelous instrument of discovery, and when those of us privileged to use it do so vicariously for the viewer, it is, in a simple word, exciting, even without being hyped or exces-

sively dramatized. Some of the most compelling learning takes place in the quietest environments. . . .

When I finally realized in my thirties what it was I wanted to do (after considering theology, teaching, government, politics, publishing, Wall Street, business — from each of which I brought something to television . . .), I discovered myself in a perpetual and open university of adult education: sitting at the feet of — or on the other end of the video "log" with — Commager, Adler, Marcuse, Campbell. . . . That is anything but work. . . .

[Television is] a wonderful and wondrous instrument for telling a narrative story, conveying the energy of human conversation, or showing from afar a spectacle heretofore reserved for the few. . . . It is also important enough to warrant one's energies, for by it individual lives can be enlarged and, when necessary, whether in the ritual of the transfer of power or of a state funeral, it becomes the campfire around which the nation-tribe sits to weave and reweave its traditions and tales. . . .

Having been propelled as a young man into a conspicuous place, and having moved on to a base in New York, I was easy pickin's for the Establishment. There was the temptation, and I went on the board of the Rockefeller Foundation, became a trustee of the Council of Foreign Affairs (in each case the youngest), got invited to Bilderberg, etc. But some old instinct prevailed, and the crucial decision came in the very early seventies when David Rockefeller and his committee, searching for the first full-time president of the Council on Foreign Relations, offered me the job — with an apartment on Park Avenue and all that. . . . I declined. I declined because I had begun to find in television a joy — yes, joy — incompatible with power and prestige, and I had begun to realize that in journalism lay the route to independence. For if a man has a skill he can take with his tent, he need never be fearful of obeying his heart. I grew up, you might say, rather late, but not too late. . . .

As to how I feel toward those cuts in programs I once helped to enact: I of course deplore what is happening to low-income families . . . whose daily lives will be diminished. They are paying the price for a Democratic Party that was all heart and no grit, a party whose unwillingness to assign priorities to its special-interest groups allowed all of them to think they could have everything they wanted, and [the party] then could not say "no" to any of them. [He mentions indexation of Social Security without regard to need, and wasteful administration of Medicare and Medicaid.] Democrats know how to legislate but not how to govern: they are all foreplay and little consummation, and even when there is issue from the passion, it is left on someone else's doorstep. The inability of Democrats to put their House and Senate in order brought on the Reagan counterrevolution, which, in the grand manner of American politics, will now substitute one set of excesses for another. Welfare ripoff was nothing like what you're about to see at the Pentagon! . . .

Therein lies the basic flaw in the counterrevolution. Altruism, especially altruism meagerly pursued, is no substitute for collective efforts at social justice and economic equality. I suspect this will be the battleground for the rest of this century. This, and the arms buildup, in which cost overruns alone for forty-seven major weapons systems in one quarter of this fiscal year were greater than the reductions Reagan made in domestic spending! . . .

It is past midnight and I have rambled on, less eager, I suppose, to fill in the blanks than, by showing you how difficult it is to fill them in, to stay you, perhaps, from even continuing your effort. I am always — almost always — reluctant to talk openly about myself, and even more so in this transition and with you. The future is never the past, and I would rather have the work I have done analyzed than myself, or expectations raised about what lies ahead. But if you are to persist, I enclose three other documents that might interest you. . . . ■

The Struggle for Poland's Airwaves

The government sees the mass media as a pillar of its political power. If Solidarity wins in its demand for TV access, that pillar will crumble.

by Rob Steiner

THIS SUMMER, POLAND'S PROPAGANDA SECRETARY, Stefan Olzowski, paid a visit to Poland State Television. The occasion was the introduction of the new president of the State Committee on Radio and Television, Wladyslaw Loranc, the third man named to the post in less than a year. In the past, official visits of this kind were almost always hush-hush affairs. But this was the Poland of summer, 1981—after Gdansk, after Solidarity—and a crowd of employees flocked around the visiting dignitaries. As Olzowski—who is perhaps the ranking hard-liner in the Polish government—made his way down the hall, a Solidarity poster caught his eye. It protested the union's exclusion from NIK, the watchdog agency charged with monitoring corruption in government. Olzowski was irritated and ordered a guard to take down the poster. The guard, a member of Solidarity's radio and television branch, refused. So the propaganda secretary ripped the poster from the wall with his own hands.

A small incident, but one that hints at the extraordinary tensions overhanging Polish television today. Control of *telewizja*, as it is called, has now taken its place alongside economic management as a decisive issue in the continuing struggle between Solidarity and the Polish authorities. It may seem odd that access to the airwaves should become so fierce a matter of contention in a country on the verge of economic collapse. But that is only because the story of television's role in Poland's recent history has been lost behind headlines of strikes, shortages, and Soviet menace.

Throughout the seventies, television did more than any other medium to drill into the Polish consciousness the "propaganda of success"—the sense that all was well, that the country's economy was booming, its military strong, its government concerned, united, and well-run. The revelations in the summer of 1980 that Poland owed the West \$27 billion, that the economy was really a shambles, and that leading government officials—most notably the chief of television—were guilty of the most extraordinary graft, provoked a popular outcry against the state media. Solidarity embodied this sentiment in the third of its twenty-one conditions in the Gdansk agreements of August 1980. The union's demand for "freedom of expression and publication," as well as television time, shook not only the authorities, but the entire Eastern bloc, for whom strict censorship of the mass media is absolute dogma. Yet in the political confusion of the last year, remarkable changes *did* occur in Polish television: broadcasts of previously censored material, direct transmission of Central

Committee meetings, and even allocations of air-time for Solidarity and other critical voices.

But whether this liberalization of the media in Poland will continue is now the issue of the moment. Though authorities speak proudly of their commitment to *odnowa*—Polish political renewal—they nevertheless contend that television's proper role remains that of traditional socialist propaganda: to create attitudes as well as to inform. And under pressure from the Soviet Union, which has bluntly charged that "enemies have gained control of the mass media . . . in order to destroy socialism," the Polish government has consistently sought to contain reform.

Even so, Solidarity—voicing the demands of its 10 million members—has insisted not only on liberalization, but on media access to express alternative points of view and to counter government propaganda. On May 26 of this year, Solidarity and government negotiators reached an agreement that would give the union total editorial control over one hour of national television each week. In a part of the world where control of the airwaves has been an essential tool of state domination, this development can fairly be called the culmination of Solidarity's most radical initiative: the drive for freedom of information.

But the agreement is now in jeopardy. Charging that Solidarity's demand for television access is unacceptably "political" in nature, the government has in the past few months launched a concerted media drive to depict the trade union as unalterably unpatriotic. Solidarity responded with a brief but bitter strike against the newspapers in August, and has threatened similar action against radio and television. Yet the government has remained uncompromising, even in the face of an August 23 call from Catholic primate Jozef Glemp for implementation of the television agreement. The authorities now state that the agreement will not be honored unless radio and television employees renounce their right to strike. Solidarity has refused these terms.

The prospect is confrontation. As a strike leader proclaimed during the August newspaper action, "The mass media can be taken over any time and be what they are supposed to be: for the masses." To which the government has responded that "forces of order" are ready "to insure proper functioning" of radio and television installations.

Had it not been for the policies of Edward Gierek, the prime minister ousted last year, the present controversy over the control and content of Polish broadcasting might not be nearly as critical as it has become. By transforming a primitive, decentralized television system into a tightly monitored instrument of mass propaganda, Gierek politicized the medium, unwittingly inviting just the kind of protest that Solidarity is now making.

Rob Steiner, formerly an associate producer with Public Television's Bill Moyers' Journal, has recently returned from Poland.



Before Gierek's tenure, television limited its role, as Columbia University professor Jane Curry has written, to "satisfying the normal demands of the population for entertainment and information." In Gierek's view, however, "The [press], radio, and television constitute the ideological front of the Party," and he exhorted journalists "to criticize from a well-considered Party position with the intention of bringing the situation into conformity with the general Party line." Gierek courted the media, received their attention, and then trapped them in a kind of deal with the devil, promising greater influence in return for greater orthodoxy.

After his rise to national power in 1970, Gierek sharply increased the government's investment in television. He expanded the medium's broadcast range, added a second (principally educational) channel, and provided subsidies to lower the price of television sets. He also supplied Politburo members with videotape recorders so that they could study and improve their media images. By 1978, most Polish households were wired; television ownership had increased almost eighteen-fold since 1960.

At the same time, Gierek eroded Poland's regional system of media control. Programming was placed under the supervision of national functionaries. The evening news itself actually became an organ of the Central Committee, which meant that high party officials, instead of the censorship bureaucracy, were directly responsible for its content. Because of television's tremendous power, censorship was stricter than in any other medium, and television journalists quickly learned which subjects were permissible and which were *zapis*, or forbidden. If they did not, the practice of paying only for what was broadcast, rather than for everything produced, provided a strong spur to orthodoxy.

Not only was it forbidden to discuss sensitive subjects like the standard of living, health services, and price increases; any mention of automobile death tolls, air and water pollution, and flu epidemics was also *zapis*. Beyond censorship or propaganda, there was also sheer exploitation of the medium: Popular Western programs like *Kojak* were scheduled on Sunday mornings in order to discourage church attendance. Television news adopted "a sedate and factual tone," as one censorship document put it, in reporting on a country where discord supposedly did not exist. With Gierek's policies for Poland's economic development based on increasing foreign (especially Western) investment, international news assumed a similarly noncontrover-

sial tone. Since Poland had trade agreements with Uganda, there were no reports of Idi Amin's atrocities. Clear deference was (and continues to be) paid to the Soviet Union. "We have what we call our 'principles,'" says one television producer. "Poland is a member of the Warsaw Pact, and Poland is a socialist country. These are unshakable." Accordingly, no criticism of the Soviet Union was allowed. And as Polish television signals strengthened, reaching into Soviet territory, inhibitions increased. For example, any talk of private farming—an acknowledged reality in Poland—was *zapis*.

Gradually, however, dissent took shape. Mieczyslaw Rakowski, Poland's current vice premier, was both a prominent politician and journalist, chief editor of *Polityka*, the leading sociopolitical weekly, and a noted television commentator. In 1977 he published several articles advocating decentralization of media power, and later resigned from television rather than submit a script to the censor in advance. Karol Malcuzyński, a respected journalist, lost his interview program, *Monitor*, in 1976, presumably because it questioned the government's credibility.

But it was the strikes of July and August 1980 that crystallized protest against Polish television. As in the past, a rise in meat prices, coupled with a transfer of better cuts of meat to special shops requiring foreign currency, sparked the general uprising. Stuffed for years with a video image of plenty, the Poles angrily rebelled against the elite that had fed them the lie. The August 24 disclosure that Gierek's close companion, radio-television chief Maciej Szczepanski, was guilty of corruption—that he had used state funds to outfit himself with eleven cars, three planes, a six-seat helicopter, a yacht with a horse stall, 900 pornographic video cassettes and 10 lavish residences, including a Warsaw apartment building stocked with black prostitutes—lent force to the strikers' demands for changes in the conduct of the media. The strikers explicitly called for "freedom of expression and publication" as the third of their twenty-one points. "Money and kielbasa, all right," a radio journalist commented, "but the demand for freedom of information completely surprised them." But perhaps most important of all were the activities of the underground press—the first Solidarity mimeographs—which introduced into Polish society an alternate and respected source of news. By September 5, Karol Malcuzyński was able to speak on the floor of parliament about the bankruptcy of "the propaganda of success." "In a developed, intelligent, and critical society like ours," he said, "which also has access to many different sources of information,

this type of propaganda is suicidal."

Malcuzyński's speech was neither reported in the papers nor covered on television, an indication that the floodgates were hardly flung open. The August 31 nationwide transmission of the Gdansk agreements signing, in which Poles heard Lech Walesa's speech uncensored and in full, was certainly a landmark broadcast—but it was also the first time that Walesa's name had ever been mentioned on Polish radio or television. On September 21, for the first time since World War II, Catholic mass was broadcast on radio, in accordance with the agreements. Yet Solidarity's demands for its own radio and television time were promptly stalled.

The forces for change gathered momentum after Gierek was ousted, coming into their own in mid-October when Jozef Klasa was named head of the Central Committee's press, radio, and television department.

Klasa is a mysterious figure in Polish politics, a strict Marxist-Leninist with Machiavellian instincts, a man whose best days may well be before him. Though closely linked in the late sixties with rightist, anti-Semitic elements, Klasa acquired liberal credentials when he was first secretary of the Krakow region from 1971 to 1975. In that post he was Gierek's natural rival, and as steward of the Krakow district, with its tradition of cultural diversity, he presided over Kuznica Krakowska, a club of party intelligentsia noted for frank discussion.

"Klasa recognized that information had to be expanded," says a leading Polish journalist. "If it were not, the population would turn to Solidarity publications and foreign radio, and the credibility of the Polish media would only decrease further." While confusion over authority and censorship reigned throughout the autumn of 1980, both Klasa and Polish journalists operated with considerable latitude. Once rare, direct transmissions from the Polish parliament became common. Solidarity spokesmen began to crop up on television discussion programs. Previously censored programs were unshelved and aired. News in general became far more extensive and objective in its coverage. (Indeed, foreign radio even began citing Radio Warsaw as its source of information on Poland.) And in public-opinion surveys, the credibility of the evening news reached its highest level in years.

Yet at the same time, party authorities continued using television to condemn further strikes by Solidarity, to caution against "anti-socialist" trends, and to assert their own primacy. The party clearly signalled its disapproval of the Polish

(Continued on page 57)

Great News!

Starting today, network television's only morning all-news program goes to 90 minutes.

That means 30 minutes more of the solid news you need to start your day. The kind of coverage you get only from broadcasting's most honored news organization, CBS News.

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Now, there's more to your "Morning."



MORNING
WITH CHARLES KURALT
AND DIANE SAWYER
MONDAY-FRIDAY

The team that makes Sunday exciting is working on the rest of the week as well.

The "60 Minutes" Correspondents bring you a totally new and different daytime experience. Exploring the contemporary scene. Digging deep. Coming up with the unexpected. Each week a new topic. Each day an intriguing dimension of that topic uncovered.

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It's fresh, lively, provocative.

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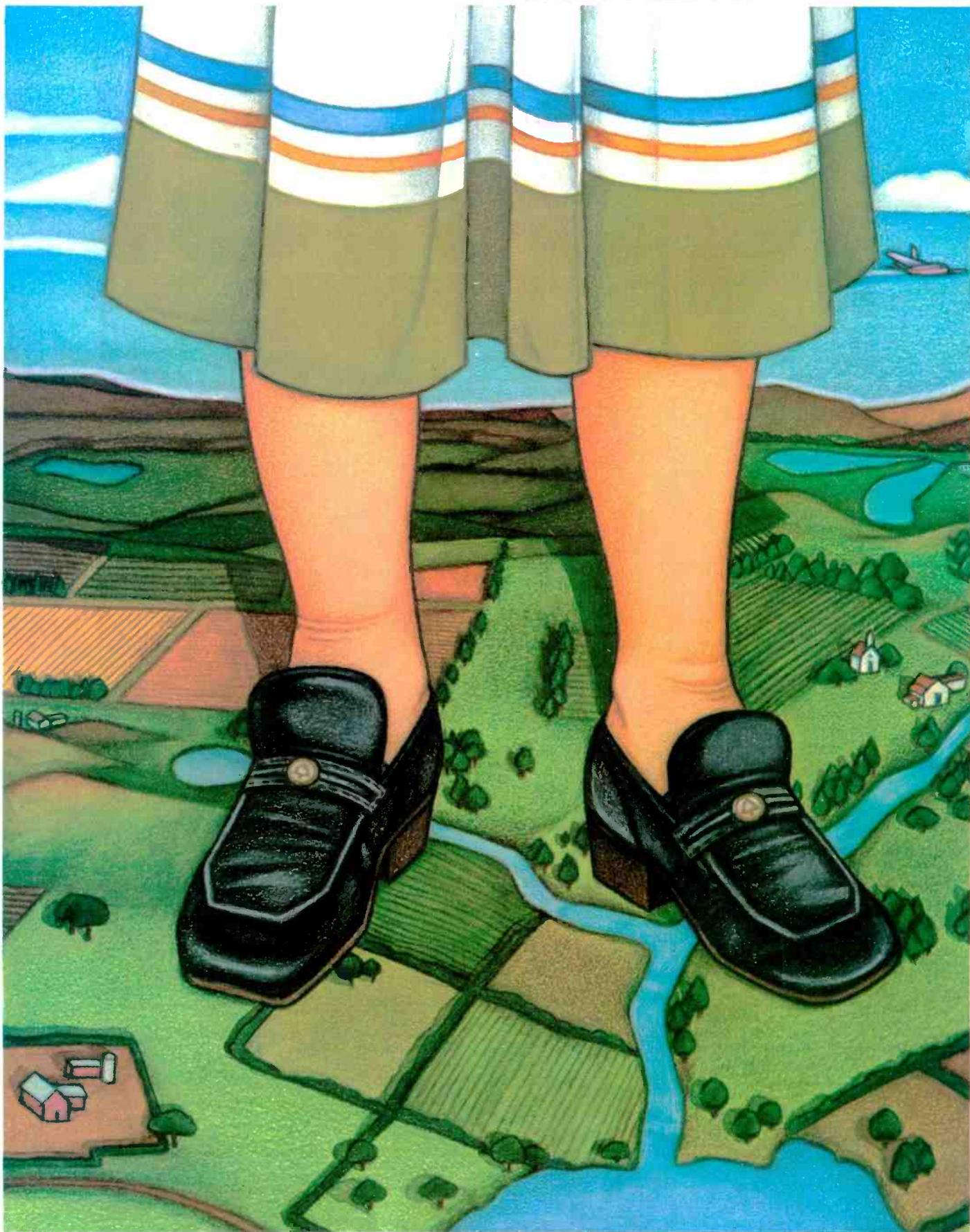


UP TO THE MINUTE
MIKE WALLACE, MORLEY SAFER,
HARRY REASONER, AND ED BRADLEY
MONDAY-FRIDAY

CHECK LOCAL LISTINGS FOR TIMES AND CHANNEL.

CBS NEWS

Illustration by Linda Y. Miyamoto



Why Is Everyone Afraid of Ma Bell?

The cable, computer, and publishing industries are battling to keep the world's largest corporation from growing still bigger — and seizing their turf.

by Joel Swerdlow

A QUIET BUT BLOODY BATTLE has been taking place in Washington, a battle as yet little noticed but perhaps one of the most decisive of the decade. Hundreds of lawyers and lobbyists are desperately plotting ways to keep American Telephone and Telegraph — better known as Ma Bell, probably the largest corporation in the history of mankind — from completely controlling the nation's communications system.

Both the American public and American business have good reason to fear AT&T. When people talk about the coming "wired nation," they often forget that the nation is already wired — by the telephone company. Furthermore, as we enter the eighties, a number of technologies that were once discrete — telephone, satellites, cable, computers — are coming together. And there sits Ma Bell right in the middle, with virtually unlimited money, personnel, and research and manufacturing facilities, ready and willing to dominate the much-heralded communications revolution.

AT&T claims that to provide high-quality, low-cost service, it must not be hamstrung by "irrational" restrictions on its operations or size — 1,044,000 employees (second only to the United States Government), total assets of \$119 billion, and 80 percent of the domestic telephone market. Corporate and government opponents counter that unless Bell is dismembered or sharply curbed, competition will be blitzed and the next generation of Americans will grow up under a mind-controlling Goliath.

As for the public, while AT&T may provide the best telephone service in the world, citizens may well wonder at what point regulated efficiency turns into uncontrollable power.

The Great AT&T Battle, in short, involves not only the \$300-500 billion communications industry and political muscle that makes veteran Washingtonians shake their heads with wonderment, but it involves the very shape of our future. Unfortunately, however, the issues are so complicated that unless the public-interest implications of the battle are clearly spelled out, and a comprehensive reform agenda is drawn up, the communications revolution of the 1980s will take place with the American public either hopelessly confused or dangerously indifferent.

The Byzantine world of Bell-dominated issues makes sense only when one understands that — thanks to technological developments — the difference between *communications* and *computer services* is now impossible to distinguish. In April, 1980, a

Federal Communications Commission decision, known as Computer II, stipulated that after March 1, 1982, AT&T may provide home equipment (computer terminals, etc.) and "enhanced services" (such as data processing and information banks) through a wholly owned but "fully separated subsidiary."

The revolutionary change entailed in this decision is difficult to overstate. For more than half a century, Bell has flourished as a quasi-public utility — rich and noncompetitive. Computer II unleashes it to compete in the very marketplace that will define the communications revolution.

Bell executives admit that a "fully separated subsidiary" is difficult to define; at first and even second glance, the words seem contradictory. But AT&T is moving ahead; the new subsidiary, Baby Bell, if delivered on schedule, will be born with \$10 billion to \$15 billion in assets and 100,000 employees.

Just about every potential AT&T competitor — from newspaper publishers to manufacturers of home computers — has been trying to convince the federal courts and Congress that AT&T will inevitably use revenues from its regulated, government-protected telephone business to support its nonregulated offspring. Such cross-subsidization, they argue, will enable AT&T to lower prices, eliminate competition, and gobble up too much of the communications pie. (To support their contention, they point to the robber baron flavor that has permeated Bell's ninety-six-year corporate history. Federal juries, for example, have recently awarded \$3 billion in damages to companies that brought suit against Bell's anti-competitive practices.)

The maze of court cases and Congressional hearings surrounding the birth of Baby Bell does not fit the convenient regulation-deregulation dichotomy so popular in Washington these days. To split up Bell seems like an aggressive act by big government. But to guarantee that Baby Bell remains truly autonomous would require fresh legions of FCC lawyers and accountants.

In fact, the Reagan Administration has developed a severe case of schizophrenia. Its Justice Department is pursuing an antitrust suit designed to split up AT&T that dates back to 1974. But Attorney General William French Smith recently stated that "bigness in business does not necessarily mean badness, [and] success should not be automatically suspect." And the Commerce and Defense Departments have urged that Justice drop its suit. "It is essential that we keep together this one communications network we have now," says Defense Secretary Casper W. Weinberger. Back on the other side, a Justice Department official says Weinberger is merely using "the old national-defense ploy." Meanwhile, White House economists sit on the sidelines muttering that the bureaucracy needed to monitor Baby Bell would be inflationary.

Joel Swerdlow is the co-author of Remote Control: Television and the Manipulation of American Life. His articles on communications issues have appeared in numerous publications.

Bell's wealth makes it uniquely qualified to fight on all fronts, and it fights to win. A spokesman estimates, for example, that the Justice lawsuit has already cost AT&T "over \$300 million." But lest anyone worry that the Feds are viciously hounding the poor telephone company, Bell simply passes every penny of that cost on to telephone users. Last June, at a Justice-Bell joint picnic, for just a small example, federal workers provided beverages at their own expense, while AT&T hired trucks from a caterer at telephone users' expense. Many government people wore "Reach out and crush someone" T-shirts, a play on Bell's current "Reach out and touch someone" advertising campaign.

NO MATTER WHAT CONGRESS and the courts do, AT&T is so large it will still dominate the next generation of communications technology. Bell is therefore best analyzed as it affects major avenues of information dissemination:

(1) *The survival of newspapers.*

Experts estimate that by 1985, 40 percent of America's homes will be wired for cable. New "high resolution" technology promises larger, clearer pictures and has enhanced television's future as a medium people will "read." Bell, whose annual revenues from its Yellow Pages total more than \$2 billion, wants to present an electronic version over the new expanded cable system.

Such a project sounds innocent enough, but the nation's newspapers fear for their lifeblood: classified and display ads. "Instead of a dry, once-a-year Yellow-Page listing of 'Mike's Grocery,'" a *New York Times* editorial warned last May, "Ma Bell wants one day to offer minute-by-minute supermarket specials on apples and lamb chops. Along with the time of day, it could announce the hours remaining for a white sale on sheets and blankets."

The effect of such direct competition between AT&T and newspapers could be devastating. Although the newspaper industry does not compile ad revenue statistics, a spokesman for the American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA) says that "we'd all disappear if we had to rely just on the sales price of the paper."

But the issue transcends economics. The electronic Yellow Pages is only one way Bell wants to travel beyond its traditional "common carrier" role and become involved in actual message content—normally considered the newspaper's domain. In Albany, New York, it has already used telephone lines to offer the

white pages, weather, sports, horoscopes, and advice from Dr. Joyce Brothers. It withdrew plans for similar services in Austin only after Texas newspaper publishers took legal action based on the argument that a government-protected monopoly should not compete in the information-providing marketplace. Furthermore, AT&T reports that Bell's "Dial-It" telephone services now gross over \$40 million a year with jokes, prayers, sports scores, and other messages.

ANPA's *Presstime* recently pointed out that an AT&T-proposed Massachusetts service, since withdrawn, would have included "spoken messages [such as] 'a Metro Report' offering 'current major news items.'"

All of which has led newspapers to warn that if AT&T is unchecked, and becomes a television publisher, it could suffocate competition and become the nation's premier news source—what *The Dallas Morning News* calls an "OPEC of information."

Bell has acted quickly to defuse this issue. "The Bell System does not seek to be in the business of creating or controlling news and editorial features ordinarily found in a newspaper or magazine," AT&T proclaimed in a statement last March. Bell simply claims the right to put on television screens what it already publishes in the Yellow Pages, and many objective observers agree it should have this right. Former Carter Administration anti-inflation chief Alfred Kahn told Congress last spring that he sees "nothing in the newspaper industry's arguments against Bell other than genuine protectionism. . . ." And a seasoned Capitol Hill expert asks, "Why is AT&T more of a threat than the local real estate association? Newspapers are concerned about the impact of the technology of the future. They're blaming Bell because they're afraid."

Newspaper-AT&T disagreement has become one of Washington's hottest issues; the most probable compromise will limit Bell to unchanging electronic displays of name, address, telephone number, and business-category listings. But such a compromise may only be temporary. "If Bell simply takes what you write, puts it into its computer, and then puts it into the home screen—is that sending information?" asks a communications-law specialist. "It's a tough one. No one knows."

Ironically, the technology itself cries out for newspaper-telephone cooperation. Dow Jones, publishers of *The Wall Street Journal*, provides the "Dow Jones Report" for AT&T's New York City "Dial-It" service. And Knight-Ridder, one of the nation's largest newspaper

chains, has conducted a joint venture with AT&T in Coral Gables, Florida. Several hundred test homes received free "pages" of information—including "a complete, continually updated news report from *The Miami Herald*, the Associated Press, and *The Wall Street Journal*." Knight-Ridder strictly controls the content, while AT&T manufactures, installs, and maintains the equipment. The two corporations plan to offer expanded news/information services to paying customers by mid-1983.

AT&T cites the Knight-Ridder venture as evidence it can—and will—stay away from control over content. But Bell still wants its electronic Yellow Pages. "Newspapers survived the introduction of television, [and] they can survive our participation in the information-service arena," says AT&T assistant vice president Dennis J. Sullivan. "Besides, you can't wrap fish or train puppies on a video screen."

(2) *The future of cable television.*

Each year over a billion dollars are invested in constructing cable systems. But wiring America places cable operators in direct confrontation with AT&T. By the end of the 1980s, residents of up to 40 million American homes will be able to push buttons and talk to computers through their television sets.

"To the telephone company," says Thomas E. Wheeler, president of the National Cable Television Association (NCTA), "the existence of a second wire into the home or business is not just a competitive challenge, it is a threat to their total monopoly of telecommunications services by wire."

The Justice Department antitrust suit documents a series of AT&T anti-competitive practices to restrict cable growth. Partially as a result of this record, the FCC forbids telephone companies from owning cable operations where they hold the local telephone monopoly in all but rural areas. But this restriction could one day disappear. FCC Commissioner Joseph Fogarty, for example, recently said that "telco [telephone company] technology and operations may offer 'natural monopoly' economies, [and] if such economies exist in significant magnitude, then telco participation in the cable-television marketplace is 'unfair' only in the sense that it may be inherently unbeatable. If this should prove to be the case, the efficient answer may have to be that the public interest is better served by telco participation."

For the present, some experts say, cable cannot survive on revenue from basic service and pay channels such as Home Box Office. They believe cable operators must

have a share of the approximately \$50 billion that could ultimately be generated by data transmission, information services, telemarketing, and other two-way services. But AT&T may not sit back and idly watch cable tap those billions. As *Forbes* magazine reported last May, "Bell is involved in a massive effort to provide electronic information to customers through phone lines before the cable-television people sign everyone up. Rumors of what Bell is up to are currently shaking the cable-television industry. Bell admits that it has projects under way at its huge Indianapolis Western Electric facility, but won't discuss anything about them."

Other areas of actual or potential cable-AT&T competition include closed-circuit video communications, teleconferencing (which will become increasingly important as travel costs rise), and ancillary cable-based services, such as home burglary protection. The question of the fees cable operators pay AT&T—so they can attach cable wires to telephone poles—is already causing conflict.

For the moment, cable enjoys one advantage: As *Forbes* estimates, "One modern cable-TV wire has 45,000 times the capacity of a phone wire." For instance, a printed television "page" brought in over newer cable systems will appear on the screen virtually instantaneously, while one transmitted over ordinary telephone wire is printed slowly, line by line.

Washington, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston metropolitan areas." A Bell press release promises that "eventually, lightwave communications may offer a high-quality, low-cost way to bring a variety of improved voice, data, and video services to customers in offices, shops, and homes."

Competition notwithstanding, AT&T and cable operators can help each other. For example, it makes sense to use cable wires to bring data into the home (listing shopping choices on a special channel), and the telephone to take data out (placing an order for a product). AT&T is happy to jump right in with the cable operators on this. "By using the phone lines as an information outlink," an AT&T official told the NCTA national convention last May, "4,300 existing cable systems can become two-way interactive quickly."

But top cable executives remain wary. "Don't ask us to compete with the phone company," Warner Amex chairman Gustave Hauser recently said. "That's not competition, that's death."

(3) *The availability, pricing, and capacity of computers for business and home use.*

Computer terminals, signal-switching gear, data processors, word processors, hard-copy printers, and other equipment will form the core of new communications patterns. One recent issue of *Business Week*, for example, carried fifteen full-

is preparing to enter the highly competitive computer industry, computer giants like International Business Machines are being forced to take notice. IBM led the field last year with \$26 billion in annual revenues but has been watching its total market share drop steadily from over two thirds in the early 1950s to less than one third today. "We're getting a smaller percentage of a bigger and bigger pie," says an IBM spokesman.

Computer and allied industries are frightened that Bell (or Baby Bell) will squash them. "[Without] meaningful safeguards," says A.G.W. Biddle, president of the Computer and Communications Industry Association (CCIA), "the Bell system will extend its monopolistic tentacles throughout the separate subsidiary and stifle the forces of competition."

As one measure of Bell's marketplace powers, last May it announced the technical standards it would use for videotext equipment; experts expect these to become the accepted standards for American and European manufacturers. Moreover, most computers—no matter who makes them—will talk over AT&T lines. "We have real concerns about participation by a single company that is also the sole supplier of a vital raw material of the information age—basic transmission service," says Leo J. Chamberlain, executive vice president of Rolm Corporation, a manufacturer of private telephone-switching systems.

The trade press estimates that more than half of all non-Bell long-distance data-transmission ventures have died before or during birth. But at least in this area, advanced technology and the potential for huge profits promise to prompt many more challenges to AT&T's domination. One important newcomer, for example, is Satellite Business Systems, owned jointly by IBM, Aetna Life & Casualty, and Comsat General Corporation. The extent to which satellites will replace AT&T land lines, and the degree to which AT&T itself will become involved with satellites, remain unclear.

The CCIA argues that only competition will guarantee lower prices, better service, and innovation—because small-to-medium businesses have less vested interest in the status quo.

AT&T admits that the size of its system necessitates delays in introducing new equipment but points out that its Bell Labs have given the nation semiconductors, lasers, and other crucial technologies made possible only when a large revenue base supports research. A 1978 *Fortune* article listing eighteen worldwide "major advances in semiconductor electronics," for example, credited

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



But both cable and telephone companies may eventually turn to super-efficient fiber optics—glass wires that carry information as laser-generated pulses of light through glass, rather than as electrical signals through copper wire—and in this area AT&T seems to have a huge lead. An NCTA spokesman estimates that cable operators have less than a total of seventy-five miles of fiber optics in use. AT&T, on the other hand, has already tested fiber optics commercially in at least five states and in 1984 will complete what it calls "the world's longest laser-powered telecommunications system, linking the

page advertisements for office computers and related equipment with promises such as: "Vital information, including commodities and stock-market quotations, current news and government developments, financial and economic trends, transportation and energy updates, and more, are only a phone call away from over 600 commercially available data bases."

Until the FCC's Computer II decision, a 1956 federal court consent decree (based on a 1949 Justice Department antitrust suit) limited AT&T to "POTS"—plain old telephones. But now that AT&T

Announcing the opening
of Broadway's newest theatre.

**Seating capacity:
Two hundred million.**

This season, ABC Television introduces
ABC Theatre On Broadway,
a new concept in television entertainment,
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The premiere presentation will be
"The Elephant Man," one of the most
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twelve to Bell.

And not everyone is allied against Bell. Although an IBM spokesman recently insisted that "rigorous accounting safeguards" must keep AT&T from using telephone-generated funds to subsidize computer sales, he went on to add that "all carriers, including AT&T, should have the opportunity to compete on an unregulated basis."

"IBM has lawyers and accounting power to go head-to-head with AT&T," a computer industry official observes. "There are some paranoids among us who would say that every competitor AT&T kills is one less competitor IBM has to deal with."

(4) *The quality and cost of telephone service for both voice and data transmission.*

AT&T provides virtually all of the nation's long-distance facilities. This means, for example, that CBS, NBC, and ABC must transmit programs to affiliated stations on lines leased from Bell. Earlier this year, Bell requested FCC permission to raise the networks' rent a reported \$21.6 million annually. It's impossible to determine at what point such increases impede broadcasts—or, in the case of wire services, slow the dissemination of news. FCC Commissioner Fogarty even asked, at the time the increase was discussed, whether AT&T wanted "to keep the networks in line."

AT&T has the same hold over everyday business and home telephone users. The FCC reviews all interstate phone rates, and AT&T presumably receives a proper return on its investment. But past and present FCC staff members say that Bell's size gives it unlimited ability to justify whatever rates it wants. The FCC apparently doesn't know whether local, long-distance, home, or business users are paying too much or too little. And although recent FCC and federal-court decisions have opened the way for some competition on long-distance rates from MCI and other companies, they remain dependent upon Bell for interconnection with local facilities, and Bell retains the power to manipulate technical standards and financial charges. "It's competition by the grace of Bell," says one regulatory expert.

Competition in long-distance calling, however, may be the wave of the future. MCI subscribers must now punch in twenty-two numbers because Bell does not provide a more convenient interconnection. But MCI recently signed an innovative contract with the non-Bell Northern Iowa Telephone Company (one of about fifteen hundred small, independent companies scattered throughout the country, primarily in rural areas that Bell

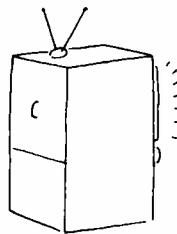
never bothered to pursue). NITC customers can either dial "1" and the number when they want to use Bell's long-distance lines, or dial "6" and the number when they want to plug into MCI.

WHETHER IN THE NEWSPAPER, cable, computer, or telephone business, AT&T's competitors agree that government regulation has only limited impact and that predicting the effect of proposed regulations is virtually impossible.

"It's difficult to say whether the FCC has really made a difference in promoting competition, or whether the limited competition that exists stems solely from the pressures of technology and the marketplace," says one FCC official.

Baby Bell, should it survive judicial and political challenges, will only breed more frustrated bureaucrats. "Trying to make sure that it remained 'fully separated' would be like trying to get a handle on the oil companies," says a seasoned observer. "You could call all the oil company presidents to Capitol Hill, but they still have the power to manipulate data so no one can understand it."

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



Government ineffectiveness is especially disheartening because so few voices are speaking for the public interest. "This is not an age for people," says former FCC commissioner Nicholas Johnson. "All you can hope for is to maintain the opportunity for little fly-by-night companies like IBM to have a say as the debate goes on."

"We recently had the largest rate increase in history," says an FCC staff member. "It will cost telephone users more than \$1 billion a year. And yet there was virtually no consumer group, no organization for the vast body of telephone users. We're involved in a process requiring so much knowledge of detail that no one pays any attention."

In most cases—contrary to the cliché—it's not only easy to criticize, but easy to say what should be done. With AT&T, however, neither one is easy. Lawyers representing billion-dollar corporations sound no different than young,

idealistic FCC attorneys. Whether eager to protect corporate profits or the national interest, they are all frustrated and are all unable to suggest specific solutions. The Justice Department's lawsuit offers no remedy other than somehow splitting up Bell—but even Bell's most strident opponents are unable to explain how this will serve the public. They simply say that Bell is too big, too unaccountable, and too important to ignore.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that many objective observers refuse to jump on the "bust-Bell" bandwagon. "Bell does research and development unlike any other company on earth," says a communications consultant. He smashes his telephone down on his desk, then picks up the receiver. "See, it still works. They'll make really good computers, too. People often see the issue in terms of good guys and bad guys. But it isn't that clear."

Nor is it clear that breaking off some of its subsidiaries would actually hurt AT&T. "In light of its current marketing problems," *Fortune* noted in 1978, "divestiture may be just what the company needs." And *The Washington Post* revealed last July that AT&T "has offered three times to divest itself of assets total-



Barsotti.

ing up to \$20 billion in an effort to settle antitrust problems with the government."

The confusion of the experts and the apathy of the public may well end up serving Ma Bell's interests. If we fail even to understand the communications revolution, how can we hope to control it? The pattern is familiar. When the automobile and television appeared, for example, technology and raw economic power—not reason and planning—reshaped our lives. The same thing is happening today. The difference is that so much of the economic power and technological expertise is centered in one company—AT&T.

An AT&T spokesman leans back, folds his hands behind his neck, and smiles. "Being big doesn't necessarily mean being bad," he says.

A lot of people agree. A lot of people disagree. And a lot depends on who is right. ■

Archie Bunker and the Liberal Mind

by Christopher Lasch



Illustration by Keith Bendis

IN THE LATE SIXTIES, advertisers discovered a new market. Surveys told them that the most voracious consumers were now affluent, urban, educated people under the age of thirty-five. In an attempt to reach this audience, the networks began to experiment with programs slightly more sophisticated than *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and *Marcus Welby*. After much hesitation, CBS—which had least to lose at the time—introduced Norman Lear's *All in the Family* in January 1971. For the first time, a network had dared to confront its audience with a middle-American antihero who vents the most outrageous opinions, tyrannizes over his wife, and bickers endlessly with his daughter and her husband, who struggle unsuccessfully to overcome his prejudices against blacks, Jews, women, and other "un-American" minorities. Archie Bunker proved so durable a character that he has been with us eleven years, now as the hero of *Archie Bunker's Place*, *All in the Family's* successor.

From the start, Archie Bunker became the object of passionate controversy. Did the depiction of his bigotry have the therapeutic effect of dragging a sensitive issue into the open and forcing viewers to confront their own prejudices? Or did it reinforce bigotry by making it respectable? According to Robert Wood, former president of CBS, *All in the Family* helped to "ventilate some of the prejudices and misconceptions in American society today." Many reviewers agreed that *All in the Family* served an "important purpose," even if it offended liberals and other "up-tight viewers." A CBS survey of the show's audience indicated that most viewers took it as a satire, not a vindication, of prejudice. But a somewhat more extensive (though still flawed and simplistic) survey, by sociologists Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach, concluded that the program probably reinforced prejudice instead of combatting it.

Laura Z. Hobson, author of *Gentlemen's Agreement*, claimed in a 1971 *New York Times* article that *All in the Family* sanitized prejudice and made it socially acceptable. Her vigorous attack on Archie Bunker and his creators captured the indignation of an older generation of liberals appalled by what they saw as an attempt to make bigotry loveable, "to clean it up, deodorize it, make millions of people more comfy about indulging in it." In reply, Norman Lear accused Hobson of underestimating the intelligence of middle Americans, who could be trusted, he

Christopher Lasch, professor of history at the University of Rochester, is author of The Culture of Narcissism.

insisted, to recognize his work as satirical in its intention. Yet surveys showing that most viewers identified with Archie (even though many of them thought son-in-law Mike got the better of their arguments) strengthened the fear that the program elicited a "sadistic response," as one educator put it, and served "no constructive purpose." (These views and others were recently collected by Richard P. Adler in a volume entitled *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal*, published by Praeger.)

Both Archie Bunker and the controversy he has generated tell us a great deal about the liberal mind today. *All in the Family* and *Archie Bunker's Place* implicitly take the position that resistance to social change, failure to "adjust" to change, and fear of change have pathological roots. Lear has argued that Archie Bunker's bigotry rests not on hatred but on the "fear of anything he doesn't understand." Because this fear is irrational, Archie's prejudices cannot be corrected by rational persuasion. Although Mike's arguments always "make sense," according to Lear, while Archie's rebuttals are "totally foolish," Archie can't be decisively defeated by Mike.

Liberals of Laura Hobson's type, convinced that bigotry can be combatted by propaganda depicting it in the most unattractive light, mistakenly see the Archie Bunker programs as a capitulation to popular prejudices. What the programs really seem to say, however, is that prejudice is a disease and that the only way to overcome it, as in psychotherapy, is to bring to light its irrational origins. *All in the Family* "simply airs [prejudice]," according to Lear, "brings it out in the open, has people talking about it."

The series seems to have been influenced, at least indirectly, by the theory of "working-class authoritarianism," which has played an important part in the thinking of social scientists and members of the helping professions ever since the late forties. According to this widely accepted interpretation, prejudice, ethnocentricity, and intolerance of ambiguity originate in the authoritarian child-rearing practices allegedly characteristic of working-class families. Archie Bunker has all the traits commonly attributed to the authoritarian husband and father. Lear's dramatization of Bunker's anti-Semitism, racism, male chauvinism, and xenophobia shares with the sociological literature on authoritarianism a tendency to reinterpret class issues in therapeutic terms and to reduce political conflicts to psychological ones. It ignores the possibility that "middle Americans" have legitimate grievances against society, legitimate misgivings about what is called social progress.

Yet the few gains that have been made in race relations, desegregation, and women's rights have usually been achieved at the expense of the white working-class male. His anger cannot be understood, therefore, as a purely psychological reaction; it has an important political basis. His dislike of liberals, moreover, springs not so much from "anti-intellectualism" or ethnocentricity as from the realistic perception that working-class values are the chief casualties of the "cultural revolution" with which liberalism has increasingly identified itself. With his unsentimental but firm commitment to marriage and family life, his respect for hard work and individual enterprise, and his admittedly old-fashioned belief that people should accept the consequences of their actions, the working-class male rightly regards himself as a forgotten man in a society increasingly dominated by the permissive, therapeutic morality of universal understanding. He sees himself, not without reason, as the victim of bureaucratic interference, welfareism, and sophisticated ridicule. Lacking any real political choices, he sometimes vents his anger in an ill-considered politics of right-wing moralism. But it is well known that many of the same voters who supported George Wallace also supported Robert Kennedy (and in any case the Wallace vote did not by any means come exclusively from the working class).

All in the Family and Archie Bunker's Place make no attempt to depict the political basis of working-class prejudice, or even to capture the complexity of the attitudes it dramatizes. The programs reduce a complex historical experience to the single issue of "bigotry," which they then approach as a form of pathology.

But what is true of Norman Lear's famous series is equally true of the commentary they have inspired. Both critics and defenders agree that the "disease" of bigotry is the important issue; they differ only on the question of whether Lear's talking-cure may be worse than the disease itself. Thus historian John Slawson (after stating flatly that "bigotry is sickness") argues that Archie Bunker brings out the worst in his fans. Quoting political sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset on working-class authoritarianism, Arthur Asa Berger (author of *The TV-Guided American*) congratulates *All in the Family* for demolishing the "myth of the common man." But whereas the myth upholds the working man as the salt of the earth, Lipset, and Norman Lear, suggest that he is actually a bigot, endowed with attitudes "to make you shudder." Like many crit-

ics, however, Berger would prefer a more straightforward and unambiguous condemnation of Archie Bunker and his kind. Lear's comedy, he thinks, embodies a kind of pornography of prejudice, ridiculing ethnocentric attitudes but at the same time inviting the viewer to find titillation in their frank expression.

There may be some justice in Berger's charge that *All in the Family* delivers a "double payoff": "We enjoy the ethnic humor yet feel superior to it." But instead of asking whether such ridicule serves a useful social purpose, commentators might better ask whether anything of artistic value is served by appealing so consistently to an audience's sense of superiority. Laura Hobson considered the program "elitist" because only well-educated liberal intellectuals would feel superior to Archie Bunker. Lear, noting that Hobson had unwittingly exposed her own elitism, replied in effect that liberal attitudes are now so widely diffused (at least among the younger viewers he was trying to reach) that almost anyone would feel superior to such an antiquated buffoon. When it nevertheless turned out that many viewers do identify with Archie, even though they do not necessarily endorse all his opinions, this fact—instead of prompting speculation about the complexity of the emotional response elicited by the series—simply reinforced the fear that it might have undesirable social effects.

Yet art of any merit to some extent transcends the immediate intentions of its creators. Although *All in the Family* and *Archie Bunker's Place* invite ridicule of their hero, as their defenders contend, the programs also seem to evoke a more complicated response. For one thing, these programs—especially the original series—deal with emotionally resonant themes of family life. In one survey of *All in the Family*'s audience, the children in a working-class family told an interviewer that their mother, like Edith Bunker, mediated generational arguments. Many middle-class mothers could doubtless say the same thing.

Part of the Bunker household's appeal to a more "sophisticated" audience, I suspect, lies in its power to evoke reminders of ethnic neighborhoods and ethnic cultures that the program's upwardly mobile young viewers have left behind in their climb into the "new class." In the conflict between Archie Bunker and his son-in-law, who rises during the course of the series from a Polish working-class background to a university teaching position, *All in the Family* dramatizes experiences central to the formation of a new, liberal, managerial intelligentsia, which

(Continued on page 63)



AND NOW HE-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-RE'S JOHANN.

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Love on Tape

by Susan Heeger

TO KNOW OUR HEARTS you have to watch our faces, our gestures, pay attention to our silences.

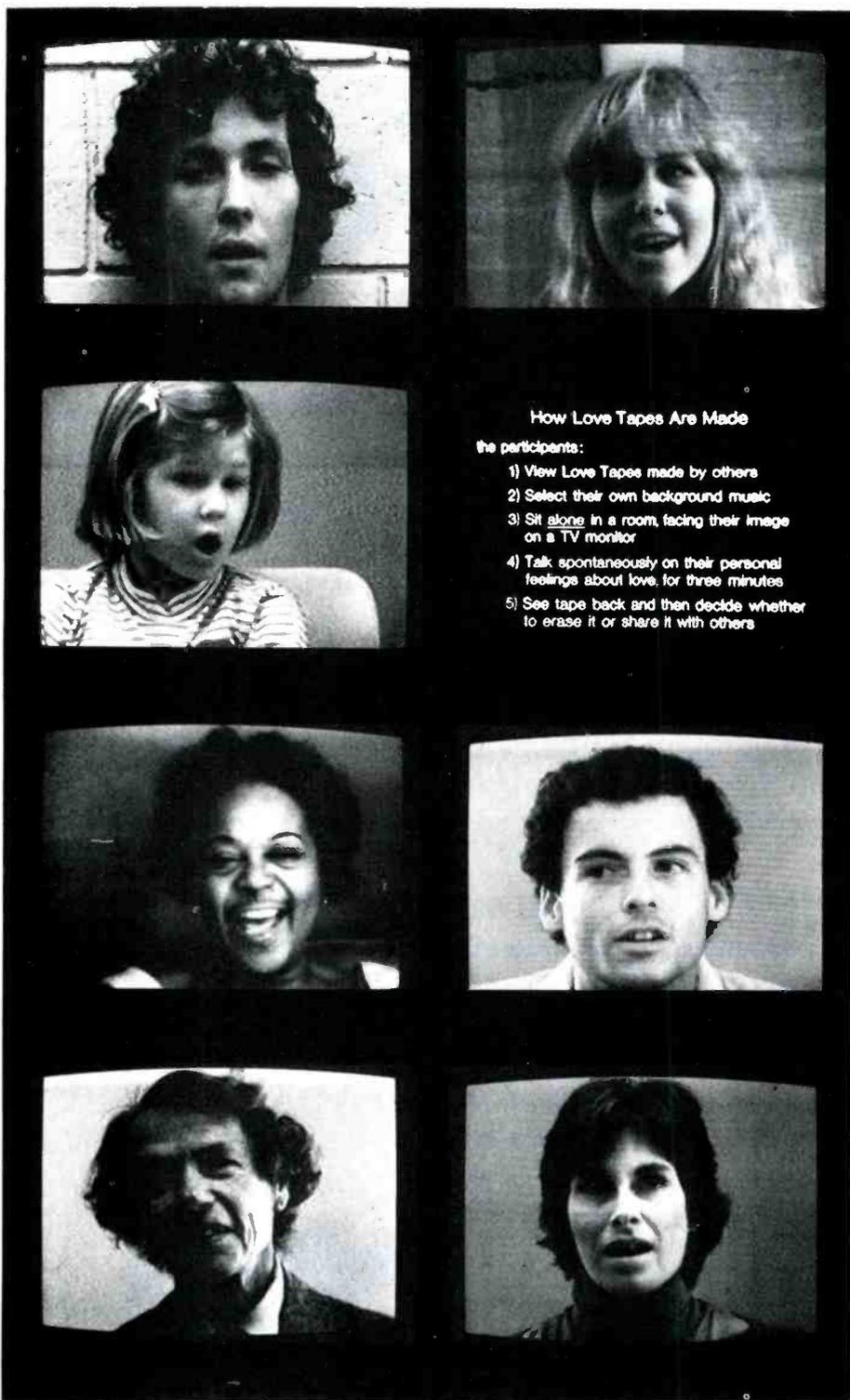
One woman who made a *Love Tape* never speaks at all. For three minutes, while "Moonlight Sonata" plays mournfully, she stares at herself in mute torment, shuts her eyes, gives the flicker of a smile. Her mouth opens. Watching, you can't help but list toward her, encouraging, expectant. But her eyes close and, opening again, fill with anguish — as if she'd hoped to make herself vanish.

The *Love Tapes* present haunting portraits of ordinary people. They are taped confessions, they are performances, they are real-life dramas of emotion. One woman who saw a *Love Tapes* selection on New York City's public-television station called it "the most intimate experience I've ever had with TV. You don't always want this when you turn on the set." However, she added, "I could probably remember every one I saw."

Conceived by video artist Wendy Clarke, the *Love Tapes* involved the public with video technology partly to challenge their assumptions about television. "In our society," says the artist, "we spend so much time blobbing out to the box when we could be growing and changing with it. I'm for a more active involvement."

From the project's inception in 1977 until April of 1981, when Clarke's role in it ended, more than eight hundred people made *Love Tapes*. The National Endowment for the Arts provided financial support, as did the Rockefeller Foundation and the New York State Council on the Arts. Museums in California, Texas, Connecticut, and New York held *Love Tapes* exhibitions. *Love Tapes* were the subject of television talk shows around the country. They were broadcast over cable systems in Los Angeles and New York, and were widely covered on New York local news shows. Such broad popular and artistic interest is unusual for a

Susan Heeger lives in New York and is at work on a novel.



The Love Tapes present haunting portraits
of ordinary people. They are taped confessions,
performances, real-life dramas of emotion.

work of video art. It raises issues not only of the medium's complex potential as an art form, but of the influence that art could have on conventional television.

To make *Love Tapes*, all participants first "warmed up" by watching tapes made by others. When they felt ready, they chose some background music, sat alone in a room facing the camera—and themselves in the monitor—and simply talked for three minutes about love. They said whatever came to mind. Some recited poems or told anecdotes. Very often in the course of things they lost their way, forgot the points they'd planned to make. No matter what they did or said—or didn't say—the camera ran for three minutes without stopping. When time was up, they viewed the tape privately and decided whether to erase it or let others see it.

The sometimes aimless result led one commercial broadcaster to complain, "Wouldn't it all have worked better with an interviewer?" More smoothly, perhaps, since an interviewer would have kept these people on the track. But much less spontaneously. The "self-interview" was a unique and important aspect of *Love Tapes*. Subconsciously or otherwise, people try to give an interviewer what he wants. Talking to themselves, alone, gave makers of *Love Tapes* ultimate control over what was said. This control was never undermined by later editing, as they knew from having seen others' tapes. Once completed, a *Love Tape* wasn't changed in any way unless erased, again on orders from its maker.

A few of those who made *Love Tapes* acted as if they believed they were actually on the air. As Clarke points out, "Not everyone saw the difference between closed-circuit and broadcast television. Some thought they were on Channel Two." They talked about "expressing views" and "taking this opportunity." They addressed an audience appropriately general and remote: "You people out there." Some of them brought "scripts." As one man declares, "I have waited thirty-one years to say this to the whole world!"

But in most cases, something happens

the longer they are left alone with themselves. It is not "the world" but their own image they are facing, and the effect of this seems very nearly hypnotic. As one woman put it, "The person looking at you *knows*." Though the world may not, the person sees through your poses, spots your routines, demands more—demands truth. "Every time I watch my tape," says one man, "I realize I said more than I intended."

"I planned to be witty," says another, "to come off sounding smart. I was more sincere than I expected."

The unedited, spontaneous search for self-truth is what makes some tapes so rambling and formless. It is also what makes them resonate, what lifts them for the viewer beyond document, oral history, and entertainment—to the province of successful art.

The neater tapes, those that chart a course and stay on it, are often least successful in artistic terms. Take one that begins, "I'm a modern person so my views on love conform to my society's." The speaker is a man in dark glasses who has chosen a leopard-skin backdrop and a disco song he rocks to as he talks. His tone of voice is measured, slightly smirking, as he describes childhood visions of a grown-up world—"smart clothes, cocktail parties"—the world of the Barbie dolls he played with. "I thought I'd grow up like a Ken doll." In high school he fell in love, coincidentally, with a real girl named Barbie. "She used me as her Dear Abby . . . She took me along on [her] dates"—with the captain of the football team. During their five-year relationship, her one "act of love" was to give him a Joni Mitchell record—after she had pushed him from a tree and broken his arm.

Then he "knew she did care."

Though there is anger in this somewhere, the speech rolls out like a comedy act, well-paced, ending smoothly where it started. He credits Barbie for his modern views, with launching him for life as Dear Abby and platonic pal to those he loves. "That's it, Babs. Thanks a lot, chum."

The tape is funny and sad. But one senses he's performed it before, much the

same way, for an audience at a party.

In another tape, a rather plain young woman begins by quoting from the music she has chosen: "I really don't know love at all . . ." She describes a feeling she used to get from her family, "that we love you, we just don't like you," and tells of all the time she has spent since, making sure that others like her. She falters and is quiet. She mentions love she's felt from animals, who are "totally accepting." After awhile, she remembers other *Love Tapes* in which people brought up "mother-love."

"Maybe my mother was different . . ." Suddenly, as if physically confronted by the gulf between herself and them, she just manages through tears, "I guess that's my problem to work out . . . I haven't talked to my mother in three years." Finally, beyond bitterness, she realizes, "I miss the family connection."

What we have gone through with this woman is a familiar, stumbling grope toward self-knowledge, the sort of knowledge that we ordinarily bury in order to tolerate our lives as they are. The experience gathers force from small insights, tentatively offered, and from the fact that it occurs (as all *Love Tapes* do) in real time, not the telescoped, chopped-up, fast-edited time of conventional television. This feature, perhaps more than anything, encourages our identification. The suspense is genuine, the outcome uncertain. Believing what we see, we get involved. We fill in gaps left by silences. As we go along, we refer to our own feelings, our own past. And in the end, we share the misery and release of her discovery—that no matter how imperfect our early family lives were, a longing persists for the deep bonds of kinship.

Before 1977, when Wendy Clarke produced her first *Love Tapes*, she had been working for five years as an "interactive" video artist. From the beginning, her aim was to take the mystery out of television by teaching the public how it worked and how to use it—"educating people that television could be different"—and her approach was "to use what the medium has, what it can do, instead of trying to manipulate it." Particularly interesting to

her were its live feedback aspect and the flat, slightly abstract, "newspaper" look of its images. Her early exhibitions of video sculpture involved people with cameras and monitors in a playful exploration of space and medium. But it was keeping a video journal that led her more directly to the *Love Tapes*.

Begun "purely for myself . . . as a sort of self-therapy tool," the journal showed Clarke the benefits of taking controlled risks before a video camera, confronting herself in the process of confession, knowing she could erase if she wanted to. Experiments with editing convinced her to keep the journal in real time, to record the sometimes slow evolution of insight rather than peak moments only.

When a half-hour portion of the journal, from a long session with herself on love, was shown in a class at UCLA's motion picture/television department, the intense, personal responses from film students convinced her of the format's potential to get the public involved. Five students stayed after class to make their own tapes. With a recording of "I'm in the Mood for Love" in the background ("There were no modern records in the library"), each talked for the length of the song about love. Music, says Clarke, "takes up spaces and puts people at ease. It gives a rhythm and form that wouldn't otherwise be there." It also limits the length of each tape.

The student tapes seemed to complete the process she had started. "I no longer felt uneasy about my own tape. Everybody took the same risk. Everyone had been worried about revealing too much. Afterward, we all felt so close."

Her next step was to set up a video booth in a Los Angeles art museum and test the project with a larger group. The response there—among mostly white, middle-class people—encouraged her to try *Love Tapes* in more diverse settings: with Spanish-speaking students in New York, with a party of friends in East Harlem, with teenagers and the elderly, with prison inmates and disabled adults. Each group approached the subject with a slightly different emphasis. The middle-class Californians focused on romantic love, the Hispanics on love for nature and their families. The Harlem group discussed friends and community, the inmates, love threatened or lost.

Overall, the similarities were more striking than the differences. Most people saw love as necessary for survival, and correlated childhood deprivation with severe problems in adulthood. Self-love was considered an important step toward loving and being loved by others. And there were larger concerns as well. Frustrations over world conflict prompted desires to

forge links with others on more than just the personal level. For many, making *Love Tapes* was an act of connection.

In the spring of 1980, wanting to make the *Love Tapes* experience "totally public," Clarke set up a video booth in the lobby of New York's World Trade Center. During the ten days she was there, 357 people, "from messengers to executives," made *Love Tapes*. One man made a tape each day. A lot of people, Clarke says, just came to hang around, to watch tapes and feel part of the process. "Nobody ever listens to me," many told her. On the release forms she provided, on a line marked "comments," their enthusiasm for *Love Tapes* overflowed. "It was a relief!" "Terrific!" "I did it!" "We know we're not the only ones who've suffered now—or shared joy."

With the success of *Love Tapes in New York*, Clarke knew the process would work anywhere. But when she failed to get funding for a global-scale piece, she began looking for other projects. In April 1981, at the Museum of Modern Art's *Love Tapes* retrospective, she produced her last *Love Tapes*. "People can make them now without me," she says. "All they need is a starter tape." She knows of at least two groups that have done this: a

philosophy class on sex and love at Post College and a church group in upstate New York. Not at all protective about her method, she encourages its use for a variety of other purposes, such as education and therapy. (See box.)

But her current interest is a new, global project in which "people in different parts of the world would communicate meaningfully, nonverbally," by doing a painting together simultaneously. Though the project is still in its early conceptual stages, she foresees satellite hookups of video systems in New York, Paris, and Tokyo—in places accessible to the general public, not just to museum-goers.

John Hanhardt, curator of film and video at New York's Whitney Museum, describes Wendy Clarke as a video artist who has "broken ground for television" at a time when the home viewer is interacting increasingly with the medium. By involving people as viewers and participants in a process that was "very clear but not simple," she showed video to be "a medium they could overcome their fear of and see directly as a self-created tool. They could actually use it."

As one man who got involved at the World Trade Center wrote to Wendy Clarke, "Thank you for expressing myself."

THE AVERAGE PERSON has been intimidated by communications equipment, says Michael O'Callaghan, director of Global Vision, a nonprofit communications company. "People have been the victims of it—of the kind of Madison Avenue programming that uses its audience to sell toothpaste."

O'Callaghan, who helped plan and implement *Love Tapes in New York* with Wendy Clarke, has launched a publicity campaign of his own called *Future Tapes*, which employs Clarke's *Love Tapes* technique to "create a sustainable vision of the future seen through the eyes of leading thinkers, first in America and then around the world." Among his reasons for choosing the method are its potential to disseminate information widely at a relatively low cost, and its stimulating effect on the thinking of people who participate. "There is a great pleasure," he says, "in taking control of television, creating something that won't be twisted into someone else's product."

Especially appealing for his purposes is the way privacy with monitor and camera puts people in "an exploratory mood . . . making conscious what is unconscious, so they are more aware of how they see things."

Suzanne Greason, another of Wendy Clarke's former assistants on *Love Tapes* and the associate producer of *Future Tapes*, is currently using the technique in two other projects as well. The *Nuclear Issues Tapes* aim at creating "an electronic 'speak-in'" to further public knowledge and understanding of the subject and to "insure the survival of the species." The *Equal-Time Tapes* involve opinion and information exchange on "issues that affect us all," such as abortion and ERA.

A comparison of Clarke's method—the honesty and openness it elicits—with the conventional television interview suggests the former's effectiveness as a documentary tool.

Clarke herself is excited by the method's possibilities as a psychotherapy aid. At least two therapists she knows, impressed again by the frankness of *Love Tapes*, have bought video setups for their practices. Clarke sees educational uses for *Love Tapes*—as a means for starting discussions on love, parenting, and other topics.

Whatever the application, Michael O'Callaghan, for one, senses a growing interest in "using the video medium to bring people in direct communication about things they feel are important." ■

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Video Disk vs. Video Disk

If you believe what you hear, you think there is a war on. But the two disks are so different, they may each find a niche.

by David Lachenbruch

MENTION "VIDEO DISK" in most media circles and eyes turn heavenward. Despite billions of dollars spent in development, promotion, and marketing, the video disk is viewed variously as a stepchild, a dismal flop, an idea whose time has passed.

The disk, video sophisticates quickly point out, is an ingenious redundancy of the video age: It's designed mainly to replay movies—the same movies available on pay-cable and subscription television, without any equipment cost and at a much lower admission price. Moreover, the disk player does one—and only one—of the things a video-cassette recorder (VCR) can do. VCRs, using tape, have about ten times as much prepackaged programming available in retail and rental shops, and they can also be used to record programs off the air, or from cable, or to make electronic home movies from a video camera.

Those who have been following the reports and advertisements know that there are two incompatible video-disk systems on the market and a third on the way. One system, the optical LaserVision (LV), has been in stores since the end of 1978 without creating much excitement. The other, the lower-cost RCA capacitance elec-

tronic disk system (CED), arrived last March in a burst of public-relations fireworks but fizzled at the retail level. The outlook could change as time goes on, but for the moment, the video disk concept has failed to set the world on fire, or even to char it around the edges.

The market for both types of video disk suffers partly from the prevailing notion that their two technologies are in a battle with each other for acceptance. Even the companies promoting the systems sometimes seem to believe the two are in competition. But the fact is that in most respects, the LV and CED systems are less competitive with each other than they are with pay television and video-cassette recorders. The disks use quite separate technologies, and they differ vastly in their capabilities.

The only characteristics they share are these: They use the familiar flat-disk medium to store pictures and sound, and they are both totally dependent on available software. This dependency may be part of the reason for their inauspicious beginnings. By the middle of this year there were only about 125 titles available for each system (with some overlap), far short of what would be necessary for broad consumer appeal. So it is much too

early to make firm judgments about the success or failure of either disk.

But there is at least one encouraging note. When a chain of stores headquartered in Biloxi, Mississippi, recently began renting video-tape recorders and RCA video-disk players for \$11.99 overnight, it found almost immediately that the disk players were overwhelmingly preferred. The reason, it turned out, was that for playback purposes, the disk player was simple to operate, while the VCRs bewildered the customers with their switches and knobs.

The differences between the LV and CED video-disk systems are far greater in number than the similarities, and they are philosophical as well as technical—philosophical in the sense that the two disks were created to perform significantly different functions for distinctly different kinds of consumers. It is only because they both have the ability to play movies that they have come to be considered competitors. And as for the technical differences, they are miles—some would say worlds—apart.

The LV system stems from work conducted independently by Philips in the Netherlands and a small laboratory owned by MCA in California. In the early

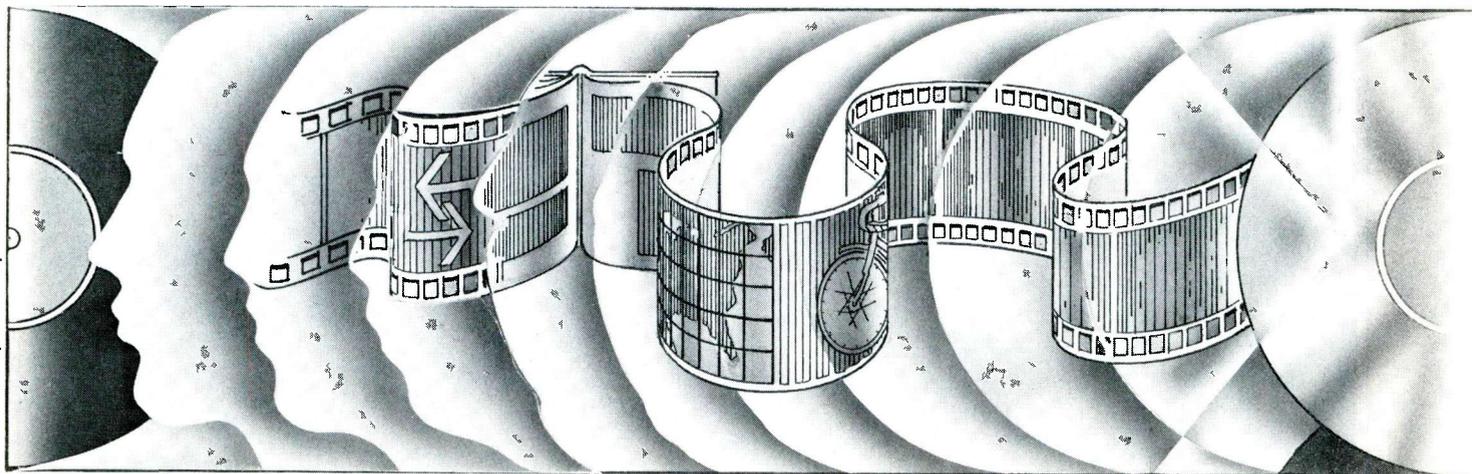


Illustration by Ian Wolpole

1970s, the two companies came up almost at once with virtually the same system. Any variations were eliminated through a joint standardization effort.

The LV uses a highly effective disk with microscopic pits etched into its surface that follow a spiral path under a protective coating of transparent plastic. A low-powered laser beam is focused on the row of pits through the transparent plastic coating. The modulated laser light is reflected back into a photosensitive system and converted to video and audio information. Each of the 54,000 spiral "tracks" on one side of a standard LV disk also contains electronic coding to keep the pinpoint of laser light on the desired track at all times — so positioning the lightbeam "stylus" doesn't require the mechanical guidance provided by grooves in an audio disk.

The standard LV disk conveniently makes one revolution for every full television picture, or frame. In the American television standards, the television picture changes thirty times a second. Thus the disk spins at 1,800 revolutions per minute (rpm) to provide thirty minutes of playing time, or 54,000 individual pictures per disk side.

Because each frame is electronically coded, the 54,000 pictures on a side may be played in any order, held indefinitely (by repeating a single track), speeded up (by skipping tracks), slowed down (by repeating each track a specific number of times), played backwards, and so forth. By means of a microprocessor built into the player, any one of the 54,000 individual frames can be located merely by "punching in" the specific frame number on the player's wireless remote-control keyboard. Because the lightbeam stylus moves a total distance of less than four inches from the beginning to the end of the disk, any individual frame may be located in a fraction of a second.

This is clearly a very sophisticated device, and its random-access feature makes

it particularly attractive for teaching and training. And use of the optical disk in tandem with the computer is already quite popular in industry and government.

Some of the disk's considerable potential is being plumbed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, under Dr. Nicholas Negroponte of the Architecture Machine Group. One wonder created in Dr. Negroponte's lab is a bicycle-repair manual on video disk. This uses a color-television monitor; a transparent touch-sensitive layer coats its screen. Touching any part of the bicycle on the screen will give you a moving picture showing exactly how it works. You can play it back in slow motion, speed it up, zoom in for a closer look, or get more information on any part you choose.

Another development from this lab is the "movie map." The user may touch any part of the map, as it appears on the overlay, to elicit close-up pictures of a geographical area. One disk, based on an extensive filming tour through Aspen, Colorado, even allows the user to "drive" though the city, turning right or left or going straight as he chooses, determining his own route, speed, and points of view. He may stop at any building for a closer look — and in fact can see how each street or building looks in winter or fall.

Although these uses are quite complex, they demonstrate what can be done with the optical disk right now and in the near future. Consumers with LV disk players are already being offered interactive programs. The most intriguing is "The First National Kidisc," produced by Optical Programming Associates and now widely available. This single-sided record can be played straight through from beginning to end in twenty-seven minutes, but it is designed to provide hours of instructive fun for children. There are how-to segments (making model airplanes, dancing, making a glass xylophone, knot-tying) that can be played at any speed or in step-by-step stop motion. There are magic tricks,

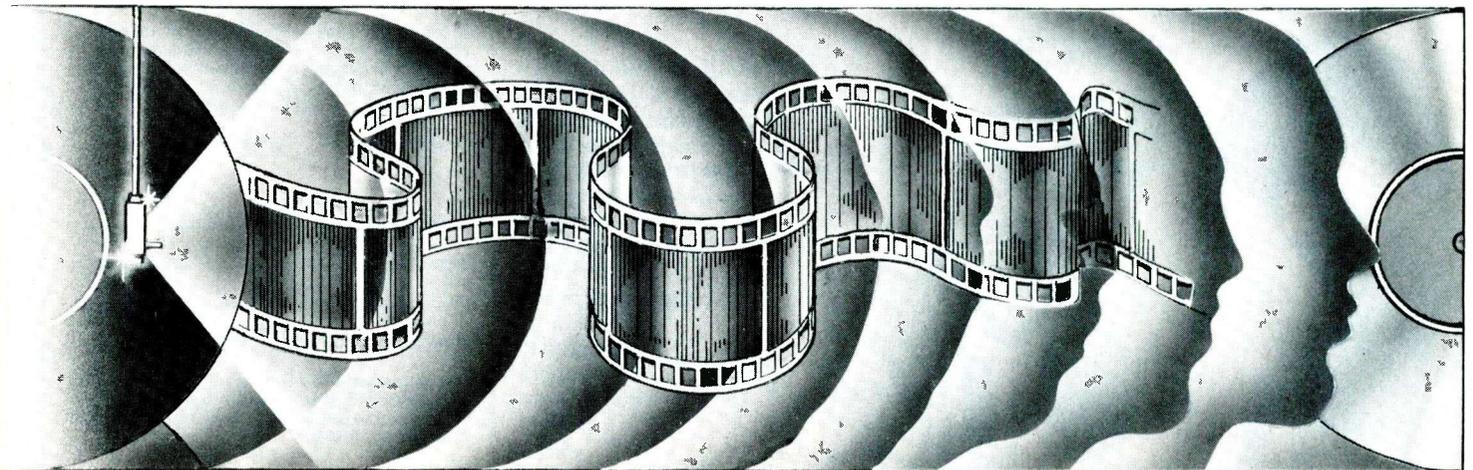
completely convincing when played at normal speed, but demystified by slow motion. There are riddles to be viewed one at a time, and even a target game to be played using a wireless remote-control unit.

Sears Roebuck experimentally transferred its entire 236-page summer 1981 catalogue onto one side of an optical video disk. The *Tele-Shop Catalog*, distributed to 1,000 disk-system owners, contains thirteen "fashion shows and demonstrations," complete with motion and sound, that may be dialed up in any order. Coordinated with these are thirteen "merchandise shops" — the equivalent of catalogue items — which are completely indexed and located by frame number. Nearly 18,000 items are contained on some 5,000 individual still frames listing descriptions, pictures, and prices of the products.

It is even possible to put the contents of an entire art museum on the laser disk — but not on the mechanically operated CED disk.

RCA's development of what turned out to be the CED system probably predates the start of work on the Philips-MCA LV system, since it was begun in the mid-1960s. RCA eventually finished what it considered a simple, low-cost system using a grooved disk of a vinyl material impregnated with carbon making it electrically conductive. As in audio disks, a diamond-tipped stylus rides in the CED disk's grooves; however, the grooves serve no function except to guide the stylus on its spiral path across the video disk. Like the grooveless optical disk, the grooved capacitance disk is engraved with pits representing the video and audio signals. The stylus "reads" differences in electrical capacitance, which are determined by the distance the pits create between the body of the disk and the conductive portion of

David Lachenbruch is editorial director of Television Digest.



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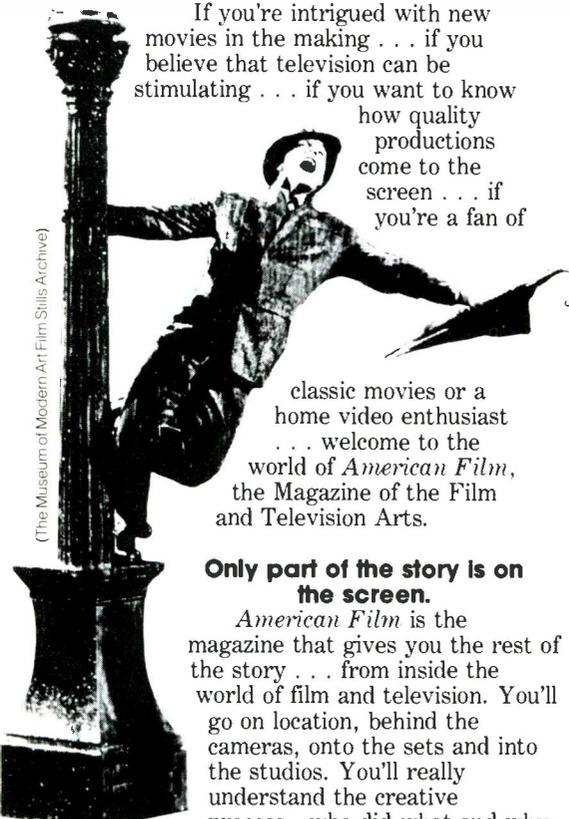
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the stylus.

The CED disk is designed to play up to an hour per side. Compared with the LV's 1,800 rpm, it loafs along at 450, because it plays back four one-thirtieth-of-a-second television frames per revolution, instead of one. It was designed exclusively as a consumer product, and for a single purpose: to play back recorded picture and sound in a sequential fashion—that is, in real time, from beginning to end. Throughout its developmental work, RCA remembered it was aiming at a mass-market product that could be produced simply and cheaply, designed to accept records as similar as possible to the audio disk.

Inevitably, as both systems were under development—"racing to market," as it was often put—an aura of intense competition developed, despite the fact that the proponents of each system had different goals in mind. The optical system was designed to be a new type of ultra-sophisticated, ultra-flexible, high-density computerized storage device, while the capacitance system was intended as the video equivalent of the phonograph record.

In the course of the rivalry, both sides were forced to make compromises, each adding features promised by its "competitor." Perhaps the most significant was the addition of hour-per-side capability to the LV system. This necessitated the development of a second, variable-speed playing mode: The turntable starts at 1,800 rpm when the laser beam is nearest the center of the disk, and decreases to 600 as it reaches the outside tracks at the end of the side. In this "extended play" mode, the LV system relinquishes all of its "special effects" and random-access ability, because it no longer plays a single frame per revolution. The new extended-play disks are used increasingly for movies, making possible the recording of a two-hour film on a single two-sided disk instead of two, and bringing it to parity with the RCA system in this respect.

RCA in turn added some "special effects" to its basically linear system. A "visual search" feature permits high-speed scanning of the picture in forward or reverse. The effect is somewhat like flipping through a magazine. "Rapid access" is even faster, but lacks a visible picture. When both forward and reverse search buttons are pressed simultaneously, the disk plays a single track over and over—a sequence of four frames.

RCA's biggest concession to the "competition" was the promise to add stereophonic sound in mid-1982. In line with its objective of producing a low-cost, mass-market machine, RCA had designed its system for monophonic sound, assuming that buyers would attach the players to

their television sets, all of which are monophonic. (The LV system, on the other hand, has two sound tracks, and some disks are recorded with stereo sound. The player has standard audio output jacks that can be plugged into a home stereo system.) When RCA unveiled its system to the press and announced the sound was monophonic, a chorus of derisive jeers, hoots, and hollers went up—particularly from the audio trade press. A sustained barrage of unfavorable publicity forced RCA to announce it would have stereophonic disks and players next year.

The same hi-fi dilettantes, electronic gadgeteers, and professional prophets of the video revolution who howled at RCA's lack of stereo summed up their case, after the introduction of CED, with the authoritative pronouncement that the optical system would be the sole survivor because it was "better." They ignored the fact that the two systems actually have little in common.

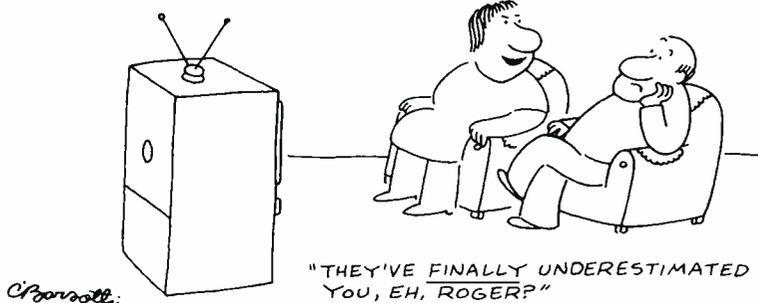
A look at the prime movers behind both

ture of the QUBE two-way cable-television equipment. Despite Magnavox's far more widespread distribution, the Pioneer player now leads in the LV equipment field, presumably because of its convenient and versatile random-access push-button system (present on both the player and the wireless remote control), which Magnavox lacks.

Disks for the LV system are being mastered and pressed by DiscoVision Associates (IBM and MCA) in California, by Universal Pioneer (DiscoVision Associates and Pioneer) in Japan, and at a new 3M plant in Wisconsin.

The CED system is backed almost completely by consumer electronics companies. Its proprietor, RCA, has licensed a score of competitors to manufacture players, and three of them—Japan's Hitachi, Sanyo, and Toshiba—are in production. Brand names controlling a total of nearly 60 percent of the U.S. color-television market are selling (or soon will sell) CED players made by the four manufacturers. These include Zenith, Sears, Montgomery Ward, and

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



systems is instructive. The major marketing effort for the LV system in the United States has passed from Philips and MCA to IBM, which became interested in the system while working on information storage. IBM purchased 50 percent of the DiscoVision operation from MCA. The latter has now almost completely dissociated itself from proprietorship in the optical technique (although it still has a financial interest), even changing the name of its video-disk programming operation from MCA DiscoVision to MCA Videodisc, and making its programs—mostly from Universal Pictures, which it owns—available to all disk formats. Philips still has a deep worldwide interest in the system, but its American affiliate in consumer electronics, Magnavox, is apparently cooling on the idea.

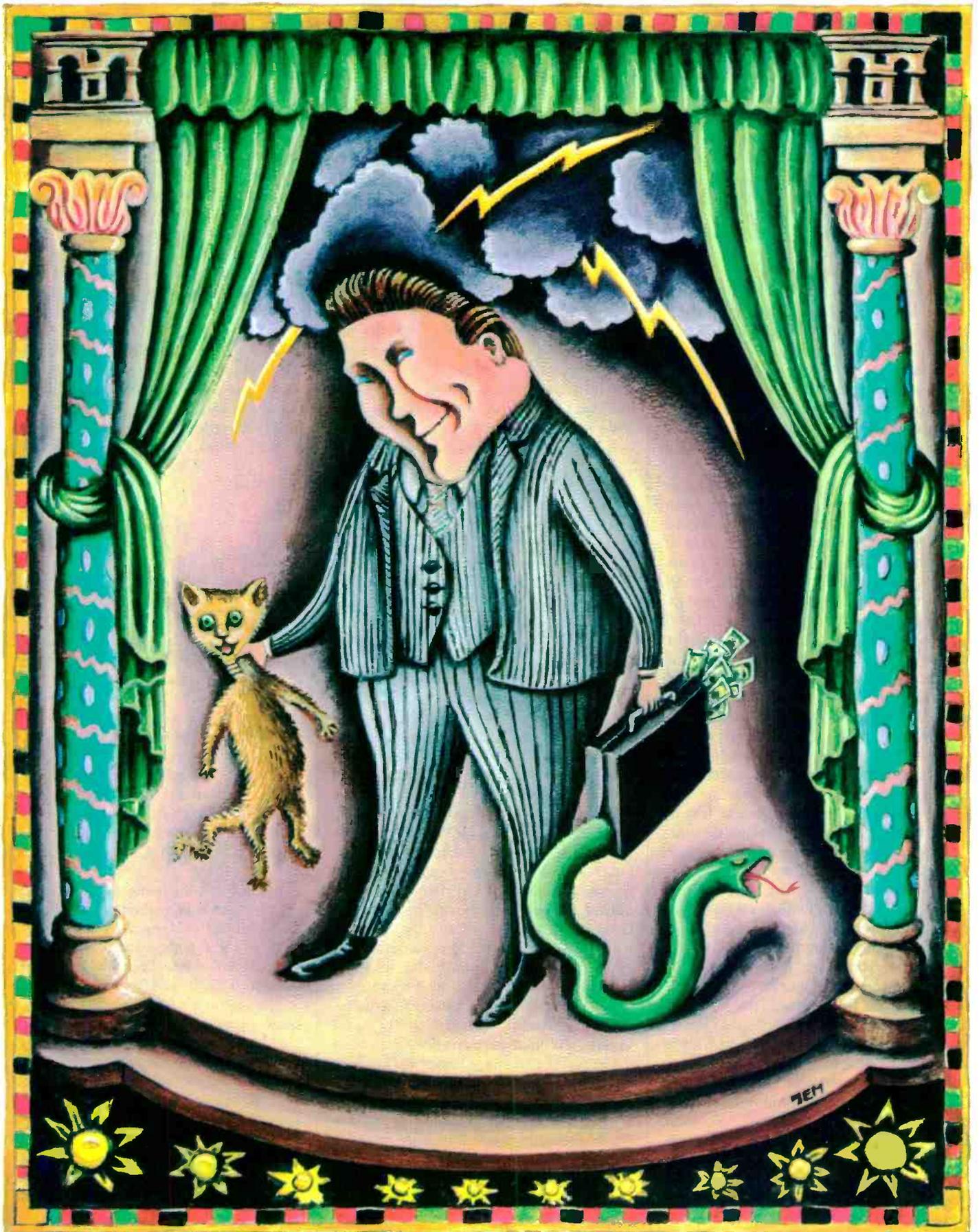
LV hardware sales in the U.S. are now made primarily through Pioneer Video, a subsidiary of Japan's Pioneer Electronics, a leading manufacturer of component audio equipment. Pioneer recently gained a foothold in video through the manufac-

J.C. Penney. The Radio Shack chain, not previously involved in television-set marketing, is also selling CED players and disks. CED disks are currently being made only by RCA, in Indianapolis, but CBS will open a large CED mastering and pressing facility in Carrollton, Georgia, early next year.

In mid-1981, the home video-disk player penetration was estimated at 70,000—about 40,000 LV (available in various parts of the country since late 1978) and some 30,000 CED (launched nationwide on March 22, 1981).

The pattern of early sales seems to show a marked difference in the types of customers for the two systems. Pioneer's surveys show that at least 70 percent of LV buyers already own video-cassette recorders, and that most seem to be the sophisticated types who frequent the audio-video retail stores. While RCA has little demographic research available, initial reports indicate that CED is selling best in rural areas, far from the nation's

(Continued on page 66)



The Businessman on the Box

The new stock villain in prime time wears a three-piece suit. And business is reacting like an oppressed minority group.

by Michael Pollan

A YOUNG WOMAN HAS BEEN FOUND MURDERED, and television detective Harry Orwell is called in to investigate. Prime suspects include a drug dealer, a hired killer, and the boyfriend. Who did it? None of the likely candidates. The young woman, it turns out, was bumped off by her quite-respectable boss.

As plot twists go, this one is by now thoroughly hackneyed. These days, television's favorite stock villain—once an American Indian, or a drug dealer, or a Mafioso—is the American businessman, whose three-piece suit is about as reliable an index to evil as the black cowboy hat used to be in old Westerns. And just as the painfully obsequious Tonto elicited storms of protest from American Indians, amoral and slithery J.R. Ewing has plenty of American businessmen crying prejudice.

A flurry of recent "public service" print advertisements, by Kaiser Aluminum, United Technologies, Mobil, and others, ask Americans whether television isn't doing our society a disservice by portraying businessmen almost exclusively as crooks and buffoons. On *The New York Times*' Op-Ed page a Mobil advertisement asked, "If J.R. Ewing were a woman or a member of an ethnic minority, would the person who shot him go unprosecuted?" Whether or not the question is legitimate, the fact that the answer is probably negative has many business leaders up in arms. Richard Lesher, the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, pointedly reminded his members that "these programs are funded by our advertising dollars," and demanded to know "why we should continue wasting our shareholders' and employees' funds by subsidizing our own demise."

At least one major corporation has already decided to act: Kaiser Aluminum plans to take a program's portrayal of business and businessmen into account when deciding where to advertise. "It would be ridiculous for my company to be buying commercial time on a program that was highly critical of the industries we're in," said Ronald Rhody, Kaiser's corporate vice president for public relations and advertising. Kaiser may not be a heavy television advertiser, but the significance of its new policy should not be underestimated: A major corporation has explicitly made ideology a criterion for advertising support.

Though few have advocated this kind of direct action, many people in both business and government sound worried about the long-term effect of television's unremitting procession of nefarious executives. Last year, a study commissioned for the Department of Commerce cited television entertainment's treatment of business as an important factor in the erosion of America's "in-

novative spirit." A survey conducted by the Annenberg School of Communications found a correlation between heavy television watching and low confidence in business. And this fall, the Annenberg School is holding the first major business-and-the-media conference to address the portrayal of businessmen in television entertainment.

But nothing has done more to call attention to the prime-time businessman than "Crooks, Conmen, and Clowns," a study recently published by The Media Institute. (In fact, Kaiser's Rhody cites this study as the reason for his company's action.) The Media Institute, a watchdog outfit funded largely by the Scaife Foundation, analyzed 200 prime-time shows and found in them a deep and abiding strain of hostility toward business and businessmen. According to the report, two out of every three businessmen are portrayed as "foolish, greedy, or criminal"; nearly half of the work done by them is illegal, and "television almost never portrays business as a socially useful or economically productive activity."

Though the institute is dominated by business and obviously has an axe to grind, few observers have assailed its principal conclusions. In fact, another study done at the Annenberg School found that, of the three most common professional types portrayed on television, it was the businessman whose image was the blackest: He was eight times more likely to be the bad guy than a doctor, and thirteen times more likely than a policeman.

The popular arts in America have never done too well by businessmen. The robber baron, the unfeeling landlord, the eagerly foreclosing banker, the sleazy used-car dealer—these stock business villains have long been fixtures in our popular culture. Then why should business suddenly be so worked up about television entertainment? One reason may be that it simply suits the business community's public-relations strategy to act upset about *something*. In recent years, an important part of that strategy has been to play down the power of business, and to depict it as an underdog before the amassed power of government and the media. This embattled stance has helped to get a whole raft of government regulations repealed or eased. And unremitting complaints of unfair treatment on television news seem to have won a new responsiveness from the networks, in the form of more "balanced coverage," various new broadcast forums—such as ABC's *Viewpoint*, on which companies can actually air prepared film clips in response to objectionable news items—and television's increasing receptiveness to corporate issue advertising.

"Business is being treated much more fairly on the news side lately," admits Leonard Theberge, president of The Media Institute and editor of the study on prime-time businessmen. "You're getting nearly a balance today, with almost as many companies

Michael Pollan is the associate editor of *Channels* magazine.

commended as they are criticized. That's a major shift." And it's one reason, Theberge says, that his group decided to make a study of television entertainment; business apparently views prime time as the next stretch of hostile territory.

But there is something different about this new offensive, something troubling. It's one thing for business to portray itself as embattled, and quite another to imply it is an oppressed group, like blacks, women, homosexuals, and Indians. To criticize and mock the powerful is intrinsically different than mistreating the powerless. Blurring that distinction—as Mobil, The Media Institute, and others have done—may offend many more people than it persuades.

For business to be straining to polish its image at a time when nearly all of its agenda—from deregulation to massive corporate tax cuts—is being written into law, might seem like overkill. What difference do a few prime-time swipes at businessmen make when Congress and the President are giving away the store?

But the strategy has its rationale. As the

Department of Commerce recently warned the business community in a surprisingly frank report, though business may finally have the government in its pocket, it should be careful of the American public, which "still has expectations of business beyond business's traditional agenda of providing goods, services, jobs, and profits." The report advised that public confidence in business remains astonishingly low, despite the hospitable new climate in Washington; so business had better refurbish its image, lest the American public ruin a very good thing.

A less reasoned motive for business's complaints about television entertainment may be just plain hurt feelings. American businessmen have always desired more than tolerance from the American people. For Adam Smith, morality was not relevant to business; public benefit would follow from self-interest, even greed, not from high-mindedness. American businessmen, however, have traditionally claimed a moral legitimacy for themselves. Heir to the Puritans' exacting views on worldly success, the American

capitalist has sought from us love and appreciation, not just forbearance.

From this perspective, it's easy to see why businessmen are so insulted by their image on television. The businessman villain is ubiquitous, surfacing in everything from adventure shows to serial dramas, soap operas, and even situation comedies. Perhaps the very dimmest view of business is taken by adventure and dramatic shows—like *Quincy*, *Hart to Hart*, *Lou Grant*, *Charlie's Angels*—where series good guys go after guest bad guys week after week. Here, businessmen come in on a one-shot basis to jazz up the plot and supply a convincing malefactor. On a recent episode of *Hart to Hart*, for instance, the head of the real-estate division of a giant conglomerate performs this dirty work. This fellow acquires valuable land, for use in strip mining, by means of a rather intense form of intimidation: He systematically dumps truckloads of the pollutant PCB in the local water supply. The PCB-dumping and strip-mining scheme give this episode the requisite dose of what passes on television for cor-

TV Gives Labor the Business Too

IF BUSINESS IS UPSET about the "bias" in television entertainment, then doesn't it stand to reason that labor would be delighted with its image in prime time? Alas, it is not.

Organized labor has been taking its own hard look at prime time, and it, too, has strong reservations. In labor's view, the medium only remembers workers and unions at strike time, or when a pension-fund scandal surfaces. Though workers appear often enough on television shows, they are usually saddled with the brains and bigotry of an Archie Bunker, and most upsetting of all to labor, they are almost never shown doing any kind of productive work. Such an image, say some labor unions, is enough to give skilled workers a sense of inferiority and convince the public that clownish workers and corrupt unions are at the bottom of our economic woes. To remedy the situation, unions are active on a number of fronts: They are pressuring the networks, of course, but they are also experimenting with some innovative new technologies.

The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers has led the most direct assault on television's image of labor. Last year, the IAM hired William Young to develop a television monitoring survey, similar to one he did on violence for the Parent Teachers Association. While Young devised the questionnaire and an organizing manual, the

IAM began training its staff. Six hundred officials from across the country met in thirteen day-long seminars to learn about the structure of the broadcasting industry, the various ways they could influence programming, and how local union members could be organized into media-watchdog groups. Armed with their *Media Project TV Trainers Manual* (by now an underground Bible of media activism), which comes complete with simulated confrontations with television executives, they convinced some fifteen thousand IAM members to form groups in forty-three states for a month of prime-time television monitoring.

The results revealed the dimensions of the gap between television's image of labor and working reality in America. Witch doctors outnumber welfare workers two to one in prime time, the study found. Butlers crop up more often than production workers. But what the IAM study found most objectionable was the absence of skilled labor and basic production work—as if, according to television, the Gross National Product somehow created itself. When workers did appear on entertainment shows, they were likely to be stupid or lazy or clumsy, though they did tend to be more generous and friendly than professionals.

The networks received the survey with disdain—not one television camera was present at the Los Angeles Press Club

when results were first announced. But the value of the project was less in its findings and the publicity it received than in the follow-up. Thousands of union members had learned to look at television critically. And once organized, they acted.

The IAM's starting point was not original; other unions have protested the look of labor on television. The Steelworkers, among others, protested the series *Skag*, in which a foreman was represented as a worker, and his union portrayed as irresponsible. The IAM project, however, takes criticism beyond the isolated protest, generating its support from the rank and file. The association is now completing a second, expanded round of monitoring, involving some twenty-five hundred monitors. Among them are about two hundred workers from two other unions.

They learned the first time that prompt criticism can have effect. A station in Providence, Rhode Island, for instance, put an IAM member on its advisory board to screen previews of programs touching on union issues. But the IAM's most visible success was in Los Angeles, where an active union group repeatedly brought its objections to the CBS-owned KNXT. The station manager invited fifteen labor representatives to a seminar, introduced them to the news director, and gave them an inside phone line to call in news items. The IAM group also explained one of its

porate realism. In fact, most of the evil businessmen on such shows are drawn directly from the newspaper: owners of struggling firms who resort to arson to get out of a jam, manufacturers who knowingly pollute or sell faulty products, and executives of companies with names like "Sintrex," who employ severe competitive techniques — such as murder — to squeeze out the little guys in their way.

BUT EVEN MORE DISTURBING TO the business community than these instances of guest villainy are the snaky businessmen who are regulars, like *Dallas*'s J.R. Ewing and *Dynasty*'s Blake Carrington. These two perpetrate their delicious ignominies unchallenged week after week, giving the impression that such fiendishness is an intrinsic part of the business world. On most shows, the business villain is just a general representation of evil who, according to current fashion, happens to wear a three-piece suit. But on such serials as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, business and evil are so inextricably bound

together that one seems impossible without the other. Indeed, when Bobby Ewing takes control of the company from his ailing brother, his good intentions (along with J.R.'s sabotage) throw Ewing Oil completely out of whack. As one member of the Dallas business community advises Bobby, "You run a business on honesty and friendship and pretty soon you won't have a business to run."

Although not all television businessmen do evil all of the time, The Media Institute found that what good prime-time executives do is almost always unrelated to their work, involving instead acts of personal kindness and charity. One notable exception to this rule is *Lou Grant* publisher Margaret Pynchon, to whom The Media Institute and others have pointed as a paradigm of the socially conscious and benevolent capitalist. But is Mrs. Pynchon really a Capitalist Hero? She is certainly admirable, but only insofar as she rises above normal business practice, consistently sacrificing profit and self-interest to journalistic truth and the public good. This is not capitalism so much as

aristocratic beneficence.

Situation comedies would seem a good place to look for sympathetic businessmen. But as The Media Institute discovered, while businessmen on these programs are not generally malevolent, they are bound to be buffoons — the butts of countless jokes about greed, petty tyranny, and perfidy. If dramas and adventure shows are populated by oily men in pin stripes, the current crop of situation comedies is full of such lame-brained small-business men and entrepreneurs as George Jefferson, *WKRP*'s Mr. Carlson, and *Alice*'s boss Mel.

Indeed, the pervasiveness of both the silly and the sinister businessman in every prime-time genre is remarkable. Consider the way business nomenclature is used on television. Whenever anyone on a television series says "business is business," it means he or she is rationalizing some act of ruthless self-interest, murder included. When a character throws around such terms as "diversification," "merger," "collateral," "escrow," or "capital," it means either that his sense of self-impor-

major concerns to the station: Americans lose skilled jobs to foreigners because U.S. corporations refuse to offer apprenticeship programs, unlike firms in other major industrial nations. KNXT agreed to produce a five-part series on the importance of apprenticeship programs. Aside from pressuring local stations, the IAM is prepared to file petitions to deny license renewal and — as a measure of last resort — to consider an economic boycott.

Still, content criticism has the disadvantage of oversimplifying a complex issue. It can be misleading simply to ask whether television portrays a worker as a good guy or a bad guy.

"The problem is that you don't see *anything* about work in America," says Jerry Rollings, the IAM assistant director of communications. "You don't see the difficulties of management's decisions to invest in something, or what risks have to go into their calculations. Much less do you see anything about workers' skills or frustrations on the job."

If commercial television has little to say about the drama of work in America, public television rarely offers any alternative vision of social priorities either. With a hefty proportion of its underwriting coming from oil companies, PBS tends to stay safely with the kind of culture that pleases oil company board members, as last year's controversy over *Made in U.S.A.* showed. This ambitious ten-feature project on the history of American labor had received a promise of funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, so

its producers went hunting for matching grants from backers, including labor unions. But when PBS president Lawrence Grossman heard about it, he got nervous.

"People will look at the long list of unions in the underwriters' credits," he said, "and accuse us of selling out." Labor leaders were outraged by what they saw as a double standard. Merrill Lynch backs *Enterprise*; LTV, Dow, Conoco, and others support Ben Wattenberg's pro-business views; Milton Friedman's *Free to Choose* is backed by General Motors, W.R. Grace, and Pepsico.

But to PBS legal minds there was a distinction. "Business is much broader than labor," said Peggy Hubble, PBS manager of development/underwriting. "Corporations put their profits into a wide variety of things. Labor unions are only going to put money into something in which they have a vested interest." As PBS sees it, corporations invest in "good will," while labor unions are after propaganda.

This barrier — which extends to issue advertising by labor — has forced unions to expand the definition of their media problem. An AFL-CIO executive-council committee on public relations, organized in late July and chaired by Communications Workers president Glenn Watts, addressed such issues as labor's use of satellites and cable, telecommunications policy, television monitoring, and the use of media in organizing.

Other unions are convinced the solu-

tion lies in circumventing conventional television altogether. The United Auto Workers Union is pioneering labor involvement in new technologies and has applied to the Federal Communications Commission for twenty-four low-power television licenses. With such stations, the union could respond immediately to members' information needs. After layoffs, for instance, it could provide job and family counseling for affected locals, and the stations could be used to broadcast regular health and safety information. The UAW is also studying direct-broadcast satellite (DBS) service, and has proposed to the FCC that satellites be licensed as common carriers, with some channels set aside at a reduced rate for nonprofit corporations. The UAW and the Media Access Project met with one of the FCC's corporate applicants to discuss the DBS idea, and the company's own FCC proposal eventually offered 10 percent of its channel capacity for nonprofit groups at 15 percent less than its going rate.

"Direct-broadcast satellites could be like the mail, only for television," says David Mitchell of the UAW. "Voluntary associations and nonprofit groups could send information cheaply, the way they send newsletters now." ■

PAT AUFDERHEIDE

Pat Aufderheide is cultural editor of In These Times magazine.

stance is laughably inflated — as in the case of situation comedies — or that larceny is afoot. Television writers evidently feel they can count on the evil connotation of these words. When the slimy real-estate operator on *Hart to Hart* decides to knock off the Harts, who are hot on his trail, he swears he's going to "put them in escrow."

Considering that television depends on big business for its financial well-being, and that the three networks are themselves very big businesses, prime time's hostility toward the executive seems strange indeed. Leonard Theberge offers one explanation: "The formats of TV entertainment are highly simplistic and lead to the portrayal of good guys and bad guys," he points out. "We have fortunately eliminated many of the stereotypes in our society, which in the past would have been the bad guys on television entertainment programs. Minorities, ethnic groups, and women are treated much more fairly than they have been in the past. This has left a vacuum, which may explain why the American businessman is such a prominent villain."

Perhaps. But why should the businessman be the one to fill this vacuum so effectively? Theberge says it's because businessmen, unlike women, blacks, Italian Americans, and Indians, haven't complained. More significantly, though, he ascribes the profusion of wicked executives on prime time to a deep-seated cultural and political bias against business and businessmen among the people who make television.

This particular notion was first put forth two years ago by Ben Stein in a slim volume called *The View from Sunset Boulevard*. Stein is the favored authority of business on matters of television; The Media Institute, Mobil, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce have all done their best to promote his interpretation of the medium. A recent Mobil advertisement reported Stein's main conclusion that "what appeared on the screen was a . . . narrow reflection of the beliefs of the handful of Hollywood producers responsible for what the rest of us see. Stein found that the majority of these creators of America's favorite entertainments are admittedly anti-business." The ad went on to conclude that television "owes the American people more than the social and economic views of a small group of individuals."

Stein's theory may sound familiar. Spiro Agnew used much the same argument in his attacks on the news media a decade ago. (Indeed, the former vice president's spirit is very much alive in the current controversy: United Technologies, in a recent advertisement, referred to

the creators of prime-time entertainment as "floppy-necked quiche nibblers.") Ever since Agnew, anyone opposed to television's political content invariably insists that the people who control the medium are foisting their own idiosyncratic views on a reluctant "Silent Majority" or "Middle America."

THIS KIND OF REASONING, however, requires a certain degree of self-deception — which is evident in Stein's book. He says that his study was inspired by Siegfried Kracauer's landmark analysis of Weimar cinema, *From Caligari to Hitler*. Yet Stein concludes his own book with this strange disclaimer: "It became clear that Kracauer's thesis — that popular culture represents and reflects national dreams and nightmares — is untrue in the case of prime-time television." In other words, one of the most widely accepted propositions about popular culture falls apart when it comes to our principal medium of popular culture.

It would be far safer to assume, as critics of every other popular art form always have, that television *does* reveal our "national dreams and nightmares" — that it is saying something its audience wants to hear.

It is no coincidence that the era of the businessman villain on television closely follows a profound loss of confidence in business among Americans. According to the ABC News/Harris Survey, high confidence in "the people running major companies" had fallen from 55 percent in 1966 to a scant 16 percent on Election Day 1980 (the "mandate" business received then apparently notwithstanding). The dim view television takes of businessmen is not nearly as idiosyncratic or unfounded as business would like to believe. Indeed, the "bad guys" of the seventies and eighties have all worn three-piece suits. Watergate, corporate bribery, chemical dumping, negligently manufactured automobiles, Abscam, ITT, Robert Vesco — the major and minor corporate crimes making the news virtually every night for well over a decade are legion. In a time of "realism" on television, when the traffic between news and entertainment is especially heavy, business villainy is bound to permeate prime time. "We don't make this stuff up," one Hollywood writer said. "We don't have to." The last few years will probably be remembered as an era of muckraking to rival the turn of the century. And just as the corrupt business practices of that time inspired a generation of popular anti-business writers — Frank Norris, Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair

Lewis — the disclosures of the seventies have spawned *Lou Grant* and all the lesser programs that regularly explore our social and economic problems.

Channing Gibson, a writer for such shows as *Eight Is Enough* and *Family*, agrees that "businessmen have made themselves an easy target over the last few years." But Gibson suspects television's obsession with evil businessmen goes even deeper. "As we sort through plots as writers today, we find the world is really on an economic footing, and people feel oppressed by business." Gibson thinks television is venting the "frustration people feel with the corporate apparatus' power over our lives."

Popular art has always taken swipes at such powers. It is no accident that two of television's most popular programs — *Dallas* and *Dynasty* — have oil magnates for their central characters. Has any other industry so directly affected our lives in the last few years? Most Americans still hold oil companies responsible for the energy crisis, according to the polls. A kind of cathartic psychodrama — between ordinary Americans and unaccountable businessmen — is often played out in shows like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. On one recent episode of *Dynasty*, for instance, Blake Carrington and his son, Steven, nearly come to blows over the energy crisis.

"You sold this country out," Steven screams.

"Don't stop there," his father tells him. "Go on. Get it all out."

Steven: "You didn't develop this country's resources when you had the chance. You developed Arabian oil fields instead, because it was cheaper. You made billionaires of the oil sheiks. Except now the Arabian oil fields are up for grabs by any army that has the nerve to march in."

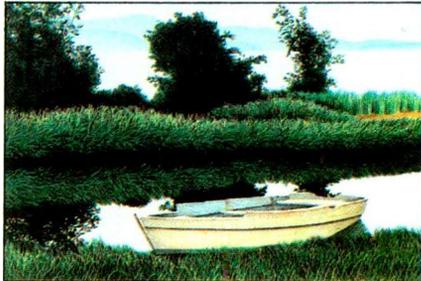
Blake: "I've heard this garbage from people I almost respect. Do you really suppose I'm going to take it from you?"

Stupid as it sounds, the scene actually works on the screen. It manages first to stoke our rage at the oil companies, and then lets us work it off against Blake Carrington. For that, business should perhaps not be indignant, but grateful: There are far more serious ways in which this anger might otherwise be discharged.

BESIDES, SUCH HOSTILITY toward powerful figures and institutions does not necessarily signal any desire for radical change. Chaucer's outrageously scatological burlesques of the medieval clergy — the main figures of authority in his time — did not issue from a deep dissatisfaction with the church so much as an

(Continued on page 60)

What your home could have in common with the Met, the Tate, and the Louvre



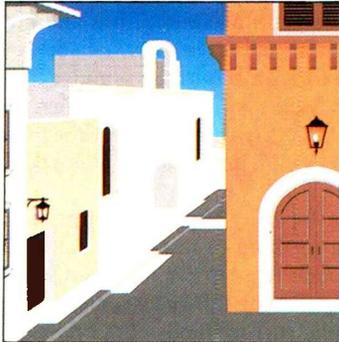
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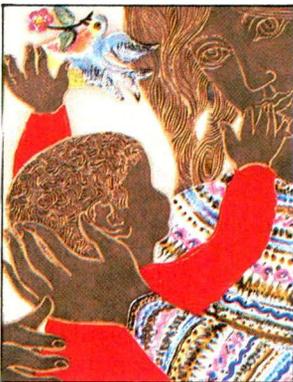
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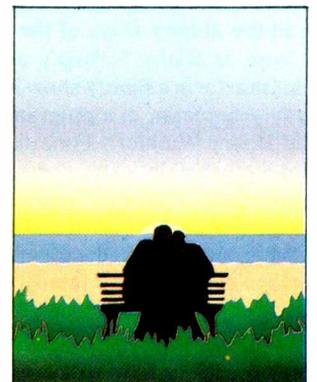
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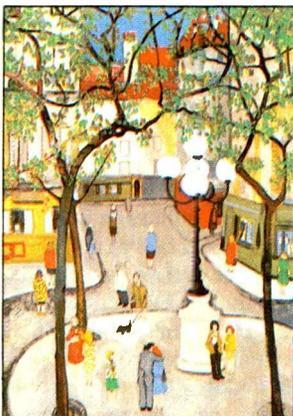
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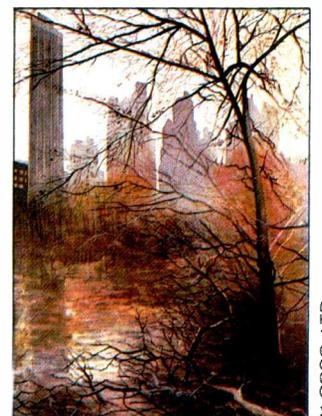
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... And Gracie Begat Lucy Who Begat Laverne ...

Native to television and seemingly implanted forever, the sitcom has deep roots. Its family tree tells us much about who we think we are.

by Michael Malone

BY CHANGING FASHIONS to fit the times, by loosening their themes and tightening their T-shirts, a few daytime television epics of domestic calamity have somehow managed to defy age and to live on all the days of our lives; indeed, of our parents' lives and perhaps our children's as well. No prime-time series, however, has ever proved so impervious to shifting seasons. Even the most successful appear to have a natural life span, to grow old and lose their ratings, to be left for younger rivals.

But inevitably, when this love affair between the American public and some popular television series comes to an end, its absence leaves behind, unsatisfied, whatever fantasy or emotional need that particular departed show had been managing to fulfill in our culture. Inevitably, a new program is born to replace the old: We lose Lucy and Ethel but we gain their daughters, Laverne and Shirley. Ozzie and Harriet may have departed but, safe in the *Happy Days* of the fifties, Richie's family is as good and wise as Ricky Nelson's once was. And if Ricky's singing could transform a family show into a vehicle for a teenage idol, so twenty years later, in a program planned around Richie's family, could Henry Winkler's Fonz skyrocket into a pre-teen merchandizing industry. In some ways, Archie Bunker's father is Ralph Kramden and his grandfather Chester A. Riley. *All in the Family* belongs to a family.

These parental predecessors can be traced back along the branches of television's family tree. And it is in this genealogy of popular series that the heart of the medium can be found: The most persistent (and therefore presumably the most meaningful) themes and relationships of our favorite shows—the situation comedies—tell us who we think we are, or want to be. (In a talk on film criticism Pauline Kael gave at Harvard in the early seventies, she earnestly urged budding movie analysts to take up television study instead, because of its incomprehensibly vast and almost entirely unexplored influence, more pervasive than any force since the medieval church.) Again and again, the same essential features appear, not merely because producers are consciously trying to reassemble the ingredients of earlier successes, but because they are unconsciously resupplying those collective myths and types of characters intrinsic to the genre and important to our culture.

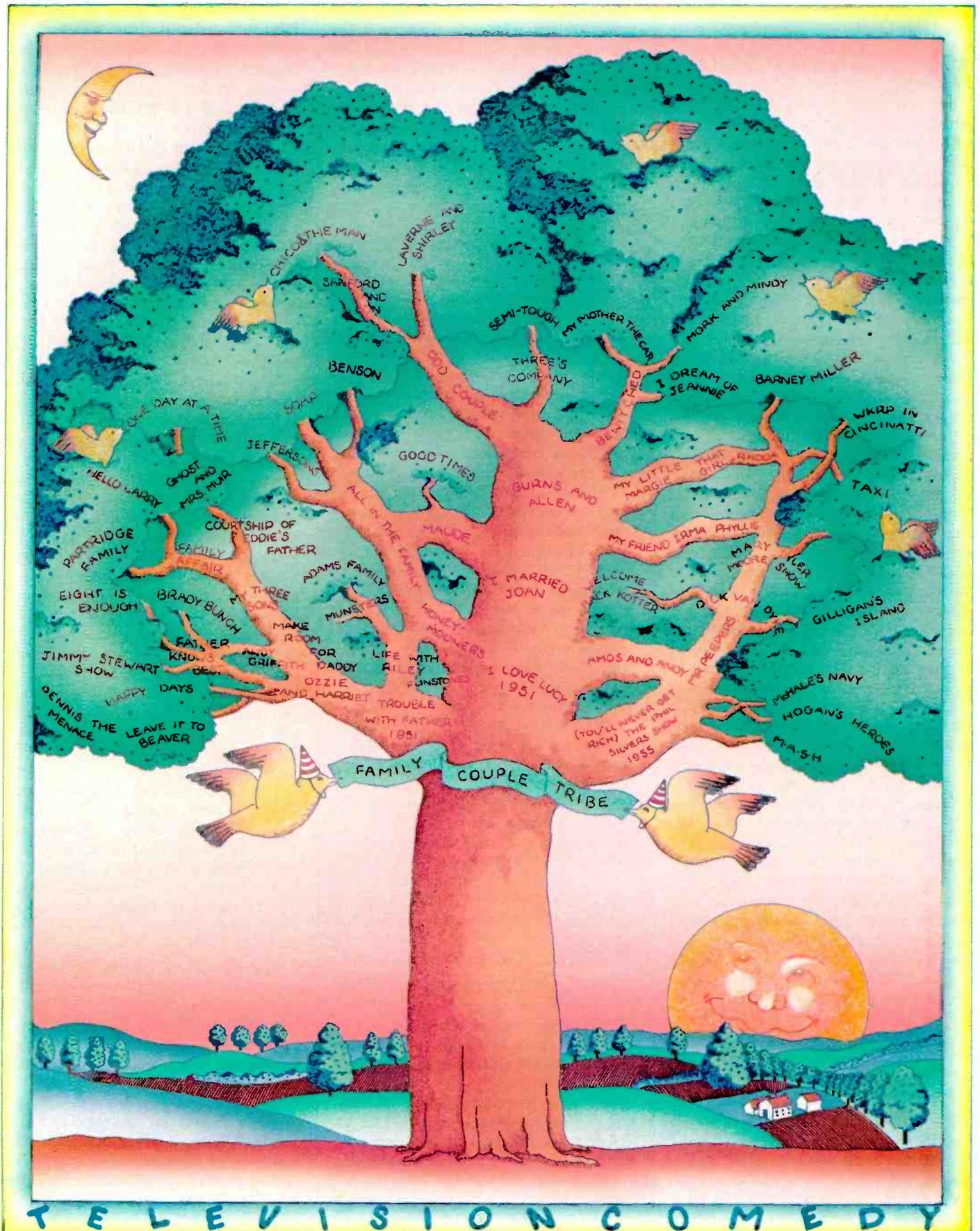
The show ubiquitously known as the "sitcom" has outlasted or outdrawn our fifties craze for thirty-nine cowboy shows a week, our sixties craze for doctors and lawyers, and even our perennial

Michael Malone writes for The New York Times Book Review. He is the author of several books, including Dingley Falls, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

infatuation with idiosyncratic detectives like blind Longstreet, crippled Ironside, bumbling Columbo, obese Cannon, and bald dapper Kojak. The sitcom has trounced in ratings and durability satiric comedy styles of the British *Monty Python* sort, or of the "spoof" species—*Get Smart* and *Batman*—and every other type of television show. Today, situation comedies regularly number three out of the four top-rated prime-time programs. They are thirty-minute shows with descendants going back thirty years.

That this is the favorite format should not surprise us; it is preeminently suited to the medium of television entertainment, for technical as well as social reasons. A television screen is a small opening in a box, very like the little proscenium of a puppet theater. Seated in the familiar surroundings of our homes, we are watching four-inch-high people scurrying across this opening. In sitcoms they are usually getting themselves caught up in mistakes, misunderstandings, or mishaps; their actions get faster and broadly physical, they shout and pout and then kiss and patch up. It is all very much like a Punch-and-Judy show. Television cannot sustain the epic or the tragic stance, which asks for very different aesthetic and psychological responses: For one thing, such drama demands that we see characters as greater than ourselves, which is difficult to do when they are only four inches high and in our own ordinary living rooms. Nor can television evoke, as films can, the awed wonder of romance. The mythic stature accorded deified images like Gable or Garbo on a *literally* larger-than-life screen, viewed in the vast dark communal space of a movie theater, is laughably incongruous if transferred to television.

By its nature, television lends itself not to tragedy and myth but to comedy and domesticity, the foundation of situation comedy. (They are also the foundation of commercials, a form indigenous to television and a close relative of the sitcom.) All comedy is domestic in the sense that its harmonizing function moves it toward marriage, family, and community, and away from the great solitude of heroics and grand romance. But the particular kind of domesticity celebrated in situation comedies is the significant result of television having come into its own during the early fifties, when family values reigned supreme in America. Then the virtues of the self-contained and happy suburban home governed our culture in ways that had not been true before and are unlikely to recur in our own cynical times. The early comedies like *Ozzie and Harriet* symbolized domestic utopia: every family in its own private home, every home with a television set for each member. The medium, like the suburban mode of life, fostered uniformity but not community. From their middle-class living rooms, monogamous couples and their happy, wholesome children stared into the middle-class living rooms of the Nelsons or the Erwins



TELEVISION COMEDY

(*The Trouble with Father*) or the Andersons (*Father Knows Best*) or the Williamses (*Make Room for Daddy*) or the Ricardos (*I Love Lucy*), and saw themselves affably mirrored there. Of course, the pushing problem of "making it" never got its foot in the door of early sitcoms. What did Ozzie Nelson do for a living, anyhow?

As commonly used, "situation comedy" means any continuing series of half-hour comic episodes in which members of a regular cast get involved in an amusingly troublesome incident; quick complications entangle them, and an even quicker resolution unravels everything.

Among the many reasons for the sitcom's becoming television's typical programming style was that its half-hour length was perfect for a continuing series. Not only were audiences comfortable with this format from radio days, but back in the time when a show was fully sponsored by a single company, most advertisers were reluctant to double their expenses—and their risk of failure—by taking on an hour-long program.

Some critics, among them Horace Newcomb in *TV: The Most Popular Art*, want to separate *situation* comedies like *I Love Lucy* (with its physical farce, fixed characters, and emphasis on plot rather than interaction), from *domestic* comedies like *My Three Sons* (with its gentler humor, developing characters, and emphasis on human relationships). And it is true that only the loosest definition of sitcom could cover at once the slapstick cartoon buffoonery of *The Misadventures of Sheriff Lobo*, the social satire of *M*A*S*H*, and the warm-hearted sermonizing of *The Brady Bunch*. In fact, new labels such as "dramedy" and "com-dram" have recently been dreamed up for such programs as *Eight Is Enough*, which are only comedies in the sense that they espouse the "happy ending," not in the sense that they have the "witty" dialogue, incongruities, and absurd coincidences of laugh-producing plots. Brandy French, manager of program development for Columbia Pictures Television Syndication, describes such Garry Marshall series as *Happy Days* and *Laverne & Shirley* as "dramalettes," a hybrid of the orthodox sitcom and the instructional moral fable popular in the fifties. Significantly, both these shows are set in the fifties, and in both we can see how the distinctions between sitcom and domestic comedy blur.

Both *Laverne & Shirley* and its parent *Lucy* have fixed characters (two women, two men), fixed realistic sets, and a weekly problem that builds to some slapstick climax. One incident (the famous mayhem in a production-line skit) offers a

typical example: Working in a candy factory, Lucy and Ethel fall hopelessly behind when the conveyor belt speeds up. Physical chaos is the result. Opening a restaurant by themselves, Laverne and Shirley fall hopelessly behind, as cook and waitress, when the orders speed up. Physical chaos is the comic result. Lucy and Ethel try to break into show business. Laverne and Shirley try to break into modeling. But unlike the absolutely ritualized chicaneries, calamities, and ultimate remorse into which Lucy fell—her tearful bawling was always laughable—

Lucy's Night

UNDERLYING THE GROWTH of sitcom traditions is the important cultural fact that television's audience has always been predominantly female—by a 60-to-40 ratio.

The networks' currying of favor with their major consumers was even more concentrated in *Lucy's* golden age, when most households had only one television set, and women controlled the dials of that set after their children went to bed. So it is significant that all of Lucille Ball's series on CBS were scheduled for Monday nights: Theory had it that the proportion of women in the audience was highest then because Monday was the night American husbands went out bowling or poker-playing with the boys. So extraordinarily popular was *I Love Lucy* that its single half-hour carried CBS in the Monday night ratings for years.

In the post-*Lucy* days, CBS slipped from first place, tried some other series in the old vein of female domestic comedy—*The Doris Day Show*, for example—but could never recapture its prominence until 1975 when it scheduled a new style of comedy, the ensemble social satire of *M*A*S*H*. Of course, Monday is no longer women's night on television; ABC radically changed all that with *Monday Night Football*.

Laverne's and Shirley's hurts and humiliations are more apt to be treated "seriously," so that we are asked to respond first with sympathetic sentiment; then comes the joke, and we're released into laughter.

Television comedy's family tree has three major branches coming from the actual root of all drama—human relationships. They might be called *tribal* comedy, *family* comedy, and *couple* comedy. Beginning with its parent series, *You'll Never Get Rich* (*The Phil Silvers Show*),

tribal comedy brings together, often around a central star, a diverse assortment of characters whose separate lives are connected by some external situation—usually the workplace (as in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Alice*, *Barney Miller*, *Taxi*, or *WKRP in Cincinnati*), but sometimes war (as in *Sergeant Bilko's* off-spring, *McHale's Navy*, or *Hogan's Heroes*, or *M*A*S*H*). The student tribes beleaguering our Miss Brooks and Mr. Kotter provide a variation on the work-colleague show. Surviving a shipwreck—the excuse for *Gilligan's Island*—is, like war, an extraordinary circumstance forcing together strange bedfellows.

Initially the casts of these tribal series are apt to be ensembles of stock characters: an egghead, a dreamer, a Don Juan, a cynic, an innocent. Many series include some version of (or parodic inversion of) the sexpot/dumb-blonde female, one of our most venerable comic types, with an ancestral line reaching back through the likes of Suzanne Somers to Goldie Hawn to Marilyn Monroe to Jean Harlow. Tina Louise in *Gilligan's Island* was pretty much the pure stereotype. *WKRP in Cincinnati* turns the cliché around. There, Jennifer, played by Loni Anderson, looks like a classic dumb blonde-bombshell but proves to be an intelligent woman with a strong sense of irony. In *M*A*S*H*, Loretta Swit's character is neither a dingbat nor a sexual joke, despite her name, "Hot Lips." *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* gave us, in Georgette and Phyllis, two different portraits of a dumb blonde (sans sex), each inimitable. Indeed, if a series has good writers and good actors, and the luck of longevity, all its characters will grow in substance until we can no longer even remember the form in which we first knew them.

The group is ostensibly a random collection of adult strangers, but is subliminally an extended family ("the *Taxi* family") with authoritative or permissive parent surrogates and older or younger siblings. *Barney Miller* is a good "father." Ted Baxter was the bad baby of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. And as in real families, members may grow up and move away; this rite of passage is called the spinoff. From the Moore show alone came *Rhoda*, *Phyllis*, and *Lou Grant*. But it is rare for a spinoff to do as well as a parent show. Brandy French suggests that the spinoff dilutes the very *community* developed by the original ensemble, the "family" togetherness that brought success.

A few shows, like the *Dick Van Dyke* and *Bob Newhart* series, bridge the tribal and familial formats, intermixing home and work life, though true *family* comedies spend more time where the bread is baked than where it is won. In the begin-

ning, family comedies generally came equipped with both parents, and the male got star billing. All children were highly visible (not merely title characters like *Leave It to Beaver* or *Dennis the Menace*); their troubles or trouble-making frequently provided the story line. After all, in the fifties, successfully raising children in the upwardly mobile family was supposed to be the goal.

The first family series can be divided into two types: There was the "wise dad" style of *Father Knows Best*, in which father, with a little help from loyal, practical mom, quietly guided the family from one right solution to another. *Make Room for Daddy*, *The Jimmy Stewart Show*, *The Brady Bunch*, and *Eight Is Enough* are all, in different ways, sage sons of *Father Knows Best*. At the same time we had the "dumb dad" style—the inversion of this fifties ideal. There was *The Trouble with Father*, in which Stu Erwin needed a lot of help from his loving, wise wife and tolerant daughters. Chester A. Riley of *The Life of Riley* was even more a blundering victim of endless mishaps; in fact, old Rile was an idiot—like his relatives, Ralph Kramden, Fred Flintstone, and Archie Bunker—without even a modicum of internal awareness.

As the fifties glided into the sixties, family sitcoms began to reflect the cracks in the mirror of our domestic bliss. As if designed to show the dream to be a nightmare, *The Addams Family* and *The Munsters* gave us comedies about two perfectly nice, happy, harmonious middle-class families, who are completely unaware that they horrify because they are inhuman monsters. Urbanites go to *Green Acres*, where they are ridiculously out of place. *The Beverly Hillbillies* naively insist on their old-time mountain ways in the midst of modern Los Angeles, where the Clampetts (all very nice people) make no sense to anyone.

In one new series after another, the family unit was broken and one parent disappeared. It was usually the mother, as if the wives of the fifties had already heard the distant trumpet of the women's movement and had charged away, leaving the bread in the toaster. Wise dad (or wise uncle or wise guardian) was left to carry on alone. He did just fine without a wife; in fact, without the distractions of a spouse he made a marvelously attentive parent. Who could ask for more words of wisdom than Fred MacMurray gave his boys on *My Three Sons*? Though not necessary, a surrogate mother was nice, like Aunt Bee on *The Andy Griffith Show* or Mrs. Livingston on *The Courtship of Eddie's Father*. But it didn't need to be a female; for example, Mr. French the butler played the role in *Family Affair*, as did Uncle Char-

ley in *My Three Sons*.

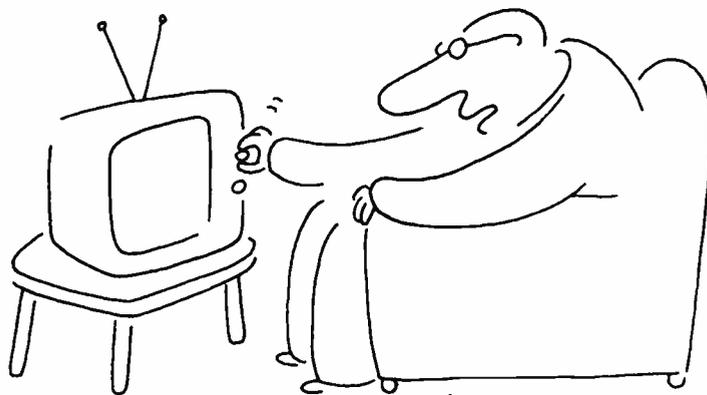
While single-father series continue to be made (*Diff'rent Strokes*), they have been superseded in popularity since the late emancipating sixties by the single-mother series, one of the first of which dealt with the trials and triumphs of a black widow with a small son. Julia had to work as a nurse; the mother of *The Partridge Family* smartly turned her large brood into a well-paying rock group. Other mothers sought help where they could find it: Mrs. Muir found a father-figure for her children (albeit an insubstantial one) in a virile, seafaring ghost. In current comedies like *Alice* and *One Day at a Time*, single female parents tend to have deeper problems, stronger needs, and more realistic lives. Mel's bustling diner is worlds away from the quiet tree-shady house where father knew best. Alice doesn't live there anymore.

The third kind of situation comedy, structured around a couple, is the most

popular. A few sitcoms have taken the eccentricity of the zany partner to its logical extreme by creating a character who is literally fantastical. In *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie*, we meet two stereotypes of the middle-class male, each with an all-American career—one's an advertising executive, the other an astronaut. Both have the comic misfortune to love and be loved by a gorgeous woman with supernatural powers. Samantha of *Bewitched* is a witch; Jeannie is a genie. Their magic is so vast that they could give these men whatever their hearts desired. The comedy erupts when the men try forcing the women to be ordinary middle-class wives, and not to use their scary powers even for so much as defrosting ground chuck.

Mork & Mindy charmingly turns this stereotype on its head by making the male the kooky extraterrestrial and Mindy his down-to-earth straight-human. In fact, compared to the Orkan Mork, Lucy is no

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



"No.
No.
NO, NOTHING PERSONAL.
No..."

popular of all. Ever since Lucy Ricardo first sent Ricky into a Spanish sputter, and crafty Kingfish first outfoxed gullible Andy, the odd-couple relationship has lain at the core of successful television comedies, as indeed it lies at the core of many great comic novels. Don Quixote and Candide tumble unscathed and unaware through the threatening chaos they have wandered into, or helped create, as their more sensible partners try to save them. In sitcoms the kooks are often the wives, and the pragmatic straightmen their exasperated husbands—as in *I Love Lucy*, *I Married Joan*, Burns and Allen (with the unforgettable Gracie's inspired non sequiturs), and *All in the Family*. But the duo may be daughter and father (*My Little Margie*), or son and father (*Sanford and Son*).

By personality traits or living habits, these two people are profoundly incompatible: one is compulsive, the other a slob; one is an ideologue, the other apolitical. The comedy in *The Odd Couple*, *Maude*, and *Angie* stems from such mis-

sillier than Eric Sevareid. Also in *Mork & Mindy*, we recover a little bit of the sexual and romantic love that has been intrinsic to comedy since its classical origins (boy gets girl) but has never been much in evidence in sitcoms—again because of their birth in the fifties. Mork's oddness makes it possible for him to live with Mindy while keeping their relationship safe in that suspended eroticism that heightens romance and honors the censors at the same time. For all its risqué double-entendres, *Three's Company* (reflecting the new "swinging life styles"—two women and a man) depends on that same "will they or won't they?" formula that kept Doris Day out of Rock Hudson's clutches until the knot was tied.

It is common practice to double the sitcom couple into a foursome. As on *Maude* and *The Ropers*, the lead married

(Continued on page 63)

Against History

(Continued from page 16)

tive, limited environment of a few channels battling to reach the widest possible audience.

It follows from this reasoning that cable, with its profusion of channels, would make highly diversified special-interest programming commercially viable for the first time. But this argues against history.

What was thought to have made cable immune from the inescapable trend towards mainstream programming is its multiple-channel technology, which facilitates viewer-supported programming services and helps avoid reliance on advertisers, who must seek the largest possible audience at the lowest possible price. With a medium that can charge a fee for programming, the expectation is that a small but affluent segment of viewers will comprise a market for the quality programming advertisers have generally been unable to support.

But a look at trends—among comparable unrestricted communications businesses in which the consumer pays for the product—does not offer encouragement. In today's highly sophisticated markets for books, records, and magazines, the emphasis is increasingly on the profit-boosting best seller. As Thomas Whiteside demonstrates in his excellent book on today's publishing industry, *The Blockbuster Complex*, this emphasis has always come at the expense of "less profitable but artistically more meritorious works."

The proliferation of special-interest magazines in an industry once dominated by the likes of *Life*, *Look*, and *The Saturday Evening Post* has often been cited as a model for the open-market economy that will encourage diversity in cable television. Yet an examination of what is actually prospering in magazine publishing today hints of what will most likely be filling up the new multiple highways of cable, cassette, and disk television: gossip, sports, popular entertainment, leisure-time interests, and sex—essentially slices from the center of mainstream interest, not all that different from the relatively narrow range of choices being offered by radio today. The fact is that the new, the experimental, the philosophical, artistic, cultural, and literary magazines are having a far more difficult time surviving in the current high-powered market than ever before. Worthy magazines are dying off at an appalling rate.

If cable, driven by market forces, is inexorably going down the same road as other media, how do we get meaningful choice and quality on our most important and most influential medium of communications? There remains, I believe, only one answer—the same answer that currently provides a significant alternative to commercial radio and television: Public broadcasting, however structurally flawed and woefully under-financed, has in recent years been the only consistent provider of culture, information, and educational programming on the airwaves.

Ironically, public television, whose demise is being predicted with every new telecommunications technology announcement and federal appropriations cut, appears to be the main hope for cable to fulfill its promise of bringing quality and diversity to television. What heightens the irony is that the very promise of cable—the expectation that the new medium will provide marketplace support for society's needs in the arts and culture—has been the chief justification for slashing public television's public-sector funding. According to the reasoning in Washington, the coming of cable has made public broadcasting unnecessary.

Yet public television is in a surprisingly good position to move into pay-cable programming successfully and to give the medium a new dimension. It has already succeeded in staking out its own place in a predominantly commercial electronic environment. It has recently started aggressively marketing its wares in the private sector in order to survive—often to the dismay of those

purists convinced it is selling its soul and sacrificing its vision in the harsh entrepreneurial world of corporate underwriting, professional fund raising, on-air solicitations, and profit-making subsidiaries. Public television has been forced to eke out its existence with a peculiar and uniquely American blend of do-good public subsidy and hard-headed marketplace enterprise.

PBS has begun to develop a pay-cable cultural and educational service in partnership with some of the nation's theater, dance, and opera companies, orchestras, museums, libraries, colleges, and universities. While this broad-scale alliance of nonprofit institutions owns no cable franchises that would give its forthcoming program service the distribution access that assures success, it brings to the marketplace certain unique assets that may well be at least as good.

The PBS pay-cable service would be likely to command the loyalty and financial support of the very families expected to subscribe to such a service—the millions of affluent public-television station members, performing-arts patrons, museum contributors, and continuing-education subscribers. They represent, in effect, a pre-sold market. Also of benefit to the venture will be the efficient public-television satellite-distribution system, which is already in place.

Finally, in contrast to the entrenched and dominant commercial broadcasting affiliates, public-television stations and their equally underfunded nonprofit arts partners have the incentive to market a quality pay-cable program service. It is consistent with their mission. For the theater, music, dance, opera, museum, and arts worlds, pay cable could provide the equivalent of a desperately needed national box office for performing arts and cultural events.

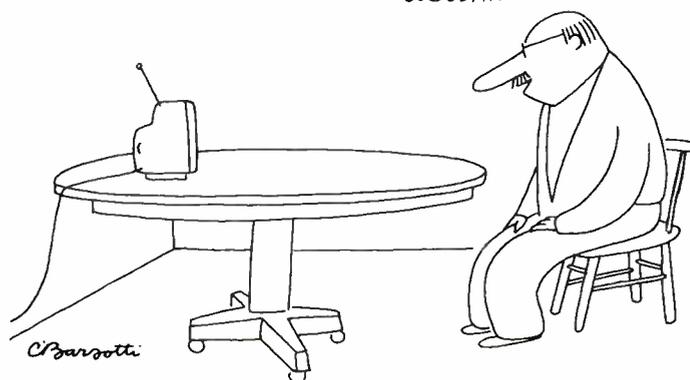
As promising as PBS Cable may be, however, such purely marketplace initiatives have severe limitations. They will help sustain only what the most affluent families in our society are willing to pay for—quality programs with at least some measure of box-office appeal. That would seem to exclude the vast range of much-needed minority programming, experimental fare, controversial public-affairs documentaries, substantive children's programming, regional and local programs, and worthwhile but obscure cultural offerings and performances.

In the current political climate, dominated by the priorities of repairing our economy and restoring our national defense, we are slashing the resources of public institutions essential to the preservation of our civilization's quality—our schools, libraries, museums, arts, scholarship, and basic research. Every one of these is in serious financial trouble today—public broadcasting no less than the others.

The unparalleled opportunities offered by the new electronic media can be fulfilled only if institutions continue to play their part in helping television attain the highest program standards for the benefit of all the people. The choice otherwise is to relive history. ■

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW

"GOOD QUESTION.
NOW GO FOR THE
JUGULAR."



Poland's Airwaves

(Continued from page 26)

media's trend toward liberalization with the appointment of Stefan Olszowski as Central Committee secretary in charge of propaganda. "November 28, 9 P.M.," says a Polish journalist regarding Olszowski's nomination. "That's when the screws began to tighten." To be sure, affairs in Poland had progressed too far to be turned completely back, but in subtle ways, sabotage of reform commenced.

For example, *Robotnicy*, a previously banned documentary about the harsh working conditions in Lodz's textile factories, was aired, but on the less prominent Channel Two, and at the same time as a recent Western movie on Channel One. The popular *Song Festival* contained many satirical songs about the Polish government, but the most critical of them were banned. The evening news, whose past reports on the English trade unions had been supportive and fraternal in tone, now spoke of the workers' exaggerated demands—a clear signal to Solidarity.

Still, sensing the country behind them, Klasa and the journalists continued to liberalize the media. Where coverage of the Pope's 1979 visit to Poland had been carefully manipulated to prevent showing the huge crowds that attended him along the way, television followed every moment of the Pope's shooting and of Cardinal Wyszynski's funeral in May 1981. The visit of Czeslaw Milosz, the once-banned Polish poet, received substantial coverage. The strikes of March and April of this year in Radom, Lodz, and Kutno were shown on television, as were the court decision on, and general reactions to, the formation of Rural Solidarity. Criticism of television itself became an accepted journalistic genre. Informed sources in Poland report that Klasa even intended to broadcast *Robotnicy '80*, a documentary about the Gdansk uprising, and that only contractual obligations requiring theatrical distribution prevented him from doing so.

On the whole, however, the drift in Polish television during 1981 has been towards greater party control. In its warning letter to Polish authorities on June 5, the Soviet Central Committee reiterated its concern:

Particular attention [during meetings between Soviet and Polish leaders] was drawn to the fact that the enemies had gained control of the mass media, which were being influenced by antisocialists in order to destroy socialism and the Party. Attention was also drawn to the fact that the battle cannot be won as long as the radio and television

worked not for the Party but for the enemy.

Within days of receiving the letter—which was published in full in the Polish press and reported on television (there is some question as to whether this was the Soviet intention)—Zdzislaw Balicki, then head of the State Committee for Radio and Television, called a meeting of the editors-in-chief of all television sections and told them that criticism had gone as far as it could. If any further critical material was to be aired, it would have to be followed immediately by a second report showing that the object of criticism had been relieved. Not surprisingly, Klasa was removed from his post.

But if the party has straightened its own ranks, there still remains Solidarity, and its demand for television air-time. The trade union seeks nothing less than total control of its own programs, with an editorial board nominated by its national leadership built into the structure of state television. Ten days of negotiations with the government in May produced an agreement that would give Solidarity a national forty-minute weekly program on Channel One, plus twenty minutes spread out over other shows, and thirty minutes per week on local television.

What does Solidarity intend to produce? A full range of public-affairs programming—documentaries, discussions, and interviews—not only about Solidarity, but about any "important matters." When the head of Warsaw's Solidarity radio and television branch was asked in midsummer what the union would produce if it had air-time then, the answer came without a moment's hesitation: a program on the food situation and the government's incompetence in handling it.

"With Poland on the verge of arterial collapse," he added, "the television issue has understandably been on the back burner. But it's because of this crisis that it's so urgent for us to have mass-media access. To save the nation." What Solidarity sees as a patriotic imperative, though, the government views as an unacceptable political challenge. And now both sides have decided—or have been forced—to bring the media issue to the fore.

The government has launched an all-out campaign against Solidarity in the official media, attacking the union not only for being political, but for being unpatriotic as well. For example, military newspapers and the party press recently denounced Solidarity for its efforts to move the Westerplatte tank, a war monument in Warsaw. Only after four days of intense anti-union propaganda did the press and television report that Solidarity's actual intention was to restore—at the request of

the Westerplatte survivors—the original wooden cross monument. The tank was to have been moved a scant thirty meters away.

This kind of treatment at the hands of the official media provoked Solidarity's August strike against the newspapers, during which union leaders threatened similar action against radio and television. With an estimated 60 percent membership among radio and television employees, Solidarity is not making an idle threat, and a round of emergency talks resulted in the union receiving two thirty-minute national television slots in early September. But the government carefully scheduled the first of these programs on the evening before a plenary session of the Central Committee, a move designed to infuriate party hard-liners and so redouble opposition to Solidarity.

Most significant of all, the government announced that it would not honor its May media agreement with Solidarity unless radio and television employees renounced their right to strike. Solidarity has refused, and parliament will soon rule on the legality of the government's action. In the meantime, Solidarity's distrust of the official media has reached such heights that state radio and television were barred from covering the union's national congress in September.

As Solidarity steps up its television demands, it confronts the same state of austerity afflicting all of Poland. Budget cuts amounting to a third of last year's total expenditures have already had devastating effects on the television system: drastic cutbacks in production (the culture section of Polish television exhausted its year's quota of color film in July, for example), little money for program acquisition, reductions in the broadcast day that will eventually shorten it by four hours, and a plethora of inexpensive talk shows so boring to the average viewer that one is tempted to suspect the authorities of a deliberate strategy to prove the futility of discussion.

For *telewizja*, as for all of Poland, the path to renewal remains open but is narrowing. The party has installed tough professionals in the key television positions. Wladyslaw Loranc, the new head of the State Committee on Radio and Television, reportedly believes the journalist's duty is to share and espouse the government's point of view. And the man with the real power over television, with the direct line to the evening news editor-in-chief, will be hard-line Propaganda Secretary Stefan Olszowski. First Secretary Stanislaw Kania, in a speech to this July's Extraordinary Party Congress, clearly stated the leadership's position:

(Continued on page 63)

(Continued from page 10)

all television news, and with Chancellor's and Mudd's cooperation, elevation to co-anchor of *NBC Nightly News*.

For Arledge, the superstar chase was a nice try but no cigar. Still, his maneuvers may yet have a payoff. He has burdened his competitors with a higher cost for newscasting. Moreover, as time will surely tell, CBS and NBC may have weakened themselves with their new alignments. There already is evidence that Rather is not quite the Nielsen draw Cronkite was. If the news ratings for these networks should drop, the beneficiary, of course, would be ABC. Finally, this bonus: When Chancellor gives up his post, ABC's Reynolds will be the senior network anchorman. *Senior*, in this context, carries the perfume of trust, experience, respect—things that can matter at the box office.



Kid Heaven

IT'S TOUGH for an amusement park to be a relative of *Sesame Street*. It must provide fun that's elevating—instruct and delight, as they used to say in the Renaissance. Say you were at Sesame Place in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, owned by CTW, *Sesame Street*'s producers. Say you had just finished with Ernie's Bed Bounce or Grover's Cable Glide, and you wanted to sink your chops into a burger and slurp a thick shake. Well, you can forget it. This is an *educational* play park. Our policy, says the sign in the Sesame Food Factory, is strictly *mens corpore in mens sana*—low fats, low salt, low sugar, high protein, no artificial flavors. And they mean it. The iced tea—grown-up food, for crying out loud—came without sugar. We politely asked for some powdered tooth decay, and the girl behind the counter scurried off and returned—with one teeny-tiny packet whose lowest reaches contained less sugar than goes into the average M&M. We pointed out that we were too old to be saved, and asked for a bit more. And

our yellow-clad helper returned with one more eensy-beentsy packet. What's more, she slyly neglected to give us a spoon (company policy?).

Of course, goodness can be fun, and any little buckaroo who doesn't get positively button-eyed at the sight of Sesame Place probably needs an adrenalin injection. The place reverberates with shrieks of delight; it's Kid Heaven. You can plunge into The Count's Ballroom, a huge bin filled with zillions of plastic balls, a sort of bubble bath with unbreakable bubbles. You can be spritzed with water as you clamber through The Amazing Mumford's Water Maze. You can do all the crazy jumping stuff that makes your mother warn you'll break your neck if you don't cut it out, because at Big Bird's Nest you just land on a giant beanbag. We took a spin on the Sesame Roller Slide and loved it.

Some of the apparently bottomless ingenuity of *Sesame Street* has clearly rubbed off on Sesame Place, but when you're CTW, providing the world's most fun educational play park simply is not enough. Remember, delight *and* instruct. An adult guide, entitled "More Than Meets the Eye," informs the reader that "the park's unusual play attractions were carefully designed to inspire creative possibilities that may not be immediately apparent to you or your child as you enjoy your visit." Unbeknownst to your child horsing around in innocent fun, he's having his self-confidence enhanced, his capacity for choice invigorated and, in the case of the high-tech Sesame Studio, he's growing "more comfortable with the scientific underpinnings of today's world."

Play, of course, is the best thing going for kids—"an essential part of a youngster's development," to quote the guide. Nets & Climbs is definitely better for youthful muscle tone than a Ferris wheel, as all-natural pizza is easier on the viscera than all-synthetic pizza. Sesame Place is good for your health, no doubt about it. But the child-psychology routine may have less to do with the park than with its parent company (known as the Children's Television Workshop until it started producing adult material), a nonprofit "diversified educational enterprise."

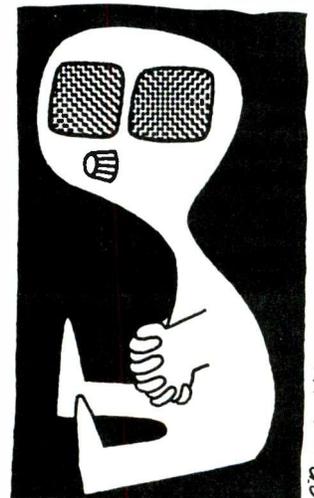
Sesame Place is a profit-making subsidiary of CTW, and its function is to make money so that the workshop can continue with its programming. CTW has become increasingly entrepreneurial as it has realized the folly of depending on foundations and government institutions for program grants. In collaboration with toy manufacturers, the group sells Muppet versions of anything (grossing over \$13 million in 1979): books, records, magazines, puppets, towels, and what-have-

you. Sesame Place started up in the summer of 1980 and since that time has been admitting as many as 7,000 people on a good day, each paying \$5.45 for admission.

But it's hard to feel happy about commercializing those lovable Muppets. They live in an urban slum, after all. They're supposed to be sort of, well, counter-cultural. Way back in 1972, Renata Adler of *The New Yorker* praised the show for its morality, pointing out that "*Sesame Street*'s attitudes towards consumerism are skeptical..." You don't like to see this sheltered world of human decency invaded by the tawdriness of commercial values. But modern life brooks no purity. So it's best to fuzz over the distinction between true function and the ancillary activities supporting that function: Big Bird sleeping bags are educational; Sesame Place is educational; everything is educational.

Which brings us to Mr. Hooper's Store. You remember Mr. Hooper—the nice little Jewish man who walks around *Sesame Street* with a big broom and sells milk? Not at Sesame Place he doesn't. Down in Langhorne (it's near Trenton), Mr. Hooper's got a branch store that'll knock your socks off. The place must be four, five thousand square feet, with that exposed, day-glo high-tech look: blue ceiling, red girders, green ducts. Mr. Hooper doesn't seem to have much milk. What Mr. Hooper does have is Big Bird easels, Sesame Place T-shirts, hats, caps, jerseys, book bags and gym bags, the *Sesame Street* story-time play set, stuffed dolls, puppets, posters, lamps, books, records (including "Sesame Disco"), Cookie Monster chairs, Cookie Monster pianos, Cookie Monster cake pans, Cookie Monster sleeping bags. The kids were in an ecstasy of acquisitive glee, and the lines from the cash registers practically reached the doors. It was, all things considered, an educational experience. ■

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW





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Bill Moyers

(Continued from page 23)

in his summation described the selling of formula to poor countries abroad as "exploitation." Chandler, who had been under pressure from a couple of the formula manufacturers, told Moyers that the language had to come out, and when the screening was over, Moyers said, "Congratulations, Bob. You just turned 'Jaws' into 'Gums.'"

To be sure, Moyers was not immune from corporate pressure at PBS. Weyerhaeuser, which had been one of the *Journal's* underwriters, cancelled its support last year. Moyers says he was given two different explanations for the decision. One was that the company felt it could get more exposure from sponsoring one telecast of an NBC *White Paper* than an entire season of the *Journal*. The other explanation was that George Weyerhaeuser, president of the huge timber company, had heard so much criticism "from his friends at the Bohemian Grove" of Moyers' shows on Barry Commoner and on the fight to destroy the regulatory authority of the Federal Trade Commission, that "even though he himself is a broad-gauged man," he decided to withdraw his support.

Moyers commented during our interview that "I don't fit easily in big institutions." He said that his ambivalence about going to CBS stemmed from his need to have "absolute independence of judgment." Again and again he stressed, as he has to friends, that unless he is able to develop what he calls a commercial, more popular version of the *Journal* at CBS, in a regular prime-time setting, he will quit the network again.

Still, one is left with the feeling that there is more to his uneasiness, that it comes from a deeper conflict within his nature manifested in his life over and over again. Indeed, working for Lyndon Johnson, who demanded absolute loyalty, must have evoked the most profound ambivalence in any man who values his independence as Moyers clearly does.

Moyers has demonstrated a profound need to be accepted into the Establishment, reflected by the names on his Rolodex and by his choice of mentors: Johnson, Harry Guggenheim at *Newsday* and, to an extent, Bill Paley at CBS. Moyers' attraction to the powers that be is also illustrated by his numerous corporate connections. This man of powerful populist instinct has nevertheless served on several boards of directors (including Mitchell-Hutchins', the Wall Street brokerage firm), and has appeared in and narrated a corporate film for IBM.

But Moyers has to be accepted on his

own tough terms, which include professional autonomy, a strong moral commitment, and a politics well to the left of what suits today's corporate and political establishments. It is a recipe for ambivalence and tension.

This makes it impossible to predict how Moyers will fare at CBS the second time around. He hates confrontations, according to his colleagues. He has a history, instead, of leaving situations when they become unbearable. One day at the end of the 1974 season, he announced on the air that he had just done his last *Journal* show, something that was news to the horrified executives who had already sold the *Journal* to PBS for the following year. After an anguished round of meetings, a new *Journal*—with a new international scope more to Moyers' liking—was finally put together for the next series.

Moyers managed to avoid another confrontation, at Lyndon Johnson's funeral, by having a false-alarm heart attack that fooled several doctors. According to one associate, Moyers did not want to be present at an event dominated by Johnson cronies he preferred not to see, including John Connally, another poor boy from Texas who chose a less complicated path out of his background.

But at CBS, with all its inevitable compromises, Moyers will have to confront

the most difficult of questions, that of who he really wants to be. When I asked him which would be harder in his new job, getting unconventional people or getting his own unconventional views on the air, he quickly replied, "Paradoxically, I'll have a better opportunity to present my ideas than I will to present other people's ideas. I guess I'm somewhat nervous about the move, because I have less confidence in my own ideas than I have in other people's." ■

Businessman

(Continued from page 50)

abiding need to vent frustrations at the forces that control our lives. Supplying that kind of safety valve has been one of the enduring functions of popular art.

But business evidently doesn't see things this way. What business sees is a remarkable outpouring of anti-business sentiment broadcast by our most pervasive medium—and business is intent on doing something about it. Yet even if it might seem like good public relations, demanding a rosier image from television may in the end be bad business.

Gene Reynolds, executive producer of *Lou Grant*, points out that "the whole tube is a walking commercial for business. Television is doing all right by them." And

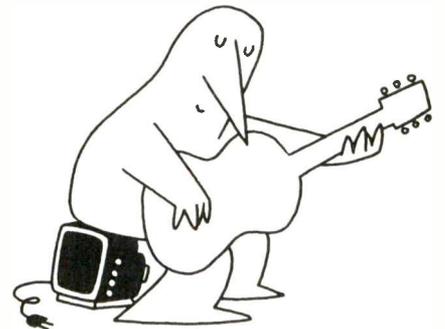
so it is. Besides the incessant commercials, the programs themselves preach the virtues of consumption in a million different ways, from the brand-new automobiles that each character drives, to the unremitting celebration of leisure. To the dismay of The Media Institute, anyone on television who works hard is immediately labeled a "workaholic." In the current "supply side" craze, this may seem a serious problem. But if television began to glorify production instead of consumption, the medium's extraordinary ability to stimulate demand for goods and services would be compromised.

Indeed, businessmen may be making a serious mistake by insisting that television flatter their egos and fill their coffers. Because, ironically enough, business actually makes money by insulting itself on television.

The success of any advertising message is closely tied to the credibility of the medium in which it appears. According to George Gerbner, dean of the Annenberg School, the average viewer "is suspicious, somewhat alienated, anti-authority, and, right or left, has a populist streak." To remain an effective advertising medium, Gerbner says, "television has to retain a sense of credibility, and that is accomplished when businessmen and other powerful characters are depicted as often fallible, venal, and corrupt."

So businessmen have a choice. They can pressure the networks to improve their prime-time image. J.R. Ewing could suddenly discover the satisfactions of philanthropy. Or businessmen can lay low, and continue to reap the extraordinary profits delivered by credible television advertising. Because demanding a rosy image for themselves on television just might mean putting the goose that laid the golden egg into escrow. ■

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



Chris Barsotti

Tune in to Holiday Giving



Turn them on to CHANNELS.

Isn't there someone on your Holiday List who should be reading CHANNELS, the magazine that's been called "must reading for media people"? But CHANNELS isn't just for people in media—it's for all who are *interested* in the media and its effect on society.

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Television as 'Art' — Science as 'Television'

Stay Tuned

by Richard Levinson and William Link
St. Martin's Press, \$11.95

THE AUTHORS, who have written more television motion pictures and series than any other writers, who are the creators of *Columbo*, *Mannix*, and *McCloud*, *My Sweet Charlie*, *That Certain Summer*, and *Crisis at Central High*, and the adapters of *The Execution of Private Slovik*, are saddened that the kind of writing they do for television has not received the serious, reflective, moral criticism occasioned by literature and film.

Their own work and the conditions under which it is created are, by the authors' own account (I might subversively assert "admission"), so lacking in complex moral reflection, idiosyncratic signature, and traditional literary morality, that their desire to be taken seriously is unintentionally masochistic, but more likely a childish desire to be praised for unremarkable achievement.

What kind of artistic, moral vision can emerge from the manufacturing ("creating" would be the wrong term) conditions under which Levinson and Link generated *Columbo*?

Because of the difficulty in finding writers, most of our scripts were put together "in house [Universal Studios]." We would plot them, Bochco would rough out a first draft, and then everyone would do a final polish.

The authors ingenuously admit that even the moral effect of *Columbo* is accidental to their contribution.

When the series went on the air many critics found it an ever-so-slightly subversive attack on the American class system in which a proletarian hero triumphed over the effete and monied members of the Establishment.

I shall interrupt here to comment that if the critics' interpretation of *Columbo*'s moral implications had been valid, the authors would be receiving just the kind of "serious" criticism of which they had lamented the absence, which would have made *Columbo* an occasion for moral reflection similar to Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*.

But the reason for this was dramatic rather than political. Given the persona of Falk as an actor, it would have been foolish to play him against a similar type, a Jack Klugman, for example, or a Martin Balsam. Much more fun could be had if he were confronted by someone like Noel Coward.

And I, for one, would vote for Bo Derek.

Levinson and Link want to be good. Surely, in their adaptation of William Bradford Huie's *The Execution of Private Slovik* (Slovik was the only American soldier executed for desertion in World War II), and in their courageous dramatization of the familial implications of homosexuality in *That Certain Summer*, and in their tenacious research into the murderous consequences of unregulated firearms in *The Gun*, the authors show themselves to be humane citizens.

But what is their daily writing life like? What is it like to bring good hearts and humane intentions into a television studio? Their memoir is a clear if boringly familiar rendition of obfuscatory, self-important, whimsical, often stupid corporate executives who, needing affirmation of their status as much as they need television product, put Levinson and Link through hoops before the authors can get their shows in production.

Levinson and Link have been uniquely successful in putting up with television moguls, and they seem admirably placid in the face of the inscrutable wisdom of Oz.

Both producer and writer are victims of a process over which they have no control.

Is it cruel to remind authors of the words they have written for all to see? Because if it isn't, why give Levinson and/or Link credit for the shows over which he/they have no control? But it is impossible to take *Stay Tuned* seriously. The book is depressingly sloppy.

In the final analysis no one, neither the creators of a drama, nor the audience, nor the critics, should be seduced by subject matter alone. The important thing to consider is the quality of the work.

Subject matter is surely an attribute of quality. But epistemology aside — what quality? That over which they have "no control"; that produced by a team of collaborators to whom they have contributed mere plot; that resulting from casting rather than creative writing?

I have a strong feeling that Levinson and Link are nice guys who have tried to do good shows for television and who sometimes have. But they made a bad mistake in writing *Stay Tuned*. They tried to make studio work appear similar to creative fiction writing. They demonstrated the dissimilarity: They tried to show how their own moral concerns were transformed into powerful social commentary, and showed instead how their moral concerns barely survived the modification of business pressures. They wanted to show how the artistic impulse could exist within the network formula, and instead they presented a picture of corporate life, which made the survival of their equanimity highly praiseworthy and their shallow understanding of the creative act embarrassingly plausible.

LAWRENCE S. FREUNDLICH

Lawrence S. Freundlich is the publisher of Wyndham Books.

Reflections on Science and the Media

by Dr. June Goodfield

American Association for the
Advancement of Science, \$9.00

WITH THE ARRIVAL of Walter Cronkite's *Universe*, the new boom in science journalism has finally hit prime time. And as surely as *Tonight* followed *Today*, there will be more.

For those of us who have watched for and welcomed this long overdue "arrival" of science and technology, it is time to take a closer look at the *process* of science journalism—its problems and its prospects, and above all, its impact.

June Goodfield's new book, *Reflections on Science and the Media*, is an excellent point of departure. While this work lacks the excitement of her earlier book, *An Imagined World: A Story of Scientific Discovery*, it provides a valuable examination of the difficult interaction between scientists and journalists involved in translating the world of science into the language of the people.

Much of what the author presents is not new but bears reiteration: The journalist's pressures of deadlines and headlines vs. the tentative nature of the scientist's findings; the pressure of fitting complexities into six column-inches or two television minutes; the problem of quick access to responsible sources; the persisting elitist attitude of many scientists—that the public doesn't need to know, and can't understand science anyway; the difficulty of steering popular explanations through the twin-tower hazards of obfuscation and oversimplification. And perhaps most important are the pressures from sponsors and media managers for commercial success. ("In American commercial television no one escapes the long arm of sponsorship.")

A third of the way into her book, Dr. Goodfield examines a critical question—should scientists and the media bother trying to educate the general public? It is really the central question of the book, and her answer—an unequivocal yes—is what makes this essential reading for all those concerned with the role of the media, the future of science and technology, and the survival of our society.

Dr. Goodfield eloquently describes the general public as "people less and less likely to be in sympathy with elitist points of view." Why bother with this crowd? They seem content enough with *Quincy* and *Lou Grant*. How much influence does the public really have, anyway?

The question is underscored by a recent survey of public attitudes toward science conducted by the National Science Foundation. In the NSF study, the vast major-

ity of those responding agreed that most citizens are not well enough informed to help set the goals for scientific research or to decide which new technologies should be developed. Moreover, most people who said they would not take part in public controversies regarding space exploration or nuclear power cited ignorance of the subjects as the primary reason.

Perhaps the media and the scientific community should concentrate on that small percentage of the intellectual elite—what Dr. Goodfield calls "that thin wedge of people who are perhaps more effective agents for social and political change and who may already read *Science*, *Scientific American*, *New Scientist*, or perhaps even *Nature*."

But no, Dr. Goodfield argues, "this really will not do." She explains: "... ordinary citizens are increasingly the political constituency to which the Congress is being forced to pay attention, and at present these ordinary citizens are frequently not exposed to the ideas, discoveries, and processes of science in a fair manner. On the contrary... an increasingly large number of political and quasi-political groups [are] making their voices and their opinions effectively heard—and at a very basic level."

Yet the track record of the American media—especially television, the single really *mass* medium—is woefully poor: to wit, the NSF study cited above. Most of Dr. Goodfield's book describes that track record and the reasons for it.

Half the book consists of four detailed case histories of major science "stories": Dr. Summerlin's painted mouse at Sloan Kettering; the debate over the safety of recombinant DNA research; the cloning sensation ("Rorvik's Baby"), and the thalidomide controversy.

In all of these cases, with the partial exception of the DNA issue, the media's handling of the issues comes in for some deservedly hard knocks. While several excellent reporting jobs are cited, the overall impression is one of irresponsible and generally shoddy media coverage.

Some journalists may find this an unfair allotment of blame. But the fact is that the primary job of reporting on science falls to the media and not to the scientists. If the coverage is poor, blaming your sources is plain and simple buck-passing. (Ask any editor.) To her credit, Dr. Goodfield criticizes many in the scientific community for failures to relate honestly and helpfully to the press. But in the final analysis the journalist produces the article

or the television program, and that—as the man said—is where the buck stops.

But this book is not a diatribe against the Fourth Estate. Far from it. Its message is that journalists, especially television journalists, have a potential to reach the general public that no one else in our society has.

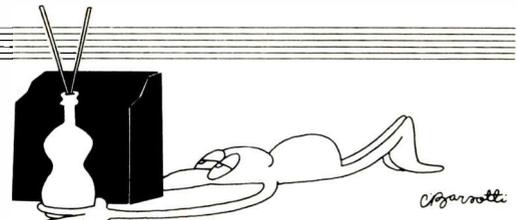
It is only in the concluding chapter, containing the author's proposals for improvement, that one wishes Dr. Goodfield had written more. Not that she is devoid of suggestions: a new spirit of "candor and cooperation" from scientists; more and better workshops among scientists and journalists; more and better science writers—even a new, professional corps of science critics to serve as "informed, independent assessors and interpreters of science," much like art and drama critics in their respective fields.

The trouble is that Dr. Goodfield's solutions—like those square pegs in the round holes—simply don't fit the problem. The problem, as the early chapters so articulately define it, is the failure of scientists and journalists alike to reach the general public—"the ordinary person who believes in basic virtues and who wants to know, quite simply, what is going on." More candor from scientists, more workshops, more science writers—even science critics—won't hurt, but any major improvement in public understanding of science and technology must come primarily through the tube. Dr. Goodfield recognizes this, but her wishful expression that "somehow, through private foundations, through public pressure on corporations and networks, or some other way, we must really begin to get good science programs... on the *commercial networks*" leaves the reader still outside the bakery window looking in. "Somehow" will not feed us.

More specific, practical steps are possible, but that is a subject for another article. (One might begin with a major in-service science education for non-science journalists, *financed by the publishers and networks*.) Whatever improvements are made require *first* that media managers become convinced of the problem's urgency. Reading Dr. Goodfield's book should help them. ■

FRED JEROME

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Poland's Airwaves

(Continued from page 57)

The Party confirms yet again its right to political inspiration and assessment of the work done by radio and television. This is its statutory duty.

Yet the climate in Polish television has already changed radically. The passage of a censorship bill in August detaching the censorship apparatus from the control of the party was an extraordinary step. The State Committee on Radio and Television, a powerless body under its previous leadership, held its first meeting in years this summer, and a liberal group, the Journalists' Association, had considerable influence over the election of its members. Important government officials like Vice Premier Rakowski, while "good Communists," have supported liberalization of the media in the past. At this summer's Party Congress, the delegates voted to restrict television coverage of the proceedings. But response from their con-

stituents was so swift and strong that a new resolution had to be passed, and extended segments on the congress were broadcast from the following day onwards, as were rump caucuses in the corridors and editorial commentary. The congress also saw the election of seventeen journalists to the Central Committee—three times the usual number. Even the evening news, responding to the national air of crisis, now provides more news about Poland's domestic affairs than ever before—and draws a larger audience, which some say is watching just to check up on the authorities.

Whether Polish television can be truly renewed remains an uncertain proposition. It is widely held, after all, that what brought Soviet tanks into Czechoslovakia in 1968 was the government's decision to ease censorship—a far milder action than the very real possibility that popular social forces in Poland will be allowed to have their own television programs. For besides Solidarity, the church and the au-

tonomous trade unions (key workers like air-traffic controllers, customs officials, and communications personnel) have also made known their desire for television access. The prospect of each of these groups controlling a segment of air-time—of the television system being decentralized—poses a deep dilemma to a Communist government that believes total, central control of the mass media is a pillar of its political power. Yet the desire for such decentralization is at the heart of Polish renewal.

Nowhere will renewal be more clearly on the line than in television. The great outpouring of truth that has uplifted the Polish spirit over the past year came largely via television. Whether it continues or is halted, whether Solidarity's demand for access is granted—all will be seen by the Polish people in the privacy of their living rooms. "This is a great time for Poland," said a Warsaw factory worker. "A very hard time, but a great time. A time of truth." ■

Archie Bunker

(Continued from page 35)

has turned its back on the ethnic ghettos, developed a cosmopolitan outlook and cosmopolitan tastes through higher education, and now looks back on its origins with a mixture of superiority and sentimental regret. This experience, repeated now for several generations, has played a formative part in the development of the managerial and professional class. Its ideology of tolerance and anti-authoritarianism puts great emphasis on the ability to outgrow early prejudices. Because the new class has defined itself in opposition to the values of "middle America," it needs to repudiate its own roots, to exaggerate the distance it has traveled,

and also to exaggerate the racism and bigotry of those lower down on the social scale. At the same time, it occasionally sheds a sentimental tear over the simpler life it thinks it has left behind.

All this finds almost classic expression in Lear's comedy of popular ignorance and parochialism. In one of the more perceptive commentaries on Lear's work, Michael J. Arlen, television critic of *The New Yorker*, suggests that "modern, psychiatrically inspired or induced ambivalence may indeed be the key dramatic principle behind this new genre of popular entertainment. A step is taken, then a step back. A gesture is made and then withdrawn—blurred into distracting laughter, or somehow forgotten."

America's new managerial elite has not

only adopted an official ideology of tolerance, in which it does not yet feel completely secure, it has also developed an "anti-authoritarian" style of personal relations that forbids the expression of anger and violent emotion. *All in the Family* dissolves murderous impulses by foisting them on the father and by depicting this father, moreover, as an opinionated but impotent autocrat crushed by the wheel of historical progress. It helps the viewer not so much to come to terms with anger as to displace it. Beyond that, it reinforces the collective self-esteem of those whose ascendancy rests not on the secure command of an intellectual and political tradition but on their imagined superiority to the average unenlightened American bigot. ■

And Lucy Begat

(Continued from page 55)

couple becomes friendly with another couple: the Kramdens with the Nortons, the Rileys with the Gillises, the Ricardos with the Mertzes. On *All in the Family*, Gloria and Mike stood in for the other couple, though the Bunkers also had a few sets of neighbors—like the Jeffersons—designed to trigger Archie's Pavlovian prejudices. The two couples can form strong friendships, male to male (Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton) and female to female. Thus, *I Love Lucy* founded two sitcom traditions. From the Lucy/Ricky relationship come all the "I married a dingbat but I love her" series. From the wonderful friendship of Lucy and Ethel Mertz come all the *My Friend Irma*, *Rhoda*, *Mork*, and *Laverne* shows in

which loyalty and love prove stronger than reason, and more fun.

Like Lucy and Ethel before them, Laverne and Shirley have charged into one scheme after another. The difference is that Laverne and Shirley are trying to get ahead, to make it. Their men are not supporting husbands, only friends. In a way Laverne and Shirley, factory workers, want what Lucy and Ethel have—a married, middle-class life. Their series represent a significant economic shift in sitcoms towards working-class characters: as comedies about lawyers (*Adam's Rib*, *The Associates*) have become less popular, comedies about blue-collar workers, about waitresses and cab drivers, succeed by taking us back to that most unsuburban world of *The Honey-mooners*, where the common themes are coping with poverty and working on an

American dream to escape it.

But there is also a way in which Lucy and Ethel, happily-married middle-class women of the fifties, wanted what Laverne and Shirley have—the knowledge that they can support themselves, the freedom to define themselves. That Lucy went sneaking behind Ricky's patriarchal back to earn money to replace "his" money, or to try breaking into his show business world; that she dragged Ethel with her (and with Ethel each of us)—all this secret rebellion tells us something about why *I Love Lucy* was America's favorite situation comedy from the very beginning, and why the character Lucy has given birth to so many zany children. "My name is Morky Ricardo," Mork tells the psychiatrist at his sanity hearing. "My best friends are Fred and Ethel Mertz." ■

Should Contraceptives Be Advertised on Television?

by Rick Horowitz



Illustration by Nancy Lawton

SEAGULLS IN A BRIGHT BLUE SKY, a young couple running on the beach, a pleasant theme played by woodwinds and strings.

It could be an airline commercial, a Bermuda tourism ad, until—surprise—a soothing male voice begins to read from Ecclesiastes:

“To everything there is a season. And a time to every purpose under the heaven . . .

. . . a time to weep.

. . . a time to laugh.

. . . a time to mourn.

. . . a time to dance.”

The voice continues:

“The makers of Trojans Condoms believe there is a time for children. The right time. When they are wanted. And Trojans have helped people for over half a century practice (pause) responsible parenthood.”

So much for expectations.

You probably have never seen this commercial. Hardly anyone has, although it was created six years ago. But such ads could soon be commonplace—if some two thousand people give encouraging answers to a survey sponsored this fall by the National Association of Broadcasters. Meanwhile, as a variety of forces contends for the ear—and the air-time—of licensees, the matter of contraceptives on television has come to represent more than simply an advertising problem. Important issues of social policy are involved here, as are television’s peculiar strengths and weaknesses, and its responsibility to serve audiences of vastly different standards, tastes, and needs.

When the Trojans spot first aired in July 1975, during an early-evening movie on UHF station KNTV in San Jose, California, it produced a brief flood of largely disapproving phone calls. The spot was pulled immediately, but a follow-up poll found sentiment running heavily in favor of the ad. It quickly returned to the air (along with another similarly low-key Trojans spot) and apparently ran without further incident for the remainder of its six-week campaign. The response was the same in Canton, Ohio, and in one or two smaller markets as well. The spots have not been aired since.

Female contraceptives have been receiving similar treatment. So far, advertisements for the contraceptive vaginal suppository Semicid have been accepted by only a few small stations, although the manufacturer is still trying to add to the list.

Both Trojans and Semicid ran up

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against the same brick wall: the NAB Television Code, which establishes standards for both programs and advertisements, and which prohibits the advertising of contraceptive products on subscribing stations. The code was adopted in 1952 and now claims 511 voluntary subscribers, some two-thirds of all the licensed commercial television stations in America. And a number of other stations that do not formally subscribe to the code adhere to many of its provisions.

The standards have been especially strict for "personal product" advertising. An outright ban on such ads was adopted in 1951, but was lifted in 1969 for feminine hygiene spray and powder. Other product categories followed: hemorrhoid remedies (1971); tampons, cosmetic douches, and sanitary napkins (1972); body-lice remedies (1974); enemas (1976); pregnancy test kits and "jock itch" remedies (1979); incontinence products (1980), and this year, medicated douche products.

Despite this category-by-category approval, individual commercials for most of these products remain subject to code "pre-clearance." They are scrutinized from storyboard forward for good taste, substantiated claims, and avoidance of scare techniques. In addition, guidelines issued periodically by the code set forth scheduling and content standards in terms both general ("[cosmetic douche] representations having sexual themes or connotations shall not be permitted") and specific ("the term 'jock itch' may not be used more than three times in such commercials").

An approved ad may still stumble at the local level if a station feels that it may be "objectionable to a substantial and responsible segment of the community." (Note that while a subscribing broadcaster may decline advertising that gains code approval, the reverse is not true, no matter how thick-skinned the broadcaster thinks his audience may be.)

The hurdles have been even higher for over-the-counter contraceptive products: condoms, suppositories, jellies, foams, and the like. Denied even a "potentially acceptable" label almost a decade ago, contraceptives have been viewed by code officials as very different from other "personal products," raising questions not only of taste but of morality and religion.

So the code board has moved gingerly, spending, as Lawrence Patrick, senior vice president for research, puts it, "a decade trying to find out whether people wanted this information." The effort has included a poll of approximately 200 national organizations in 1975; two days of hearings with religious leaders, population groups, media reformers, etc. in 1978—and now a nationwide telephone

survey of 2,000 households conducted by Market Opinion Research of Detroit.

"It occurred to us after hearing from the power structure, so to speak, to go out into the world and see what the *people* think," said Michael Kievman, vice president of Cox Broadcasting. He was chairman of the Television Code in January of 1980, when \$100,000 was allocated to design and conduct the study, which had been under discussion since 1978.

The questionnaire, on "contraceptive advertising and human sexuality," was approved in July after six drafts. The survey will test general viewer attitudes about advertising for contraceptives, about particular types of information those ads might present, and about the "social context" in which such ads might be viewed (e.g., "Would you find it personally embarrassing or not embarrassing if a birth-control product were advertised on television when you were with: your spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend? With friends? By yourself?").

Patrick expects the results to be analyzed by December and forwarded to both the radio and television code boards in March and April of next year, with any recommended changes in policy passed on to the NAB Board of Directors, the so-called "big board," in time for its June 1982 meeting.

mation they need:

- * the right of manufacturers to advertise their lawful wares;

- * the right of viewers of the public airwaves to be free from messages they find deeply offensive;

- * the duty of broadcasters to balance the current fare of sexual innuendo with "responsible sexuality";

- * the need to establish national standards of taste in a nation of diverse sensibilities.

When these often-conflicting claims are set against a backdrop of increasing teenage pregnancy and venereal disease, restive advertisers, and an increasingly well-organized "pro-family" movement, conflict is inevitable.

"In an ideal world," says Mimi Barker of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, "all parents would feel comfortable with the issues and have the correct information. . . . Kids are going to learn something—we might as well give them the right information." Discussing the societal costs of unwanted pregnancies, Barker notes that 12 out of 29 million thirteen- to nineteen-year-olds are said to have had sexual intercourse. Television, she thinks, is uniquely capable of reaching those who most need information on contraceptives.

Russell Shaw of the United States

The question of contraceptives on television is more than simply an advertising problem. Important issues of social policy are involved here.

"Don't hold your breath," advises the product group manager for one women's contraceptives manufacturer. Of NAB's record on contraceptive ads, she says, "When in doubt, stall—and they've been doing an 'A' job of it." Indeed, cynicism about the code board's motives is widespread among those favoring the ads and has been strengthened by the length of time it's taken to get the telephone survey underway. Clayton Brace, current chairman of the television code, asserts that "a responsible survey takes a lot of time to put together."

But Maurine Christopher of *Advertising Age*, offers a broader assessment: "NAB tends to be the sort of organization that stands back rather than stepping forward to deal with the big issues."

Advertising for contraceptives raises major issues galore:

- * the right of parents to determine the sexual education of their children;

- * the right of sexually active adolescents and others to get the contraceptive infor-

Catholic Conference draws the contrary conclusion. "My common-sense analysis of the situation is that advocacy of contraception, rather than fostering its use, tends to foster promiscuity, often without contraceptives."

Obviously, the philosophical gap between the two groups is enormous. Both the NAB, and broadcasters charged with serving the public interest, convenience, and necessity, are trying to keep a foot in each camp.

Even those who strongly favor contraceptive advertising on television are cautious. "It may be," says one manufacturer's representative, "that our story is too complicated to tell in thirty seconds." Although Carol Fontein of the Center for Population Options credits television with the ability to make the use of contraceptives more acceptable, she concedes that an essentially visual medium "is not the most appropriate market in many ways. It's different from a floor wax or a car—you're not going to be showing the prod-

uct or the product being used, right?" And Peggy Charren of Action for Children's Television wonders about competitive pressures among advertisers. "We don't want 'Be the most popular girl in your class—get them pink with feathers!' Once you open the door, you don't know how they'll position themselves."

But with teenage pregnancy "one of the major national health disasters in the country," Charren believes "doing it badly is better than not doing it at all." Also, if the NAB ever does give its approval, one can expect it to keep an extremely tight rein on the ads' contents.

And at the NAB? "My goal," says Lawrence Patrick, "is the most defensible, most objective study possible. I'll leave the policy decisions to the code board." Patrick is convinced the NAB will inevitably be criticized by one side or the other. In fact, though details of the survey have been closely guarded, criticism has already surfaced in some quarters.

"They're asking questions in a vacuum," claims David Poindexter, whose Population Institute has long supported

contraceptive advertising. "I'd much rather people were shown ads and then responded to something real, rather than something imagined."

"The question should be: 'Objectionable compared to what?'" according to John Dimling, Patrick's predecessor at NAB, who is now at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. He predicts that "numerically, on a 'one man, one vote' basis, the level of objection should be no stronger than it was, or is, to personal products."

However, Dimling believes the intensity of the opposition may be "somewhat stronger than it is to some products now." This raises another concern about the survey: What importance should be given to depth of people's feelings? Will 51 to 49 carry the day regardless? Will a heartfelt 30 outweigh a lukewarm 70?

William Fore of the National Council of the Churches of Christ sees the problem as even more basic: "They're asking the wrong question." The National Council, a cooperative agency of Christian communions with thirty-two member churches,

favors contraceptive advertising on a test-market basis to evaluate the substantive impact (on pregnancies, venereal disease, etc.) of such ads. Says Fore, "The question isn't the acceptability of this advertising, but 'is it in the public interest?' When stations run public-service announcements about reducing the speed limit, the point is not whether the public thinks it would like to drive 55."

And although the Catholic Conference's Russell Shaw is interested in the survey's results, he says, "The value system the church represents isn't based on counting noses, it's based on principle."

What, if anything, the NAB code board does with the noses it's counting won't be known for several months. For awhile, at least, there is relative quiet. And some disinterest. Fred Poppe, whose advertising firm gave a few people the seagulls and the sand back in 1975, will not jump back into television for Trojans even if the NAB gives the go-ahead. It costs too much, says Poppe; and print is working just fine. "Business," he says, "has never been better." ■

Video Disks

(Continued from page 45)

video capitals—New York and Los Angeles—where the VCR has made its biggest inroads. According to J.C. Penney's early experience, regional disk-player sales are almost in inverse proportion to the number of broadcast and cable-television channels available in an area. In other words, the CED system is popular among television watchers, while LV buyers are more likely to be videophiles.

Both systems are pushing real-time movies as primary programming, but for the LV system this appears to be a form of pump-priming until more suitable material arrives. Even with the small universe of available players, new LV programs are beginning to veer strongly to non-movie material, including stereophonic concerts and interactive disks that take advantage of the system's unique features.

But for the CED system, the basic staple is movies, with some television-originated material thrown in (*Star Trek*, for example, has been one of the best-selling disks). One top RCA sales executive says he envisions as the best CED prospect the man who comes home from a hard day at work, opens a beer, and sits before the television in his undershirt—in short, a person seeking passive, not interactive, entertainment.

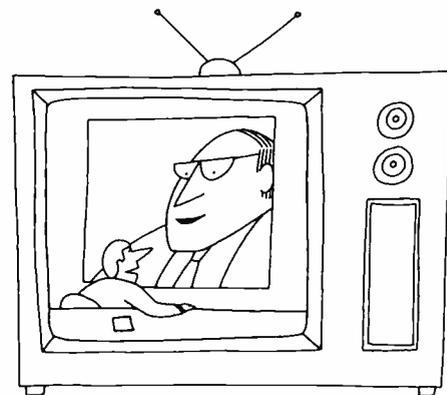
The CED and LV systems are clearly

headed in different directions. The LV's interactive and random-access features make it a marvel. Its remote-controlled players are fairly expensive, listing at just under \$800, which competes with the price of many VCRs. The disks themselves have been gradually increasing in price; most programs now cost between \$20 and \$30. RCA says it can add many of LV's features to its system later, if it chooses, through the use of microprocessors and computer memory and storage devices; but there are no plans to do so. Although CED disks currently retail for about the same price as the LV type, both RCA and CBS insist they're far simpler to produce, which could mean cost reductions as quantities increase.

A third video-disk system is promised for early next year by a Japanese-American-British consortium of Japan Victor (JVC), Matsushita, General Electric, and Thorn EMI. This is called VHD (for Video High Density or Video Home Disk—take your choice). Essentially, it combines features from both current systems. But the two Japanese partners are major beneficiaries of the VCR boom and obviously would prefer to see the video disk concept evaporate. VHD is an ingenious system, though its place in the video scheme can't be determined, of course, until it is introduced into the market—if it ever is.

The LV system, or something very close to it, seems assured of a place in

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



"I CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE THAT YOU'RE VERY, VERY BIG."
"YES, I THINK IT'S FAIR TO SAY I'M ENORMOUS."

education and industry, and quite likely in the home, as well, but not necessarily in the majority of homes. It is unique as a video device in its ability to perform as the user dictates. CED, on the other hand, requires a mass market to succeed as a playback device for entertainment. If there is a market for a relatively cheap "video phonograph," this is it—and its major competitor is likely to be multi-channel cable and pay-television rather than the LV disk system.

It probably will be several years before anyone can tell whether one system, or both, or three, or none, will survive. But between the LV and CED systems, there will be no "winner," because there really is no battle. ■

Television by Satellite: Crossing Borders and Wires in Europe

by John Howkins

AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE of debate and deliberations, Britain will finally have a fourth national television channel late in 1982. The saga of Channel Four, which has occupied media activists all these years, typifies the rigidity and inertia that has characterized European broadcasting. In almost every country, frequencies available for television and radio are left fallow. France and West Germany, for instance, continue to use only three of the four channels they were allocated by international agreement. Most existing services are heavily regulated by governments or regulating agencies.

But the arrival of satellites means that European television is about to be reinvented. Until now, a country's size and power determined the scope of its broadcast system. (The exceptions have been Luxembourg and Monaco, small countries whose stations reach large audiences on the continent.) Most countries view their systems as strictly domestic institutions. The major European broadcast organizations — the BBC, the French national companies, West Germany's ARD and ZDF, Italy's RAI, Sweden's Sveriges Radio, and the others — have always been licensed by national governments to serve essentially national audiences. Copyrights and performance rights have been assigned to these national territories, and advertisers have concentrated on national campaigns.

But satellites erase national borderlines; it will eventually be possible, practically anywhere in Europe, to receive national services from several different countries, as well as services devised for international distribution. Language differences do not pose a major problem because a single broadcast may carry several audio channels along with its picture.

There are several contenders for the distinction of being the first European satellite broadcasting service. The honor could go to Britain's Satellite Television Ltd., a consortium formed to lease satellite channels (or, if need be, to operate its own

satellite) for distributing programs to Europe's cable systems. STL, backed by Guinness Mahon and Barclay's merchant banks, has been negotiating for more than two years to lease a transponder (that is, a sending channel) on an existing Intelsat or European Space Agency satellite. If successful, the group might be able to begin its service quite soon. Several advertisers have already agreed to purchase time, and a number of cable operators on the continent have bought dish antennas to receive STL's signal.

In Switzerland, a consortium calling itself Tel-Sat has asked the government for permission to operate a Swiss national satellite that would broadcast not only to that country but also to large parts of France, Italy, and West Germany. Tel-Sat could be operational by 1985.

Satellites have engaged the passions of European broadcasters and politicians in a way not seen for years. Many producers, advertisers, executives, and ordinary citizens in every country are wildly enthusiastic about the prospect of international television systems. But the opposition is strong and vocal. At this year's Manchester Symposium on Broadcasting, an annual event that attracts leading broadcasters and academics, the mood was openly hostile toward proposals for multinational, advertising-based satellite services. During the course of the debate, representatives of the BBC and the Independent Broadcasting Authority, who want to retain the public-service character of British broadcasting, found themselves in an odd coalition with the radical left.

The frenzy for satellites was triggered at the 1977 World Administrative Radio Conference (WARC) held by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations agency that allocates radio frequencies and manages the radio spectrum. The WARC satellite conference assigned orbital positions for each country in Europe and also assigned frequencies for direct-broadcast satellites.

The plan allowed each country to provide a satellite signal that could be picked up by a small receiving antenna (ninety centimeters in diameter) in households throughout its territory. Most countries were apportioned five television channels, some of the smaller ones only three.

But, of course, the transmissions of these satellites do not stop at geographical borders, and in some situations, the foreign audience resulting from the spillover into other countries could be larger than the intended national audience. Some people view this kind of spillover as a threat, others as an opportunity.

The commercial prospects for direct-broadcast satellites (DBS) will depend greatly on the proliferation of rooftop antennas to receive the transmissions, and this will likely be governed by costs. What could be a boon to this new form of television is the recent development of a sixty-centimeter receiving dish that reportedly brings in as clear a picture as the ninety-centimeter dish approved by WARC. Technologists are also perfecting dishes capable of picking up more than the five national channels and of doing so with push-button tuning.

The European Space Agency (ESA), an alliance of eleven European countries and associated members including Canada, is expected to make its final plans on direct-broadcast satellites before the year's end. ESA's chief project is known as L-SAT (the "L" is for "large"), which is expected to have two DBS channels, one capable of covering all of Europe and the other of covering Italy. It probably will not be launched before 1985.

The European channel is already being organized by a committee of broadcasters under the auspices of the European Broadcasting Union. The committee favors programming "of interest and relevance to the widest possible European audience," furthering Europe's traditions of public-service broadcasting. There is some precedent for such international programming, notably the *Eurovision Song Contest* and *It's a Knockout*, but while popular throughout Europe, they are not exactly prizewinners.

A question also hangs over the Italian channel. The national broadcaster, Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI), has indicated a willingness to have its channel programmed by the same committee programming the European channel, but neither the committee nor the RAI seems to know how the channel will actually be used.

Notably absent from the L-SAT project are France and West Germany. Under pressure from their own aerospace industries, both countries left the project to concentrate on their own national DBS services. The two countries have signed agreements providing for joint construction of national satellites. In both France and Germany, these satellites will carry three channels, the first two for distribution of existing national television. But the fate of the third channel remains un-

John Howkins is editor of the London-based Intermedia magazine, journal of the International Institute of Communications. He writes regularly for The Economist.

certain in both countries. The third channel in Germany will not be used for television at all, but for hi-fi stereo radio channels. The Bonn government—Chancellor Schmidt's dislike of television is well known—is determined that the satellite will not jeopardize the country's existing broadcasting system. But Germany's opposition party, its advertisers, and much of its public are equally determined to win more television services.

The third channel is up for grabs in France as well. Until the May elections, it was assumed the channel would be allocated to one of the private commercial stations—Télé Monte Carlo, or Europe One—that operate on the periphery of France with government support. But France's new president, François Mitterand, has other ideas. Though no decision is expected imminently, he is likely to favor public, nonprofit applications for the third channel.

The third country to have its own regular DBS service will probably be Luxembourg, whose radio and television programs already entertain millions of people in France, the Netherlands, West Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, and Britain. Radio Télé-Luxembourg (RTL) has

commissioned viability studies that are promising.

The spur to all of these plans is the promise of more advertising revenue. Most European governments restrict the amount of advertising allowed on radio and television. In some countries, television stations are not allowed to take any advertising at all. Not that there is any lack of demand for commercial air-time. In Germany, where television advertising is limited to twenty minutes a day, slots are booked a year ahead. In France, the revenue lost annually to television by similar restrictions is estimated at about \$870 million, and the total for all of Europe is put at \$3.7 billion. This money is now being spent on other media. Satellites would not only draw these funds to television, they would also allow advertising to span Europe.

The role of satellites in the current turmoil surrounding European media was aptly described by an official of the European Space Agency, who said recently, "Satellites may change things, or they may not. But they will certainly make us look very closely at what we are doing, and as a result of that alone, things will never be the same again."

The Going Gets Tough For a Public-Access Showcase

by Ben Brown

THE GLAMOUR STORIES of cable television are about big bucks and big politics, but in a small college town in Michigan, where about 11,500 households are hooked up by National Cable Television, a story is unfolding that may foreshadow developments in local cable programming around the country.

For seven years, East Lansing has had a "showcase" cable system, with local channels set aside for government, library, school, and public access. With money and technical help from National Cable, hundreds of video enthusiasts—from police officers with home-security tips to a grad-school Yippie with a singular perspective on the news—have filled forty-five hours a week on the public access channel. And they've done it at a time when cable-industry cynics have insisted that there is neither a demand nor an audience for such a free-speech ser-

vice.

In its franchise quests, National's parent company, United Cable, has used the four local channels—largely funded by National under the original franchise agreement—as an example of what it could offer other communities. And the staff programmers and volunteer producers at the four channels have joined the ranks of those few who have managed to make good on pie-in-the-sky promises of local origination.

The appeal of the East Lansing setup was enhanced, at least as far as access advocates are concerned, by the city council's protection of the access channel from both National Cable and the city government. Written into the city's ordinance was a prohibition against censorship and a guaranteed funding scheme for the city's independent cable commission. Specifically, 80 percent of the operating fee paid by National to East Lansing went automatically to the commission to fund the local programming.

But in 1980 the seven-year franchise ex-

pired, and with it the independence of the cable commission. East Lansing and National struck a renewal deal that includes a graduated increase in fee payments to the city. And now all that money goes directly into a general fund, which leaves the allocation for the access channels to the city council's discretion.

"In these times," East Lansing Mayor Larry Owen said last December, when the new franchise was approved, "it's hard to explain why the cable commission doesn't have to stand the same budgetary test as any other department in the city."

Cable commission chairman Fred Bauries sees the issue differently. "We're looking at a situation," he wrote in a memo to other commission members, "where the city is likely to triple the franchise fee, use it to support its own cable operations, and make no firm commitment to the public's access to cable television."

In May, when the city council approved the cable-television budget for fiscal year 1982, Bauries suspected his fears were about to be realized. The cable commission requested about \$18,500 from the expected \$34,000 budget, to cover expenses for the four locally originated channels. About half of that \$18,500 was to go to the public-access channel.

But the city council decided to separate the needs of the access users from the needs of the government, school, and library channels. The commission ended up with the promise of about \$7,000 for access, and the government-run channels will get an unspecified amount of the remaining revenues when there is a clearer idea of exactly how much the franchise fee will generate.

Mayor Owen argues that under this plan the government channels could conceivably end up under-funded, and Bauries concedes that, provided the commission's remaining budget surplus is applied to next year's budget requests, the access channel may receive about the same amount of money the commission asked for. But he's also suspicious that "the propaganda channels," as he calls the government and school outlets, will end up with as much as \$27,000. This would seem to justify his complaints about a massive shift in community cable priorities.

Mayor Owen, meanwhile, says Bauries and other access advocates are overreacting. "If the votes [to grant the commission its budget for access] are there," the mayor says, "the commitment is there. But let's face it. It's going to be tougher and tougher to preserve the notion that something that seems to benefit a pretty small slice of the population should con-

Ben Brown is a reporter covering television for the Detroit Free Press.

tinue to get public support. . . . If the people who use public access don't develop a constituency, they're going to be in trouble."

And that's the central dilemma facing public access everywhere. Unlike almost every other service cable can provide, the access channels generate neither money nor friends in high places. In fact, they often end up having the opposite effect. While the franchising rush is still on, established access operations like East Lansing's have a clearly measurable value to the expanding industry: They supply showcases for franchisers' sample kits, so they continue to attract a certain reluctant support from the cable companies. But what happens when all the big franchises are finally let, and the system owners get down to the business of raising bottom lines?

Under franchise agreements they're now making, many cable companies will

be required to supply equipment and technical help to access users. But some of those agreements will face tests in court before being honored, and those that withstand the tests will require continuous oversight from franchising authorities who may be considerably less committed to access than even the East Lansing city council.

For Mayor Owen, the future of public access will continue to depend on constituent support. In a radio interview in late January, his predictions were less than encouraging for access advocates: "I don't think to this point it [public access] has built a strong enough or a lasting enough base to be guaranteed existence out into the future."

Where will "the free-speech channels" turn without city government support? "When that day comes," says Bauries, "we could be in big trouble. The concern is that access exist—not necessarily thrive, but exist."

Moralists Muzzle Gays On Honolulu Radio

by Lindy Washburn

ATALK SHOW about homosexuality was bumped recently from the Sunday morning lineup of a Honolulu radio station, following an intense campaign by local Christian fundamentalist pastors.

The show, called *Lambda Line*, originally occupied a 9:30 A.M. slot on the Sunday schedule of "Honolulu's only talk radio station," as KIOE bills itself. Now, after a month-long campaign of petitions and publicity, the show airs in the wee midnight hours, 12 to 3 A.M. Sundays.

The change was the result of pressure brought by the Christian Coalition, an organization of about seventy-five evangelical pastors on Oahu. Led by Victor Borgia, a veteran of drives to eliminate sex education from the public schools, the coalition said it objected to the time slot, the contents, and the host of *Lambda Line*.

Morality, and not free speech, was at issue, said Borgia. "If you say people who practice homosexuality should have freedom of expression, then so should those who practice incest, bestiality, and necrophilia," he added.

Answering Borgia's charge that *Lambda Line* "propagates immoral acts," Bill Woods, the show's host, responded,

Lindy Washburn is an Associated Press reporter based in Honolulu.

"this show talks about homosexuals from a variety of viewpoints, including the very negative. . . . It doesn't provide support for one lifestyle over another."

In fact, he said, Borgia had been invited as a guest more than once but had refused the invitations.

Lambda Line is named after the Greek letter Spartan warriors carried on their shields, now adopted by gays as a symbol for ending oppression. The program often features interviews with prominent homosexuals and others knowledgeable about the legal, psychological, or social concerns of gays. News from other gay communities is included, and a segment is allotted for callers.

Woods, director of Honolulu's Sexual Identity Center, had earlier clashed with fundamentalist groups over Jerry Falwell's organizing efforts in the Hawaiian islands. Woods and representatives of other civil-liberties and minority groups copyrighted the name "Moral Majority of Hawaii" just before Falwell's June "I Love America" rally in Honolulu, and staged demonstrations against Falwell under that name.

The pastors in turn preached against homosexuality and passed petitions after prayer services. Late in June, after alerting local television stations to his plans, Borgia surprised KIOE station manager

Tad James with a petition containing the signatures of 2,500 people who wanted *Lambda Line* off the air.

Woods, himself a homosexual, countered with his own petition campaign, and soon submitted another 2,500 signatures. Said James, "We could have it like a high-school bottle cap contest. . . . If there are 800,000 people on this island, I'm sure we could get 400,000 signatures on either side."

As the dispute escalated, Borgia said he might take the 2,500 signatures to KIOE's advertisers, "to find out if they really want to be connected with a station that airs such programs." James maintained, however, that the issue was not a commercial one, but rather a question of First Amendment rights for KIOE, which is ranked eleventh in audience among Oahu's twenty-two radio stations.

A month later, James announced that a compromise had been reached. While stopping short of eliminating *Lambda Line* as the Christian Coalition had demanded, it significantly reduced the size of the show's audience.

A key element of the written agreement required Borgia to reassure advertisers that the station was moving toward "constructive programming" and should be supported.

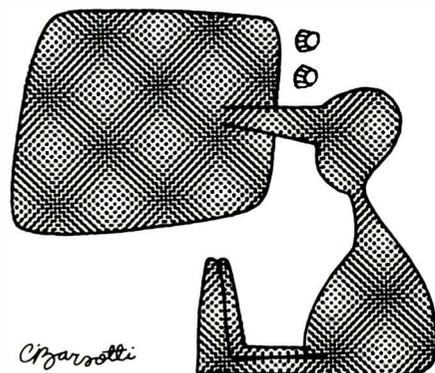
Woods in turn agreed "to conduct the program within generally accepted guidelines, which I realize are still very conservative in today's society."

The station also committed itself to one hour of programming to "present a Christian viewpoint," and four hours of programming by a moderator who is a friend of Borgia's, "to provide more balance."

Woods was told he could not "promote homosexuality" on the air, and a mediation procedure was set up to handle any further complaints about the show's content from Borgia.

James praised the agreement as a compromise in which "everyone won." "Economics had nothing to do with it," he said in announcing the changes. "As a talk radio station, we respond to everybody."

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



WRITERS IN AMERICA FACE A CRISIS.

Rapidly advancing concentration in the communications industry threatens as never before to exclude and silence serious writers who are out of political or literary fashion. Government support for the arts is being slashed. Attacks on writers — libel suits, book-bannings, censorship — are increasing across the country. If you agree that these threats demand an active response, join The Nation Institute and thousands of other writers at THE AMERICAN WRITERS CONGRESS — ROOSEVELT HOTEL, NEW YORK — OCTOBER 9-12, 1981.

WHAT WILL THE CONGRESS BE?

A massive gathering of writers of all descriptions: poets, playwrights, novelists, journalists, scholars, critics, and the associations, guilds, and unions that represent them.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THE CONGRESS?

To help American writers deal individually and collectively with bread-

and-butter problems, as well as the long-range political and economic trends that threaten the vitality of our written culture.

WHY A "CONGRESS," NOT MERELY A "CONFERENCE?"

Because at a conference people talk; at a congress, people act.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THE CONGRESS?

Panels — Workshops — Caucuses — Hearings — Festivities — A plenary session to consider formal resolutions and ways to continue the work of the Congress.

WHAT ISSUES WILL THE CONGRESS ADDRESS?

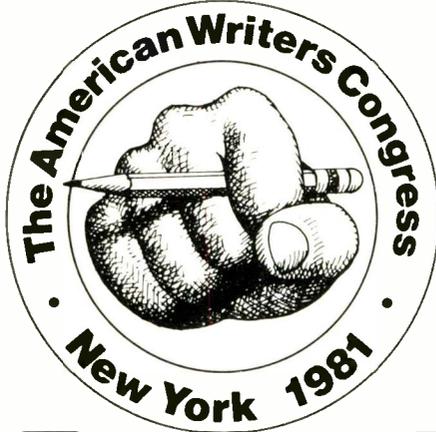
Government funding cutbacks — Assaults on First Amendment rights — Interests of writers and publishers: where they converge, where they conflict — Cooperative publishing and distribution methods — Who gets published/produced, who doesn't — More, more, more.

WHO WILL COME?

More than 2,000 writers from across the United States. Publishers, editors, other industry representatives, and foreign writers will also be invited.

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E. L. Doctorow • Doug Ireland • Frances FitzGerald • Kurt Vonnegut • James Merrill • Ed Bullins • Nat Hentoff • John Hersey • Alice Walker • J. Anthony Lukas • John A. Williams • Ishmael Reed • Ring Lardner • Barbara Grizzuti Harrison • Fred Cook • Morris Dickstein • Blair Clark • Studs Terkel • Calvin Trillin • Roger Wilkins • Nancy Mitford • Lois Gould • Ellen Willis • Jessica Mitford • Jane Kramer • Evan Connell • Mary Lee Settle • Staige Blackford • Michael Arlen • Donald Barthelme • Penny Lernoux • Alastair Reid • Norman Mailer • Alden Whitman • N. Scott Momaday • Barbara Garson • David Halberstam • Ron Radosh • Alan Wolfe • Alta • Paul Cowan • Katha Pollitt • Lore Dickstein • Jack Newfield • Albert Innaurato • Nora Sayre • Lucinda Franks • Cynthia Arnson • A. W. Singham • Steve Schlessinger • Jane Lazarre • Dan Wakefield • Justin Kaplan • Ann Bernays • R. D. Rosen • Diane McWhorter • Jane Holtz Kay • Ellen Cantarow • Robert Lekachman • Galen Williams • Carol Muske • Ben Sonnenberg • Douglas Day • Robert K. Massie • Marcus Raskin • Frank Snepp • Patricia Bosworth • Leslie Epstein • Peter Stone • Arthur Kopit • Les Brown • Gerald Stern • Herbert Mitgang • Herbert Gutman • Israel Horowitz • Michael Meltzer • Vivian Cornick • David Burnham • Maxine Kumin • Gregory Rabassa • Betty Friedan • Robert Caro • June Jordan • Maria Irene Fornes • Toni Morrison • Peter Schrag • Barton Bernstein • Jeremy Larner • John Oliver Killens • Marge Piercy • Anthony Astrachan • Al Young • Jamake Highwater • Robert Hass • B. K. Moran • Richard Lingeman • Gloria Emerson • Richard Pollak • Marshall Berman • Paul Gaston • Gay Talese • Paul Krassner • R. W. B. Lewis • Kai Erickson • Denise Levertov • Alix Kates Shulman • Barbara Seaman • Gail Sheehy • William Styron • Francine duPlessix Gray • Leon Litwack • Martin Sherwin • Rob Swigart • Lucy Rosenthal • Erica Jong • Robin Morgan • Victor Perera • Grace Paley • Toni Cade Bambara • Wilfrid Sheed • Mordecai Richler • Aryeh Neier • Wallace Stegner • Blanche Wiesen Cook • Thomas B. Morgan • Richard Foreman • James Welch • Rita Mae Brown • Richard Goldstein



A call to the American Writers Congress

The American Writers Congress is sponsored by The Nation Institute, a non-profit organization associated with The Nation Magazine.

We urge you to respond soon because reserved admission is limited.

For more information, call or write:

The American Writers Congress
G.P.O. Box 1215
New York, N.Y. 10116
212/420-0608

YES, I want to register at the writer's rate of \$25 per person (non-writers: \$100 per person) for The American Writers Congress, to be held at The Roosevelt Hotel, October 9-12, 1981. I am reserving _____ places now. (Non-reserved admission: \$50 for writers; \$150 for non-writers.)

I am enclosing an additional \$_____ to help offset the cost of The Congress. Contributions are tax-deductible within legal limits. Total amount enclosed \$_____.

Please make checks or money orders payable to The American Writers Congress. Send to: The American Writers Congress, G.P.O. Box 1215, New York, N.Y. 10116.

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Please send me room rate information for The Roosevelt Hotel.

Perils of Porn: STV Owners Lose Out as Sex Moves In

by Lee Margulies

CALL IT A SIGN of the changing times. How else do you explain the distress sale of a television station because it *isn't* showing sexually explicit movies?

Just a few years ago, of course, about the closest you could get to anything sexual on television was the scantily clad trio of young women who starred in *Charlie's Angels*—them and a few heavily edited motion pictures. Television was like the archetypal loud-mouth fraternity brother: all talk, no action.

Then came the boom in pay television, filling millions of home screens with everything from the comical nudity of *Animal House* to the erotic fantasies of *Dressed to Kill*. And more: Many pay systems have found a sizable audience for what is euphemistically called "adult entertainment," meaning soft-core pornographic films.

Not, however, at SelecTV in Los Angeles—or rather, not yet. That's what the sale of UHF-station KWHY is all about.

SelecTV is a three-year-old, over-the-air pay-television system that leases time from the independently owned KWHY to broadcast recent and vintage motion pictures, uncut and uninterrupted. It has about 100,000 subscribers, which may sound like a lot, but amounts to less than one-third the number served by its rival, ON TV, operated by KBSC.

Among the differences between the two services is that for the last year-and-a-half, ON TV has been broadcasting sexually explicit films twice a week in late-night time periods. Many of the movies are edited versions of films that were rated X when they played in theaters and contain graphic depictions of sexual intercourse and other sex acts. The company claims one third of its subscribers are watching one of these movies each month.

SelecTV has no doubts about the popularity of these films and wants desperately to spice up its schedule so it can compete with ON TV, but to date it has been unable to do so. The reason: KWHY's directors have sternly enforced a policy prohibiting the broadcast of programs with frontal

nudity, offensive language, or real or simulated sex acts—even though the SelecTV signal is scrambled and can be received only by viewers who have purchased the service.

"We don't want to be in the business of soft-core or hard-core pornography," explained Robert Bunn, general manager of KWHY and a co-owner of the licensee, Coast Television Broadcasting. The policy reflects both moral and legal considerations, he said.

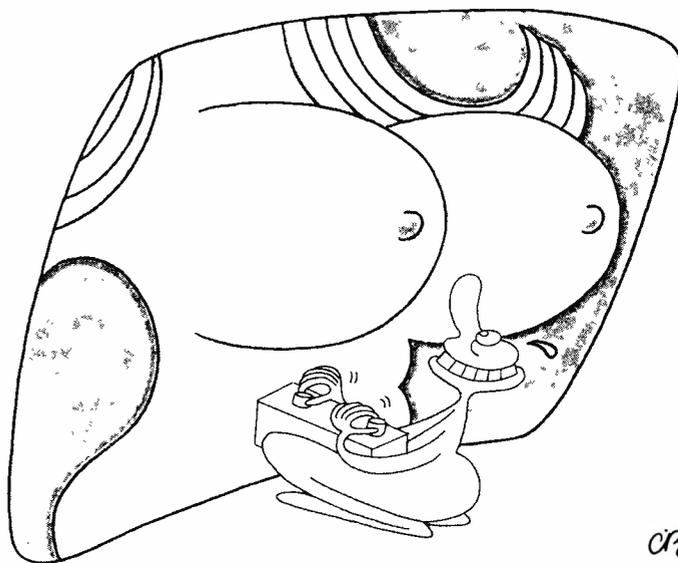
SelecTV's solution was to buy the station. Under the original leasing agreement it had been given an option to acquire KWHY, and the option was exercised. Both Bunn and Lionel Schaan,

Broadcasting for the station (now about \$6.2 million), the second by forming a new company to run KWHY, Choice Channel of Los Angeles. Choice Channel will have some SelecTV stockholders but will be owned principally by Harriscope Broadcasting, a Los Angeles-based company that owns all or part of five other television stations and three radio stations.

The only element still pending is Federal Communications Commission approval of the sale. Burt Harris, president of Harriscope, said he expects that to come early in 1982. The sexually explicit films will follow immediately thereafter, perhaps as often as every night, according to SelecTV's Schaan, whose company already offers such fare on its Milwaukee pay system.

Harris is well aware of SelecTV's intentions and said he has no objections, providing certain safeguards are taken, such as playing the blue movies late at night, promoting them tastefully, and making

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



Barsotti

president of SelecTV, said the conflict over programming policy sparked the transaction.

But the deal was not accomplished so easily. For one thing, KWHY's owners filed suit to block the sale, contending the option hadn't been exercised properly. For another, SelecTV is principally owned by Japanese and Canadian interests. It couldn't assume ownership of the station because federal regulations limit foreign ownership to 20 percent.

Those problems were finally resolved a few months ago, the first by a pretrial settlement that substantially increased the price being paid to Coast Television

lockout devices available to parents who want to prevent their children from watching.

The station Harriscope owns in Chicago offers late-night "adult" films three nights a week on a similar pay-television service, and Harris called the public response "amazing."

"Whether it's a novelty, I don't know. I'm not a psychologist," he said. "But there's no question that a lot of people are prepared to watch these movies if they can see them in their own home, without the guilt complex or social stigma that keeps them from going to an adult movie theater." ■

Lee Margulies is a reporter for The Los Angeles Times.

Morality in Marketing

by Roger Director

LAST SPRING, America's pure of heart—operating under the name of the Coalition for Better Television—threatened to boycott the products of such manufacturers as Procter & Gamble and Warner Lambert, whose advertising loot goes to support *Three's Company*, *Taxi*, *Laverne & Shirley*, *M*A*S*H*, and other such indecencies. Crest, it seems, was retarding cavities but promoting moral decay.

So painful was the hickory switch that the pious had taken to corporate America's posteriors that some of the country's jauntiest firms came crawling back from the woodshed howling and rubbing their haunches, convinced—they said—of the error of their ways. A conscience call-back began, with Procter & Gamble pulling out of objectionable fare. The boycott was called off, and the matter was closed.

At least it seemed that way, until some savvy execs realized that steering clear of the Moral Majority's wrath wasn't nearly as profitable as penetrating (pardon the expression) this lucrative market. The Bible Belt, they computed, has a capacious wallet clipped to it. If you can't lick 'em, bill 'em.

This week, corporate America dropped the other Scholl. Procter & Gamble, a leader in product piety, unveiled a new line of goods pitched four-square at the Moral Majority and its billion dollar buying power. The first step, chairman Owen Butler announced, will be to remove the ring from Mr. Clean's ear and cloak the suggestively clad genie in a dark brown polyester suit, a shirt, and a tie. "We want him to look less like a massage-parlor operator and more like a member of the Jaycees," Butler said.

Many of P&G's other products will be "upgraded" for the God-fearing customer. Folger's coffee, for example, will be completely decaffeinated to avoid even a hint of stimulation. And Crest toothpaste will get a new packaging wrinkle: Crest Without Fluoride is already being shipped to Bible Belt stores. "If He wants your teeth to rot, we're not going to interfere," is the slogan on the tube. And the

inscription on the back of regular Crest now will read: "Crest has been shown to be an effective decay-preventing dentifrice that can be of significant value when used in a conscientiously applied program of oral hygiene and regular professional care—God willing."

The only thing P&G won't be targeting anew is Ivory Soap—"the soap that walks on water"—although chairman Butler vowed that "as long as Ivory remains fifty-six one-hundredths percent impure, we won't stop trying to improve it."

Other manufacturers are following suit. Miles Laboratories, which spends \$78 million a year on advertising, principally for Alka-Seltzer, has begun test-marketing Alka-Shamer, which will offer no relief whatsoever to the sinner who has eaten, boozed, and debauched himself into an upset stomach and headache. The twin, joined tablets will not dissolve in water. Instead, they will sit there with the Ten Commandments imprinted on them to remind the dyspeptic of his folly. Similarly, Warner-Lambert's new Roloids for Sinners will "discharge forty-seven times their own weight in excess stomach acid."

General Foods has already developed Garden of Eden, an all-natural breakfast cereal that will have flakes and puffs in the image of Adam and Eve, along with flavor nuggets in the shape of F-16 fighter planes. The story of Genesis will appear on the back of each box. So will a printed warning from the Reverend Jerry Falwell that the cereal could be dangerous to the health of secular humanists.

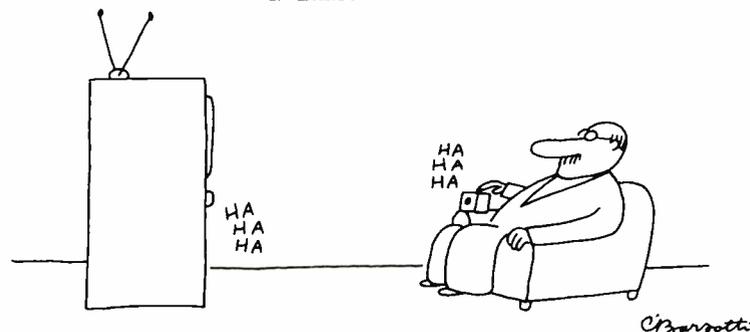
Esmark, parent company of Playtex, is introducing new lines of impenetrable and nonremovable Uplift and Chastity undergarments. And in perhaps the most ambitious marketing gambit of any major manufacturer, the company announced plans to develop a string of Pick 'n' Pray clothing boutiques stocked with "The Great Designer" jeans and casual wear. Hymns will be piped into the dressing rooms. "Sanctimonious women have a style all their own," says one Esmark executive. "Don't they deserve to look their best, even when they're feeling nothing?"

Industry analysts expect an announcement next month from Henry Wendt, president of Smithkline, makers of Contac and Sine-Off. He will broadcast the results of top-secret research on a new decongestant that will clear your sinus and your conscience with one quick spritz. "Give your soul to Contac" seems the likely advertising slogan.

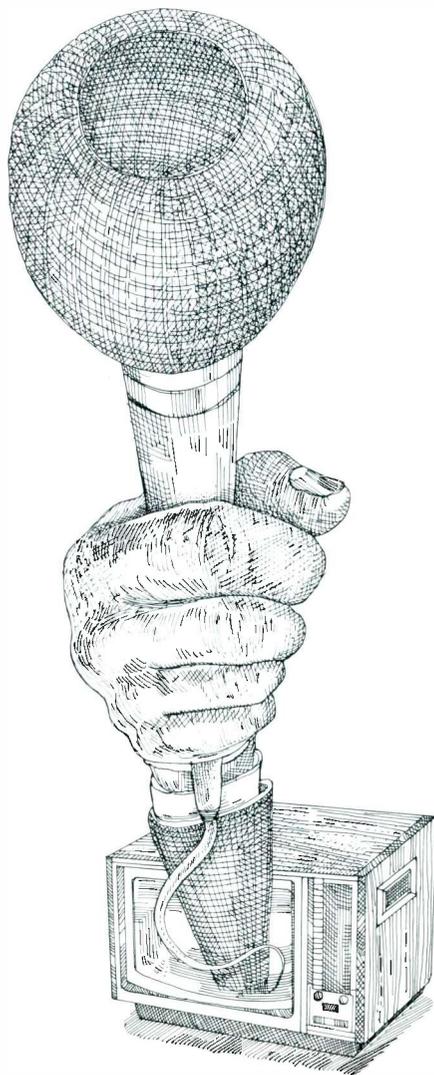
"We've thought all along that the boycott was the wrong idea," Wendt says. "We can show greater sensitivity to the Moral Majority not just by asking the networks to tone down their shows, but by providing good, wholesome products like Contac with Conscience-90." Thanks to America's unfettered corporate know-how, everyone on both sides of this religious dispute may soon be breathing a little easier. ■

If it is not evident, Roger Director is a humorist. He lives in New York City.

IN BARSOTTI'S VIEW



WHO GETS THE LAST WORD IN YOUR HOUSE?



For over 29-million people in New York, Los Angeles, Boston and Memphis a lot of what they see on TV has to do with what they say. Especially if they're watching one of four RKO Television stations: WOR-TV, KHJ-TV, WNAC-TV, or WHBQ-TV.

All of our stations believe they must listen and learn from the people they serve in order to bring them the programming they want and need.

What's more, our public affairs and news programs always try to make sure both sides of a story are heard. And some of our best shows literally invite the audience to ask questions, make decisions, and speak their mind. Like the Tri-State Town Meeting on WOR-TV. Or Government On The Line at KHJ-TV.

With shows with names like Meet the Mayors, Dialogue, Straight Talk, Life Line, Frankly Female and Community Feedback, there's no doubt who gets the last word at RKO Television. You.



WHERE TELEVISION IS A TWO-WAY MEDIUM.



WOR-TV
NEW YORK



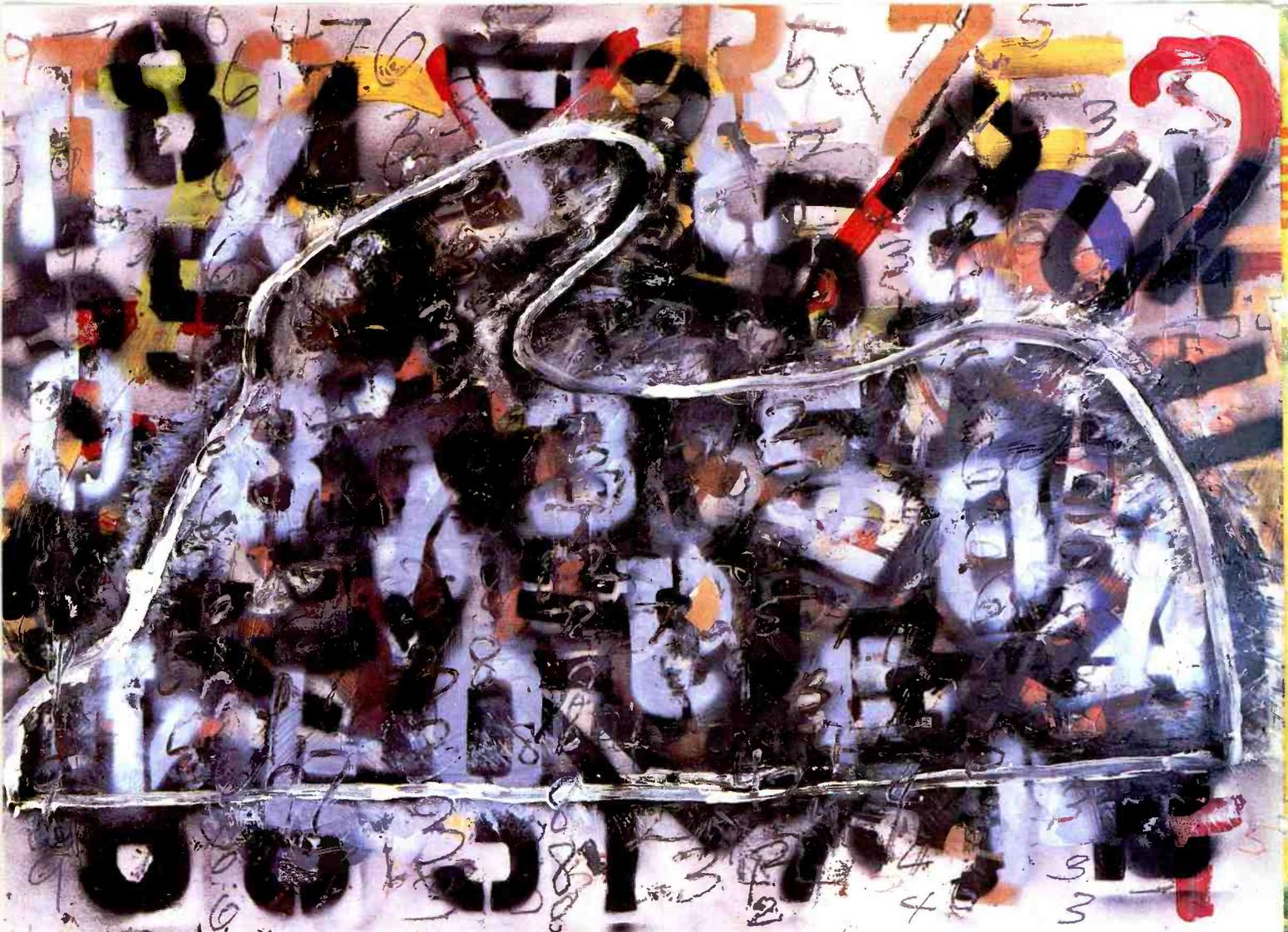
KHJ-TV
LOS ANGELES



WNAC-TV
BOSTON



WHBQ-TV
MEMPHIS



EMERGING AMERICAN IMAGES Group W supports the work of new artists to help encourage talent and innovation in America. Here we feature a painting titled *Untitled #28* (paint on paper, 36" x 52") by Michael Luchs of Detroit, Michigan. His work is represented by the Feigenson Gallery in Detroit.

"From shadows and symbols
into the truth."

—John Henry, Cardinal Newman

As darkness gives way to light,
so confusion precedes clarity.

The responsibility of today's
communicators is clear.

To peer deeply into the
shadows. To explain the symbols.
And so illuminate the truth.



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1981-82

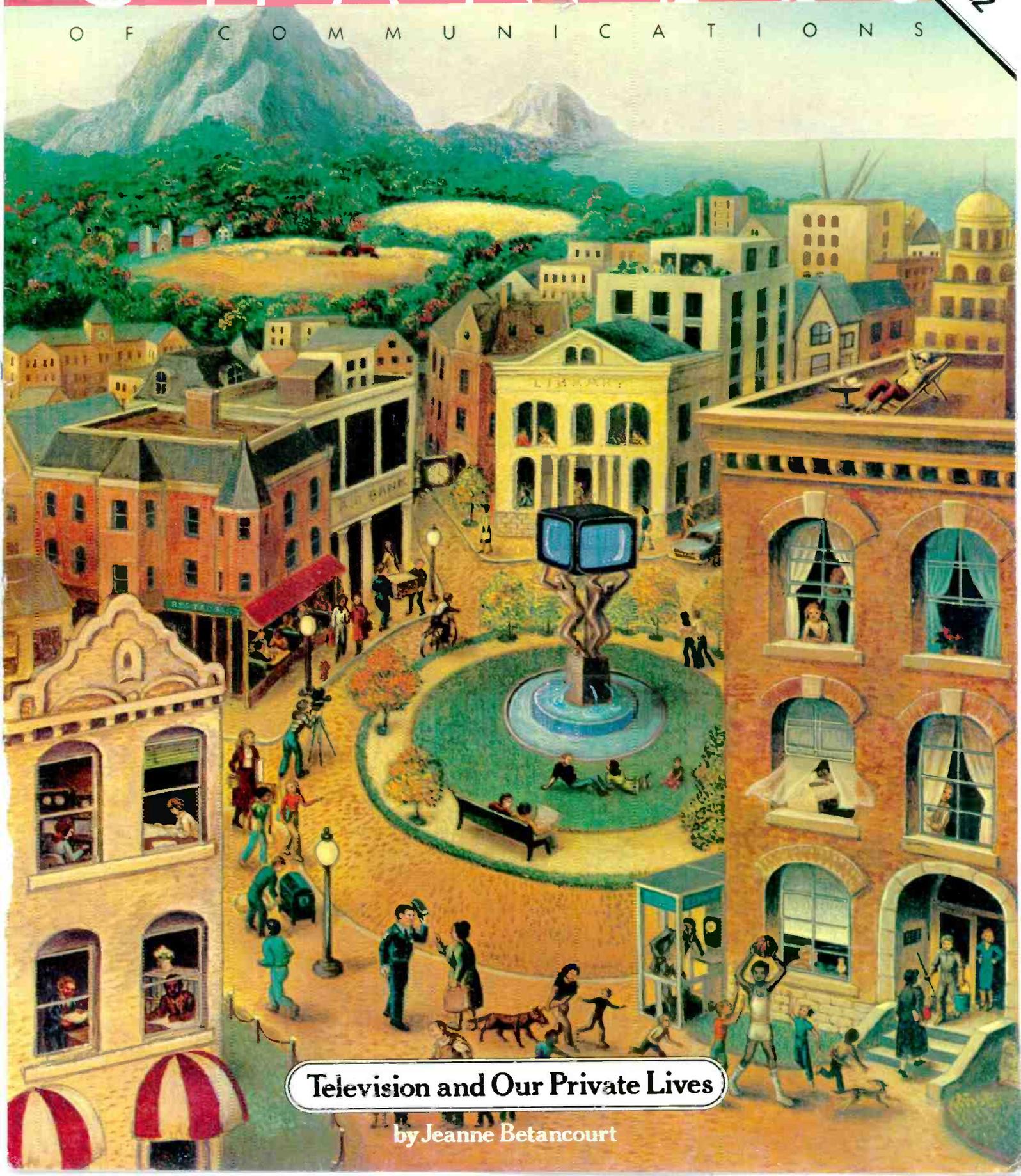
DECEMBER JANUARY

\$3.00

The
State of the
Revolution, 1982

CHANNELS

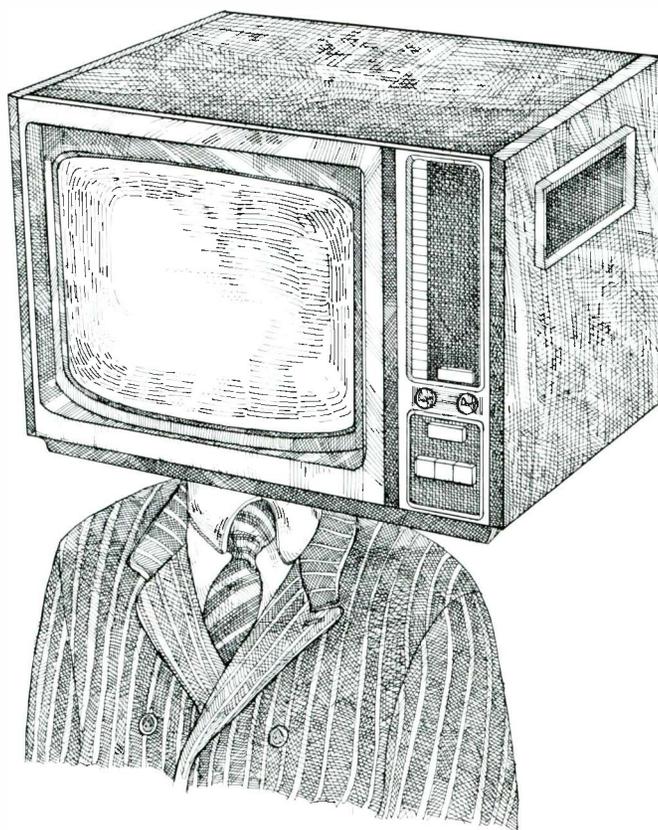
O F C O M M U N I C A T I O N S



Television and Our Private Lives

by Jeanne Betancourt

VIEWERS ARE THE STARS OF SOME OF OUR BEST PROGRAMS.



Some of the best programs we're involved in never get on TV. That's because they're community programs. And the only stars are the people we help.

Whether it's dealing with the problems of the Black and Hispanic communities, or making Christmas a reality for needy children, or running a marathon to aid retarded citizens, or helping promote community health centers—RKO Television stations know that some of the best programs we run happen when the cameras aren't rolling.

So at RKO, there's always something good on TV—even when it's off.



WHERE TELEVISION IS A TWO-WAY MEDIUM.



WOR-TV
NEW YORK



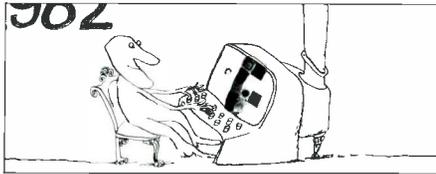
KHJ-TV
LOS ANGELES



WNAC-TV
BOSTON

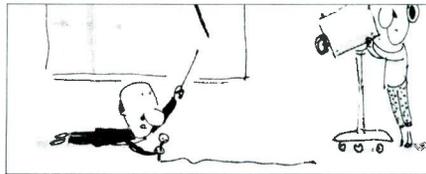


WHBQ-TV
MEMPHIS



Page 23
The State of the Revolution, 1982
 by **Martin Koughan**

In true supply-side spirit, business has decided that we're ready for the telecommunications future.



Page 30
Ninety Seconds Over the Economy
 by **Michael D. Mosettig**

Hardly the stuff of "good television," the economy is the most important and difficult story facing TV journalism.



Page 36
The Man Who Started Television II
 by **Jonathan Black**

Gerald Levin's daring proposal to wed satellites and cable made HBO — and remade television.



Page 40
The Tug of War in Israeli Television
 by **Milton Viorst**

Denounced from both the left and the right, Israel's one channel exists in a permanent state of siege.



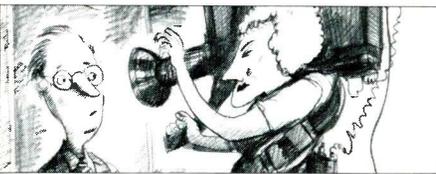
Page 44
Critical View: Seasons of the Private Eye
 by **Michael Wood**

A noted critic with a fondness for TV detectives unravels the mystery of the sleuth's enduring success.



Page 47
Television and Our Private Lives
 by **Jeanne Betancourt**

Oral histories from a range of Americans explore our true relationship to television.



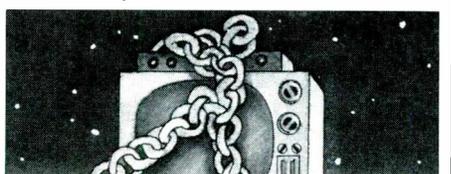
Page 53
Live! From Hutchinson, Minn.
 by **Julie Talen**

Public-access TV in this small town may look a bit ragged, but the people of Hutch have come to cherish it.



Page 56
Porn on the Fourth of July
 by **James Traub**

As popular as it is controversial, booming cable pornography exposes America's split personality.



Page 61
Law Review: Putting the Lock on Cable
 by **Henry Geller**

Congress may decide that cable operators are "telepublishers," giving total control of all channels.

DEPARTMENTS

ISSUES AND IDEAS

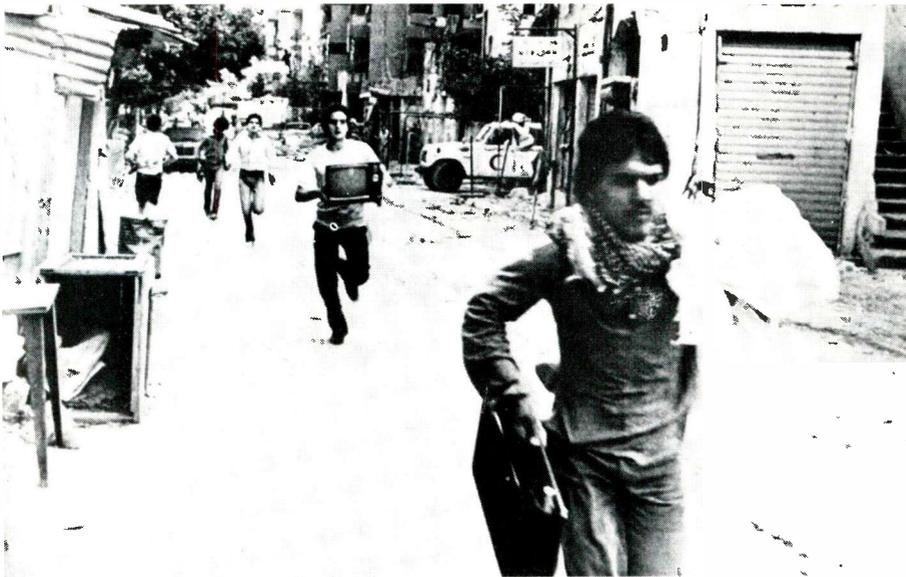
- Letters _____ Page 3
- Access _____ Page 5
 An Open Forum: Alfred Kahn
- At Issue _____ Page 6
 Contrasting Views on Fairness and Equal Time:
 Gene F. Jankowski; Rep. John Dingell
- CrossCurrents _____ Page 9
 Essays and Observations
- On Air _____ Page 17
 Commentary by Robert Coles, Ron Powers,
 and Brian Winston

The Public Eye _____ Page 21
 "Fear of Fowler" by Les Brown

CRITICISM AND REPORTS

- Book Reviews _____ Page 63
 "Remembering Television"
- Quo Video _____ Page 65
 Global and National Reports
- TV Guidance _____ Page 72
 "Is Television Good for You?" by David Finkle
- Cartoonist's View — Arnold Roth

Wide World Photos



THIS AP PHOTO stunned me when it appeared in *The New York Times* on July 20 because it says so much more than it intended. Here are people running for safety with their valuables during Israeli air raids on a Palestinian camp in Beirut, Lebanon, and what are they carrying? Not family heirlooms.

Why, I wondered then (and still do today), would these youths risk slowing their movements with such impedimenta as a television set and a portable stereo? Can these media mean so much that people could no more leave them behind in an emergency than they would a pet? I think about the young man with the television set and wonder where he found sanctuary and what he might be watching today. Did he need his television to help him cope with boredom, or to help him feel connected to the outside world?

The mind shifts from the Middle East war zone to relatively peaceful America, and recalls what happened when a certain Western town went into a severe economic depression because the mines had closed down: the residents canceled their telephone service but not their cable-television subscriptions. Then there was the Sunday night when a power failure at the Empire State Building knocked out television transmission to the New York metropolitan area. But the Nielsen "Audimeters" were unaffected, and they recorded that thousands of families had been tuned for hours to nothing but a blank screen. (NBC came up tops in ratings that night.)

Clearly, television is no ordinary piece of furniture. It provides in its window a complete environment, separate from the natural one. A great many people live in

both environments, their lives touched by whatever happens in either. Television's depiction of the real world may ring false, but the medium is its own reality.

Channels' cover story, "Television and Our Private Lives," probes the importance of the electronic environment to people of different ages and cultural and geographical backgrounds. The article is told in the words of the people themselves, as Jeanne Betancourt had extended talks (rather than formal interviews) with a range of viewers, to learn what the Nielsen ratings can never tell us: what television means to them personally. These are individual stories, not offered as research but as a look behind the statistics. They disclose, among other things, a deep ambivalence toward television: there probably has never before been a love-hate relationship on such a scale.

Yet ironically, even as we learn of people coming to terms with television after all these years, the whole electronic environment is changing drastically. Martin Koughan's article, "The State of the Revolution, 1982," has mapped out the new highways that will cut through the familiar landscapes now inhabited by Betancourt's people.

Tomorrow and yesterday collide, as they often do; but television, whether we like it or not, has already become part of our life-support system. A journalist friend tells of climbing a rugged mountain in India with a tourist group and coming upon the dwellings of religious ascetics at the top. One monk approached my friend and asked if she was American. Then tell me please, he implored when she said yes, what is happening now on *Days of Our Lives*?
L.B.

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On the Spot

To the Editor:

I was intrigued by the line in your article about Bill Moyers saying he was responsible for the "daisy girl" television commercial used in Lyndon Johnson's 1964 campaign ["The Perplexing Mr. Moyers," *Channels*, October/November]. That commercial originated in my studio when we were contemplating a sixty-second version of a five-minute atom bomb spot the Doyle Dane Bernbach advertising agency had planned. Moyers wasn't present.

Actually, the spot was already done — you might say prepared in advance. I had thought of it as a commercial for IBM to illustrate the world of numbers: a child counting up while the countdown was on for the atom bomb, combining the simplest use with the most complex. The child's voice came from a Polaroid commercial I did in 1962.

Moyers was in no way involved with the idea or with the creation of the spot. The only thing he can legitimately claim — if it is so — is that he authorized the running of the commercial.

TONY SCHWARTZ
New Sounds, Inc.
New York City

Moyers: For the Record

To the Editor:

Ann Crittenden's article about me in your October/November issue contains an egregious error.

She writes: "Moyers managed to avoid another confrontation, at Lyndon Johnson's funeral, by having a false-alarm heart attack that fooled several doctors. According to one associate, Moyers did not want to be present at an event dominated by Johnson cronies he preferred not to see, including John Connally, another poor boy from Texas who chose a less complicated path out of his background."

The implication is that I faked a heart attack, and it's not only wrong, but absurd. If Ann had asked me about the mat-

ter, I would have told her what happened and shown her evidence to support me. She was misled by uninformed gossip.

What happened was this: I suffer from a condition known as Tietze's Syndrome, a painful inflammation of the ribs and cartilage of the chest. No one knows precisely what causes it, but it's triggered, in my case, by cold weather, by straining to lift objects, or by either or both of those in combination with fatigue. It isn't serious, just painful, and it can last from a few hours to several days, during which the only treatment is rest and warmth.

When LBJ died in January 1973, I had been filming a documentary in Minneapolis about the death of a young Indian woman. That very afternoon, in bitter cold with sharp winds blowing and snow falling, my crew and I had been shooting for some two hours at her grave site on the outskirts of the city. When we returned to the hotel, my chest was throbbing with pain. I lay on the couch, a warm, moist towel around my chest, watching the *CBS Evening News* when Walter Cronkite announced the death of Lyndon Johnson.

That night, I filmed at a meeting of an Indian council until midnight; early the next morning I filmed — again in the cold — "standups," and then flew to Washington to attend the funeral. After taping a studio interview about LBJ for public television — during which the pain in my chest grew more intense — I headed for the hotel. Enroute, I blacked out, and my colleague James Karayn drove me to the emergency room of the Georgetown University Hospital. There, after monitoring me closely for several hours, Dr. Stanley M. Silverberg diagnosed my case as Tietze's Syndrome. I immediately asked him to put out a press release to that effect, for during the night there had been rumors of a heart attack. I do not have a copy of the press release, but I attach the AP story based upon it, which gives the lie to any suggestion that I was faking anything or that "several doctors" were fooled. I wanted to go on to LBJ's funeral, in fact, but the weather was cold and my doctor advised against it. . . .

I had had similar but milder attacks

than this before then, but not until Dr. Silverberg had any physician been able precisely to diagnose the cause. Because the symptoms are so similar in many respects to a heart attack, doctors always took special precautions before releasing me. I've had at least four sharp attacks since 1973 — always on location and in bad weather — but as I know now how to interpret the symptoms and to treat them, none has been as scary as that occasion in Washington.

I attach copies of Dr. Silverberg's diagnosis at the time. . . . I am taking such pains (no pun intended) to correct your story and to ask for a retraction because beguiling but untrue anecdotes like this can cause a man mischief for life. I regret to say that your magazine is the first to print this one, and I am aghast that you and Ann would publish so serious a charge without at least having given me a chance to comment on it. Now, perhaps you can understand why I am reluctant to be interviewed for personality profiles. Not only do I think one's work should stand on its own; not only do I think it's unbecoming to talk about my personal life; not only do I think journalists should resist becoming celebrities; but it proves to be impossible, even with a talented reporter like Ann Crittenden and a serious journal like yours, to prevent such errors as are bound to occur when the technique borrows from Freud and Hedda Hopper.

BILL MOYERS
CBS News
New York City

Arch Support

To the Editor:

In "Archie Bunker and the Liberal Mind" [*Channels*, October/November] Christopher Lasch is hard on Archie. In Lasch's view, Archie is so appealing because his quaint, laughable bigotry allows the audience to feel superior. But Lasch sells Archie short.

Certainly Archie Bunker's instant, blustering put-downs of minorities were considered obnoxious by liberals, but Archie became lovable not because his

prejudice was quaint, but because his bigotry—though powerful in the abstract—usually faltered when put to any sort of human test.

Archie frequently railed against blacks from his living room, but when he found them at his doorstep, the show proved particularly skillful in portraying his confusion. Archie's dilemma could thus be seen even by liberals as essentially human and, most important, inescapably American: reflecting the often-observed contradiction in the national character between abstract prejudice and personal generosity.

STEPHEN FENICHELL
New York City

Medium School

To the Editor:

The article by Grace Hechinger in the August/September *Channels* deserved a more fitting title than "Tuned-Out Teachers and Turned-Off Kids." The author accurately defines many of the problems educators find with television. More importantly, in our view, she only begins to uncover some of the exciting uses of the medium that teachers have devised. The National Education Association has been actively promoting the positive uses of television for more than thirteen years. As Hechinger states, many of our members now utilize "Critical TV Viewing Skills" in the classroom and as part of parent/student activities.

As an outgrowth of television recommendations by the NEA, we have observed a change in teachers' attitudes. Many now view the medium as a powerful and effective adjunct to classroom instruction rather than a "rival." Creative teachers have discovered how to harness television as a valuable instructional tool.

- In Massachusetts our state affiliate participates in a national network-television reading project.
- Our teacher members in Iowa conduct parent/teacher television workshops with other education, medical, and church-related groups.
- An NEA fellowship provided a grant to a Baltimore County Maryland teacher to design a television curriculum that has since been adopted

by the entire county system.

- In St. Louis, Missouri, teachers write a weekly television column for a local newspaper that includes articles on topics such as violence or advertising, specific program selections, activities, and a list of resources.
- The NEA affiliate in New Jersey, which is part of a coalition of other concerned groups, has published two television brochures: one for parents (in Spanish and English) and one for teachers.

SCHOOLDISC is a new and promising educational media project of the NEA and ABC. Through a collaborative effort of ABC Video Enterprises, Inc., the NEA, and the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, SCHOOLDISC is a series of twenty sixty-minute interactive programs and teacher's guides. Each video disk, which is intended for use in the classroom, includes six ten-minute segments on language skills, social studies, arts, science and math, news, and an in-service message for teachers. This project, which will be distributed to schools nationwide in the fall of 1982, accepts the challenge stated by Hechinger that "the availability of new media increases the choices available to both learners and teachers, and can be considered either a threat or a promise." SCHOOLDISC promises a true marriage between appropriate technology and good instruction.

WILLARD MCGUIRE
President
National Education Association
Washington, D.C.

We Shall Not Overlook

To the Editor:

Channels is definitely a channel of communication and information at this confused stage in the communications industry. Having been in the industry all of my life (my father bought the first radio on the block, and I played piano at the age of ten on WHBC in Canton, Ohio), I have never experienced such a radical change in the thinking concerning the media. Funneling such thinking into one magazine is difficult, I'm sure, but you seem to be doing it nicely.

As Michael Malone points out in your October/November issue ["And Gracie Begat Lucy Who Begat Laverne . . ."], the programs haven't changed much. The media are changing, however, and the conjecture concerning them even more so. I can't help but wonder if such thinking isn't a bit premature. I agree with Lawrence Grossman ["Arguing Against History"] that the cable operators and satellite pushers are trying to sell culture with little thought that it will succeed in the commercial market. Eventually we will all be able to see *Laverne & Shirley* on seventy-four or more channels, because we won't pay for the culture.

Having been a newsman, I am familiar with the idea that most newsmen are Democrats if not downright liberals. I have to agree that such liberal thinking very often is the truth in a news story, while a radical or Republican report might be more inclined to be demagogic. However, I do think it should not be overlooked. I agree with the thinking in the Walter Karp story ["Big Business and the Little Minister"] and Les Brown's article ["Reagan and the Unseen Network"], but I am looking for the other side of the argument as well. I hope such views will be included.

WADE BARNES
New York City

On Reagan and Moyers

To the Editor:

Les Brown's piece on "Reagan and the Unseen Network" [*Channels*, October/November] was very important and badly needed, for as he says, we are all going to suffer from the reduced accountability of the broadcasters.

Also, the Crittenden piece on Bill Moyers was fascinating; the best "profile" I've read in a long time. Perhaps Bill Moyers is a unique interviewee, but perhaps Ms. Crittenden is a genius, in which case I hope you will put her to work interviewing some other people.

HERBERT GANS
Department of Sociology
Columbia University
New York City ■

A Deregulator Speaks Out

by Alfred E. Kahn

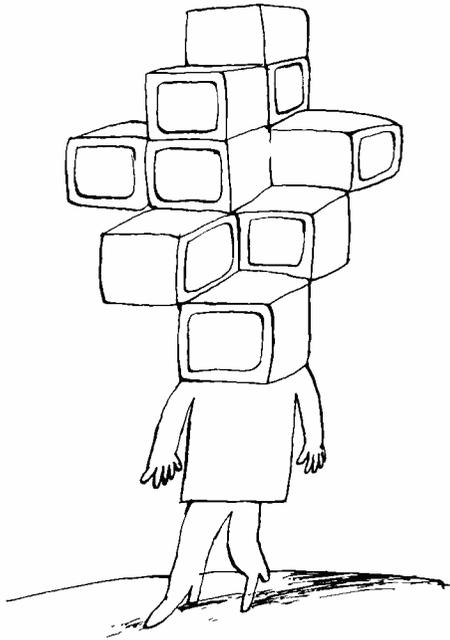
HAVING PRESIDED OVER the deregulation of the airline industry, actively pressed for the deregulation of the trucking industry, and formulated the Carter Administration's message advocating greater reliance on competition in the communications industry, I feel an almost paternal interest in Congress's urgent reconsideration of the durable Communications Act of 1934 and of regulation in the booming telecommunications field.

We should place our primary reliance for protection of the public interest on the operation of free markets. For all its imperfections, there seems to be no substitute for the spur to efficiency that effective competition alone seems able to provide.

There are clearly times when government intervention in the affairs of specific industries is required. The most compelling reason to regulate is to protect the public from such natural monopolies as utilities. This consideration has played a compelling role in the structuring of the communications industry. Congress's present task is to determine to what extent this justification is still valid.

In fashioning a new order for the communications industry, the future freedom of American Telephone & Telegraph necessarily becomes an issue of great importance. The government cannot ignore the anomaly of admitting competitors into the Bell System's markets while denying consumers of computers, data processing, cable television, and electronic information transmission the benefit of Bell's enormous technological resources. Yet how can we obtain the benefits of competition from an unleashed Bell System while keeping the contest a fair one, with success determined by the comparative efficiency of the contending parties rather than by Bell's preponderant financial resources?

In attempting to resolve the dilemma, we must keep two principles in mind: First, simply prohibiting Bell from competing would be an unacceptable solution. Second, the objective must be to devise structural rather than regulatory protections against monopoly, the kind that



ACCESS is an occasional column open to contributions from readers who have something to add to a current debate in the communications field.

Illustration by Jo Teodorescu

would permit essentially unregulated competition to have its play. Bell could be required, for instance, to sever its public-utility operations from the proposed competitive operations. This would assure that the monopoly carrier dealt equitably with its independent competitors as well as its own subsidiaries.

Unfortunately, any solution will inevitably represent a compromise between competing values. The total separation of Bell's competitive entities from all other AT&T operations might erect the strongest protections against unfair competition, but it would also undoubtedly entail some sacrifice of the economic benefits flowing from the close integration of AT&T research and development, manufacturing, and service in the entire field of communications. Conversely, there is

no way to deny even a fully separated subsidiary the technological and marketing advantages realized from its previous life within the Bell System, let alone from any continuing contacts dictated by the benefits of integration.

Finally, once deregulation becomes the chosen course, action should be quick, forthright, and complete. Not to imply that such regulation as fair-labor standards and antitrust laws should be abandoned. But if we opt for free entry into markets we think can be effectively competitive, we should not be indecisive in the interest of gradualism.

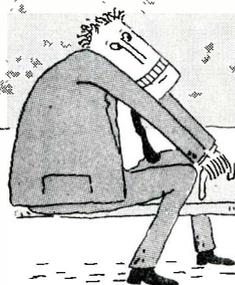
The halfway house of partial deregulation could introduce more inefficiencies and distortions than total regulation. Moreover, a gradual approach could give rise to new vested interests bent on retaining whatever protections remained.

Our goal should be to restore the effectiveness of the competitive process, not to protect individual competitors from having to prove their merit in the marketplace.

The regulatory schemes that emerged from the Communications Act of 1934 have long since been bypassed by the march of technology. The regulatory distinctions drawn between communications, computers, and data processing; the manufacture of communications and the provision of communications service; voice, record, and video; wire, cable, and satellite; cable television, telephone, and other kinds of electronic information transmission—all are obsolete legal-institutional notions that make very little technological sense today.

Except where absolutely necessary to insure fair competition, such distinctions should be stricken from the books. The time is ripe to let the market decide who might be the best provider of what. ■

Alfred E. Kahn is a special consultant to National Economic Research Associates, Inc. He served in the Carter Administration as advisor to the President and chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board and of the Council on Wage and Price Stability.



Fairness & Equal Time:

The Federal Communications Commission voted this fall to recommend Congressional repeal of the Fairness Doctrine and Equal Time Rule, the cornerstones of broadcast regulation in this country. Both have their origin in the Radio Act of 1927 and the Communications Act of 1934. Both carry the weight of law, not simply commission regulation, and their repeal requires an act of Congress.

The Fairness Doctrine is two-pronged. It requires, first, that broadcasters devote a reasonable amount of time to controversial issues of public importance, and second, that opportunities be afforded for contrasting viewpoints on those issues. The Equal Time Rule stipulates that whenever a broadcaster gives air-time to a political candidate (except in the course of covering legitimate news events), he is obliged to give equivalent air-time to all qualified candidates for the same office.

Congress will debate these issues later in the current session. In the interest of promoting informed discussion, *Channels* invited two of the principals in the current debate to state their cases to our readers.

Gene F. Jankowski is president of the CBS Broadcast Group. **Representative John Dingell**, Democrat from Michigan, is chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which writes broadcast legislation and oversees the FCC.

YES

by Gene F. Jankowski

THE RULES governing broadcast journalism would be unconstitutional if applied to print. The only question is, can such rules be justified? If not, they should be eliminated.

The original rationale for regulating broadcast journalism hinged on the concept of "spectrum scarcity." It was necessary for the government to allocate frequencies in order to avoid overlapping signals. But the "scarcity" concept had curious side effects. It became the basis of a regulatory and judicial editorial philosophy that declared broadcasting to be "different" from print, requiring rules of its own.

Ironically, these side effects have persisted even as perceived scarcity has disappeared. Today there are more than 9,000 radio stations, nearly 800 commercial television stations, and 269 non-commercial stations. This compares to about 1,750 daily newspapers. And these numbers don't include any of the new video outlets, which are developing with undreamed-of rapidity.

Clearly, the problems of today and tomorrow are those of abundance. In fact, if deregulation is not achieved soon, traditional broadcasting will stand alone among a multitude of video outlets, still carrying the burden of the long-since departed days of supposed "scarcity." The one service that is free to the public and available to all—the service with the highest level of trust—will also be the most restricted. This despite the fact that as far as the public is concerned, there is no functional difference between broadcast and print journalism. Broadcasting is simply a way of obtaining information on public events and issues, exactly as are newspapers and magazines, except that the public places greater trust in—and relies more often on—television news.

In addition, the remaining distinctions between print and the electronic media are being erased by technology. Consumers will not only have more broadcasting services and publications available as al-

ternative sources of information, but they will also be able to take advantage of combined broadcast and print services using their home television set or other video terminal. This trend is already underway. Satellites are being used for national distribution of magazines and newspapers while two-way videotext and broadcast teletext experiments are in progress. Indeed, there is already a debate about whether some print media will become the captives of the old electronic regulations as they turn increasingly to new electronic means of distribution. While they differ in detail, the Fairness Doctrine and Equal Time Rule have at least two things in common: The first is an apparent benevolent intent; the second is a provision for governmental presence where none is warranted.

The attractively named Fairness Doctrine, for instance, is frequently defended because it only states a general principle to which all good journalists should subscribe. But it is curious that only broadcast journalists are legally required to be "fair." And this arbitrary discrimination neatly illustrates the most important point of all. It is time we recognized that what we have is not a set of rules based on journalism, but a set of rules based on technology—on presumed differences between methods of delivery, rather than on true First Amendment principles.

The First Amendment was written at a time when the printing press alone constituted a mass medium. If ever a single means of communication was without a serious rival, it was then. Yet the founders of our nation felt they must explicitly bar the government from interfering with or in any way restricting that uniquely powerful medium, not in order to serve the press but to serve the public. That guiding principle seems to have been forgotten when electronic distribution appeared half a century ago. We started by regulating technology but ended up regulating journalism.

As we consider this position today, in a world bursting with new communications technology, we ought to remember that it is not technology that gives our system value; it is our system that gives technol-

Illustration by Mark Kseniak

Should We Scrap the Rules?



ogy its special place in our lives. Every country in the world has or can have the same communications hardware we have, but nowhere else does freedom prosper as it does here. It is ludicrous and contradictory to carry our own double standard forward into this new age, especially when we object to the very same concepts applied elsewhere. We have vigorously attacked UNESCO's proposed "world information order," for instance, with its provisions for such governmental intrusion on a free press as restricting the movement of journalists and requiring them to be "licensed."

It is tragic to persist in maintaining these restrictions at home; it is hypocritical as well to declare we will not tolerate them abroad.

NO

by Rep. John Dingell

THE FEDERAL Communications Commission's proposal to repeal the Fairness Doctrine and the equal-time provisions represents a radical change in government's attitude toward the public-interest responsibility of the broadcasting industry. The principal justification for this proposal is the assertion that new communications technologies now provide sufficient diversity of views to render equal-time and fairness requirements unnecessary.

In fact, I have yet to see this tremendous new diversity in video sources. Today, only one in four U.S. households receives cable services. Projections are that in 1990 roughly 50 percent of U.S. households will still be without cable services. Direct-satellite broadcasting, which is projected to provide further new diversity in program sources, is still at least two years away from beginning service, and it is uncertain how quickly subscribers will sign up. In addition, the cable systems now operating transmit mostly broadcast signals, and most of the new programming on cable is not raising local or national issues of concern or presenting different viewpoints — the basic objectives of the Fairness Doctrine.

What these factors suggest is that even

if optimistic projections for the growth of cable, MDS, STV, and DBS are accurate, we will continue to operate in a climate of scarcity for some time. Hence, we will continue to need the protection afforded by the equal-time and fairness provisions against abuse of that scarcity.

In a context of such scarcity, the Fairness Doctrine and access provisions of the Communications Act represent a delicately drawn balance between First Amendment freedoms and the public-trustee concept that underlies government policy toward broadcasting. In balancing these two interests, the First Amendment does not protect only the speaker's right to speak, but also the listeners right to hear diverse views on different issues. As the Supreme Court emphasized in the landmark *Red Lion* case,

It is the right of the viewers and listeners, not the right of the broadcasters, which is paramount. . . . It is the purpose of the First Amendment to preserve an uninhibited marketplace of ideas in which truth will ultimately prevail, rather than to countenance monopolization of that market, whether it be by the Government itself or a private licensee.

In return for a government license granting exclusive use of a portion of the public's spectrum for private profit, the broadcaster takes on an obligation to operate in the public interest.

The charge has been made that public interest is not served by the Fairness Doctrine because it places the government in the position of exercising editorial control over what the broadcasters put onto the airwaves, and that this presents a far greater danger to the First Amendment than does the "monopolistic" control of a section of the spectrum by a private licensee. Yet the exercise of the Fairness Doctrine and Equal Time Rule by the FCC has, in practice, allowed television and radio broadcasters wide discretion on what is broadcast, the issues focused on, how they are presented, by whom, and the format in which they are discussed.

The policies of fairness and equal access do not appear to place an undue burden

on the licensee, as has been argued. The FCC requires that a person who files a complaint show good cause before the licensee is required to account for its practices. In 1980, more than 20,000 complaints, inquiries, and telephone calls were made to the FCC's political broadcast division. Of these inquiries, only twenty-eight cases were brought by the FCC to the attention of the station. These twenty-eight cases resulted in a total of six admonitions to the station, five of them regarding political access. The penalty for a violation does not require the broadcaster to pay a fine or lose his license — only that the broadcaster air more discussion of the issue. The FCC administration of the Fairness Doctrine and political-access requirements thus isolates only the most serious cases and does not place a heavy burden on the broadcasters. Moreover, the fact that there were a total of 20,000 contacts to the FCC in a single year shows that the public believes the fairness and political-access requirements are important and needed protections.

If we repeal the Fairness Doctrine, the public will be left unprotected from the broadcaster who airs his personal views on controversial issues and refuses any access to groups or individuals who disagree. Likewise, repeal of the equal-time provisions will mean that the endorsement of a candidate for office by a local station or network could carry with it the denial of access to opposing candidates.

The emergence of the electronic media has dramatically changed — and I believe improved — the climate of political debate in this country over the past thirty years. But any election in which the broadcaster could determine which candidates get access to the media and in which manner the important issues are treated would reverse this progress. Broadcasting is the most persuasive means of communication ever known. Until the time when there is real and robust diversity in the channels available to the population, and structural controls such as access channels are in place and shown to be meaningful, the Fairness Doctrine and political-access requirements remain important and needed rights of the public. ■

"Culture lovers who happen to be cable television subscribers may turn on the tube tonight and think they've gone to heaven."

—L.A. Times.

"...a splendid varied evening of literate entertainment... From its determinedly on-target, no-compromise interview with violinist Isaac Stern, which opens the program, to Mike Nichols' adventures with horses for fun and profit, through an extraordinary original musical by Elizabeth Swados based on William Blake poetry, and a TV drama by John Osborne starring Sir Alec Guinness, the premiere night of CBS Cable is a triumph..." —Art Unger, *Christian Science Monitor*.

"In the first seven days, viewers were almost buried under good shows." —Gerald Clarke, *Time Magazine*.

"What distinguishes CBS... is that its program lineup is larger and more diverse—and significantly more of it is original production." —L.A. Times.

"'Our viewers love it,' said Robert Strock, marketing director of Theta Cable, which delivers CBS-C to 100,000 homes in the Los Angeles area." —As quoted in *Time Magazine*.

"...a first class undertaking." —*Sunday Herald-News*.

"Cable television... takes another great stride tomorrow with the debut of CBS Cable... brings some much-needed class to cable... impressive three hour inaugural." —Lou Lumenick, *Sunday Record*.

"...a rich tapestry of programming..." —*Cable Marketing*.

"...perhaps the most ambitious of any new cable programming service..." —L.A. Times.

"While I appreciate the diversity of the programming, what appeals to me most about CBS Cable is its sliding repeats." —Bob Curtright, *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*.

"It's a class act with its own self-made programming, an identity all its own... how much safer it would have been to just show up at an event, tape the concert or the play, call it CBS Cable something-or-other and run it." —Jack Loftus, *Variety*.

"A classy note has been struck right from the start with the intelligent choice of broadcaster Patrick Watson as the over-all host."

—Robert di Matteo, *CableVision*.

"A bright and articulate Canadian, Patrick Watson has been enlisted by the network to pull it all together. He does so effortlessly and eruditely..." —Jerry Krupnick, *Newark Star Ledger*.

"CBS Cable's resident host is Patrick Watson... He proclaims the proceedings 'a piece of broadcasting history' and prefaces every name with adjectives like 'gifted' and 'spellbinding'."

Fortunately, Watson's enthusiasm is largely justified. CBS Cable is a class act." —Lou Lumenick, *Sunday Record*.

"...an innovative mix of high and popular culture, all bearing the signature of a knowledgeable and articulate Canadian acclaimed on both sides of the border."

"The great thing for me," says Patrick Watson, on-screen host for CBS Cable's cultural program service, "is that I've been exposed to a number of hours of the cream of the crop of television, much of which has left me open-mouthed... I've caught myself using words like splendid too many times." —Houston Post.

"Watson's style and knowledge of the arts certainly are refreshing assets." —Jack Loftus, *Variety*.

"It's a coup for Canada's top public affairs interviewer." —Sid Adilman, *Toronto Star*.

"...a wonderful overview in which, for once, the interviewer is never seen... highly refreshing."

—Cecil Smith, *L.A. Times*.

"Gets off to a nifty start with 'Signature' (7:30 PM) a nightly interview program that features a fascinating talk with Isaac Stern. Stern touchingly recalls his years of struggle..." —Lou Lumenick, *Sunday Record*.

"The programming begins with 'Signature,' a half hour interview segment that will be a fixture each night of the broadcasting. Isaac Stern demonstrates he can converse as intelligently as he can fiddle during the course of the interview." —Jerry Krupnick, *Newark Star Ledger*.

"...an interview with musician Isaac Stern makes for enjoyable, thoughtful viewing." —Jack Loftus, *Variety*.

"In all, 'Confessions of a Corner Maker' is a mesmerizing hour of dance."

—John Gruen, *Dancemagazine*.

"...with CBS Cable's nationwide debut on October 12, the quality of arts programming on television in general will have been improved by at least five-hundred per cent. For dance in particular the news is felicitous... 'Short Stories,' Tharp's made for video piece is among her most original efforts... It is high drama transcending mime or dance itself..." —John Gruen, *Dancemagazine*.

"...a television breakthrough of sorts... There is stunning work here, physically 'frec' in a way that a mere photographic record of dancers on a stage could never be." —Robert di Matteo, *CableVision*.

"When Davidsbundlertanze made its New York bow last year, it was greeted with reverent yet rapturous responses." —John Bridges, *Nashville Tennessean*.

"A Gift of Friendship'... was a mesmerizing study of egos, dottiness and cruelty..."

—John J. O'Connor, *NY Times*.

"John Osborne... has come up with a compelling study..." —Lou Lumenick, *Sunday Record*.

"There's also fascination in John Osborne's 'The Gift Of Friendship...'..." —Robert di Matteo, *CableVision*.

"High point of the evening is 'The Gift Of Friendship' an exceedingly abstruse and utterly compelling drama by John Osborne... Playwright Osborne has a delicious time with this pair..." —Cecil Smith, *L.A. Times*.

"...Songs of Innocence and Experience'... brilliantly captured the soul of the poet."

—John J. O'Connor, *NY Times*.

"...employing a superb cast of charming young performers. When entrusted to sensitive hands, the Swados blend of experimentation and energy is ideally suited to the television screen." —John J. O'Connor, *NY Times*.

"I have a 'highest recommendation' for... Elizabeth Swados' 'Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience'... the talent is fresh and superb... It's beautiful, imaginative and compellingly rhythmic." —Bob Curtright, *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*.

"...tomorrow night's two remaining programs are thoroughly delightful. 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' (8:30 PM) is an original musical by Elizabeth Swados, featuring a talented group of eight young performers... the youngsters perform with verve and impressive vocal quality." —Lou Lumenick, *Sunday Record*.

"Elizabeth Swados' musical adaptation of William Blake's 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' highlights the gifted theatrical composer's ability... to give classical material a contemporary vitality." —Robert di Matteo, *CableVision*.

"Elizabeth Swados and some wonderful kids left over from her 'Runaways' follow Mike Nichols and some beautiful Arabian horses..." —Jerry Krupnick, *Newark Star Ledger*.

"'Songs of Innocence and Experience'... the highly imaginative and inventively staged musical production." —Cecil Smith, *L.A. Times*.

"'Mixed Bag' was the best show of the evening."

—Lee Winfrey, *The News & Courier, Philadelphia Inquirer*.

"...with Patrick Watson and Gregg Jackson as co-hosts, it goes out on location for its features. Monday night, Mike Nichols talked about his profitable investment in Arabian horses, while showing off the sleek steeds on his farm."

In half an hour the show touched gracefully on how Arabian horses differ from ordinary nags, how they are trained, and how profitable they are as an investment." —Lee Winfrey, *The News & Courier, Philadelphia Inquirer*.

"...if horses were your thing, you loved this episode of 'Mixed Bag.'" —Jack Loftus, *Variety*.

"...the willingness to take on-board popular art forms and leisure activities of all sorts is the most refreshing single thing about CBS Cable. 'Mixed Bag' is thus a groundbreaking show." —Brian Winston, *Soho News*.

"Foreign film buffs may lose their cool..."

—Brian Shaw, *The Athens Observer*.

"Germany's stunning young director, Werner Herzog, will be represented by 'Aguirre: Wrath of God,' a haunting film... Three more from an impressive list of world cinema are Bernardo Bertolucci's 'The Spider's Stratagem' (a fine work made before his more well known 'The Conformist' and 'Last Tango in Paris'), based on a story by Borges, Claude Chabrol's 'Ten Days Wonder' is an awkward but fascinating mystery thriller starring Orson Welles which was scantily seen in the U.S., and also shown will be the beautifully mounted tale of escape from Nazi occupied Paris—'Les Violons Du Bal'..." —Brian Shaw, *The Athens Observer*.

"...Werner Herzog's highly acclaimed but cryptic movie masterpiece 'Aguirre: Wrath of God'..." —Art Unger, *Christian Science Monitor*.

"...for once chest thumping seemed in order."

—Gerald Clarke, *Time Magazine*.

"The upcoming roster of programming is dazzling..." —Robert di Matteo, *CableVision*.

"...An absorbing and thoroughly delightful evening of cultural programming." —Jack Loftus, *Variety*.

"It's going to offer some 250 hours of programming over the next 12 months, and if 40 minutes a day is about all you have in mind for television watching, perhaps each time you turn on the set you should start by checking out CBS Cable." —Brian Winston, *Soho News*.

"The best way to make certain that you do receive it is to call your local system president and demand it. Otherwise you will be missing some landmark TV programming."

—Art Unger, *Christian Science Monitor*.

"WE COULDN'T HAVE SAID IT BETTER OURSELVES"



Bullish on Video

AN ANNOUNCEMENT from Merrill Lynch recently drew us to the first-ever nationwide investment seminar, at the Imperial Ballroom of the Sheraton Center hotel in New York. It was not investments that fired our interest, however, but the technological significance of the event itself. For one thing, the seminar would use satellites and closed-circuit video technology to link audiences in thirty convention halls and seminar rooms around the country. For another, cable-television subscribers in more than sixty markets would be able to watch either live or delayed broadcasts in their homes. Also—though more important to the portfolio-conscious audience than to a technology freak—the seminar would be a forum on the recently enacted tax law of 1981, starring (we learned at the last minute) Ronald Reagan, live from the White House. For their part, the Merrill Lynch participants would be addressing the ballroom, the convention halls, the seminar rooms, and the home audience from the company's own video studio down by Wall Street. An astonishing idea to one whose image of Wall Street never included a touch of show business.

The program, presided over by William F. Waters, Merrill Lynch vice president and director of marketing, began with a video-taped overview of the new law and Merrill Lynch's educated guesses as to its economic impact. The outlook was optimistic, the accompanying stock footage uplifting, the mood pro-Reagan.

The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period via telephone from the audiences across the country. For this, the experts appeared on screen live from Merrill Lynch's studio downtown. We learned from them that "utility companies are income-oriented"; that "90 percent of those who had good solid retirement plans could enjoy their retirement," and "Sun Belt buy, Snow Belt sell? Not necessarily."

After we watched the President's nationally broadcast speech, the experts returned to our screen to give their reac-



tions. They generally agreed that there were no surprises, and that overall the speech had been laudable. A final question-and-answer session was followed by suggestions on how investors could adjust to the new economic environment.

Whether or not the seminar was successful—did it induce more investments?—was our first question when we showed up a few days later at the office of Jeanette Lerman, vice president and manager of Merrill Lynch's video network. It was too soon to tell, she said (although a quick count told her that 17,000 stockholders and would-be investors had attended across the country, and that two million more may have watched at home). She did, however, relate the history of the company's video network: It was started on a very small scale ten years ago by the far-seeing Donald T. Regan, then chief executive officer of Merrill Lynch, and now Reagan's Treasury Secretary. The network started with some small VTRs and cameras. Lerman joined the company four years ago, coming fresh from the Canadian Film Board. Her goal was to make the department "more focused, more public-thinking." Merrill Lynch is, after all, "communications-intensive," part of an industry that uses new technology to transfer information. Theirs is a sophisticated audience whose members make important decisions requiring up-to-date and "need-to-know" information; so why not reach them with the most sophisticated and efficient means of communication?

The two creative forces behind the teleconference, Naomi E. Smith, senior producer, and Alan J. Zauzmer, chief engineer, described the problems of producing a teleconference of such sweeping scale. It was six weeks in the making, and news of the President's speech, which

they had heard only two days before, had caused a lot of panic. "The knee-jerk reaction around here was to get the President to postpone," Smith said. (We were assured this was no joke.) But reason prevailed: By working around the clock, scripts were changed, and networks contacted for a hookup to the speech.

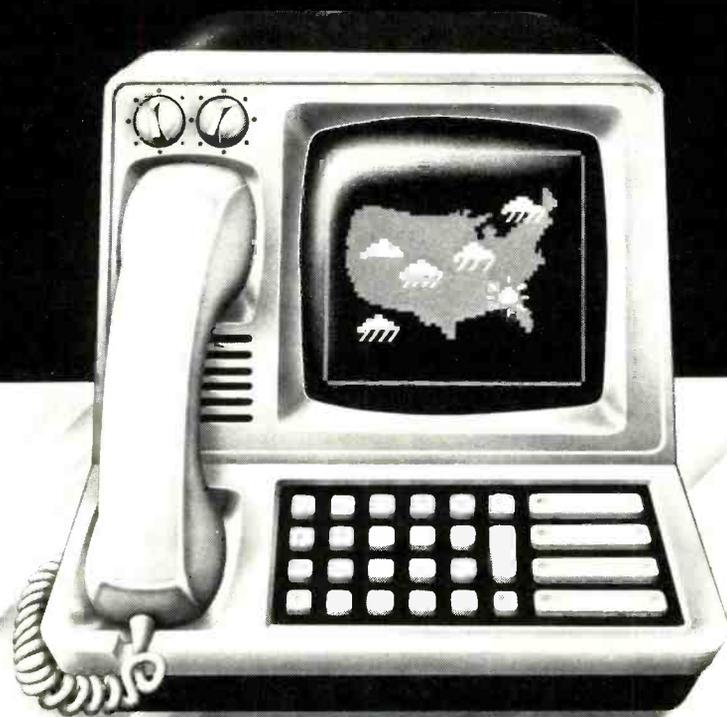
Touring the studio, we learned that the equipment and accommodations, complete with green room, cost more than \$2 million and rivalled that of any commercial station. Besides conferences, the studio is kept busy making tapes for Merrill Lynch's sales force, customers, and employees. One tape, titled *Inside Commodities: Gold*, outlines the factors affecting the price of gold and gold futures, and offers advice on individual investment strategies. *Ticket to Success* is a "motivational tape that demonstrates to new account executives the importance of order-writing skills." Another tape, aimed at foreign investors, details the many opportunities to invest in U.S. real estate. In all, fifty tapes are produced a year, keeping a staff of fifteen (along with freelance help) constantly busy.

The message of all this seems clear enough: In the corporation at least, the Telecommunications Revolution has already arrived. After carbon paper had revolutionized standard office procedures, there came the mimeograph machine and, later, the photocopier. Where once the telephone and the mails were the most efficient method of reaching clients and far-flung employees, now we have video. What better sales tool is there than the one-to-one, face-to-face presentation? The nationwide teleconference. It's face to face . . . and one to a thousand.

The 7:30 Shuffle

TEN YEARS AGO, the Federal Communications Commission created bedlam in the television industry with a new rule that restricted the networks to three hours of programming in prime time. Executives bitterly accused the government of trying to destroy their business. Today the new FCC, caught up in the enthusiasm

FRANCE INTRODUCES A NEW TELEPHONE SYSTEM THAT ISN'T ALL TALK.



The general telephone system in France is now the carrier for a wide variety of non-speech services designed to bring together the versatility and intelligence of the computer with the ubiquity and convenience of the telephone. This major development—called the "Telematique Program"—represents an integrated and compatible range of products created by a cohesive research and development effort.

At the heart of this program is the Teletel videotex system now offering a wide range of services including tele-shopping, electronic mail and reservation facilities, as well as a wide range of information sources supplied by more than one hundred and fifty private organizations and government agencies. Over 2500 families already make daily use of these offerings from the comfort of their own homes. In the next few months, a proportion of these households will have the added value of Teletel "telepayment" services using the advanced technology of the "smart card"—a plastic card equipped with a micro-computer. During 1982, a series of point-of-sale trials are planned in various French cities involving the distribution of tens of thousands of these cards to be used in several hundred smart card POS terminals located in malls, stores and supermarkets.

In addition, a specific application of the Teletel videotex technology has been developed for an electronic directory service which is currently being pre-tested by 1500 telephone customers. The major implementation takes place in the first half of 1982, when a total of 300,000 terminals will be installed to access a database of over 350,000 white- and yellow-page directory entries.

All these and other customer services, including the low-cost digital facsimile terminal, are able to take advantage of the advanced TDM and packet-switching (Transpac) technology with which the French telephone network has been transformed into a multifunctional tool over recent years.

The results of these outstanding activities are now attracting significant international interest. Teletel videotex systems have been sold in the U.S.A., Brazil and Europe, while orders in excess of 130,000 terminal units have been placed for the low-cost directory displays in the U.S.A. alone. This is in addition to the 300,000 units ordered for the French system.

Intelmatique—the promotional service of the French Telecommunications Administration—is ready to answer your enquiries. For further information, write to: Intelmatique, 98 rue de Sèvres, 75007 Paris, France. Telex: (842) 203185, or telephone in the U.S.A.: (203) 834.11.43.

for deregulation, is talking about abolishing the rule — and the industry once more is agitated: Here again is government messing up business. Clearly, something has happened in ten years to turn a hated rule into a cherished one.

The Prime Time Access Rule, as it is called, was intended by the FCC to break the networks' grip on television's peak viewing hours and to create opportunities for producers of local and syndicated shows to get on the air in important time periods. Local broadcasters viewed the FCC action another way in 1971: The commission was forcing them to invest money in programming one additional half-hour a day, at 7:30 P.M., when it was so convenient and nicely profitable simply to delegate the time to ABC, CBS, or NBC. What happened in the intervening decade is that the Prime Time Access Rule proved a financial bonanza for the stations.

If there is irony in the way things turned out, it is exceeded for pointedness by this paradox: A liberal FCC created the rule to open commercial television to market forces, while an FCC made up of conservatives — the putative champions of market forces — wants to kill it off.

Conservative theorists who espouse the idea that marketplace forces best serve the public interest will find little support for that view in the track record of the Prime Time Access Rule. In ten years, the market forces at 7:30 have yielded only two original hits, *The Muppet Show* and *PM Magazine*, and scant few local programs anywhere in the country. After trying out a variety of syndicated shows, most stations elected to give over the time slot to cheap game shows — either revivals of old network staples or knockoffs of programs currently successful in the networks' daytime schedules. Overall, Prime Time Access has meant more to the broadcaster than to the consumer.

The networks, of course, would love to have the 7:30 time period back again, and have been pushing for repeal of the rule. But it does not automatically follow that the half-hour will revert to the networks if the access restrictions are lifted; the time belongs to the individual television stations, and they may at their own option yield it to the big national programmers or keep it for themselves.

At the mere suggestion by FCC chairman Mark Fowler that Prime Time Access might be scuttled, NBC came forth with a plan to reclaim the early-evening half-hour; it proposed expanding its evening newscast from thirty minutes to an hour, spanning the period from 7 to 8 P.M. in most markets. The idea excited television critics around the country but not most station operators. As an inducement to the stations, NBC offered the affiliates more

than five minutes of commercial time to sell in the newscast, on top of a higher than normal rate of compensation for the use of the air-time.

Many larger stations reacted to the proposal in ways that shocked the network. Some were so adamant about keeping the 7:30 time for themselves that they threatened to drop the *NBC Nightly News* and pick up instead the *Independent Network News* program now carried by nonaffiliated stations. The opposition to NBC's plan grew so acrimonious that the network quietly withdrew it in October. Poised to follow, the other networks also got the message. There will be no hour-long evening news on the networks for a while yet, whether or not the Prime Time Access Rule remains in force.

The 7:30 slot remains a free-market haven for the game show.



Prodigal Pageant

SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE. The United States Constitution. Merv Griffin. Kellogg's Corn Flakes. And, of course, the Miss America Pageant. While television's entire cardboard universe was uprooted by The New Sexuality, with breasts and pregnancies and wicked double entendres flying in all directions, Miss America kept her thighs locked and stood firm. Bert Parks. Chaperones. Prim swimsuits (never *bathing* suits, since bathing implies bath, and bath implies nudity). Two years ago the Miss America bastion was suddenly stormed when Ron Ely, the former television Tarzan, took over from Bert. Miss America went disco; Miss America went real. It looked like the Sexual Revolution had swept the last token off the board. And then the word went out from Miss America headquarters in Atlantic City: On October 15, Ron Ely was fired in favor of Gary Collins, host of *Hour Magazine*. The Miss America people call Collins "folksy," but we know what they really

mean. Welcome home, Miss America.

Official comments from Atlantic City have been decidedly studied, with the expected observations that Ely was never intended to better Bert Parks's twenty-five-year record of longevity. Ratings, usually as high as a virtuous neckline, were down in 1981, but the pageant's director and absolute monarch, Albert Marks, insists that nothing so crass as ratings determined the move. "Gary is low-key," Marks told a reporter from *The Washington Post*, "and his type is more desirable than Ron's . . . [Ely is] presentable and extremely good-looking, but he's not as folksy as Gary." This gets us close to the heart of the matter, but in later comments Marks proved willing to call a spade a spade. "I wanted the show to be sexy," he admitted, "but not so obviously."

Irregular students of Miss America may not have noticed the pageant creeping over the thin line between wholesome, county-fair sexuality and whatever it is that the Dallas Cowgirls and Charlie's Angels radiate, but the signs were clear in Ely's 1979 debut. Bert Parks, whose smile is like the slot of a toaster, had always conducted the ceremonies as if he were swearing in the next President. Not Ron. His smile came right out of a toothpaste commercial. He told jokes that were funny. Ron Ely wasn't daunted by the spectacle one bit; he was having a good time. And the entertainment! America's own vestal virgins had to share the spotlight with Chic, a dancing, singing disco group that had spandex flying all over the stage. The girls were just as modest and congenial as ever, but America had to begin wondering who its pageant belonged to. The high point of confusion came when Chic did a racy little dance number with the Miss America USO troupe, a group of former finalists clad in what appeared to be corduroy skirts and nice tops. It was *Town & Country* goes to Harlem.

Well, all that is past, thank God. Even the 1981 event featured the tamer efforts of singer B.J. Thomas. Gary Collins told the *Post* that he feared "the temptation to turn the pageant in a more sophisticated direction and take the focus off the girls." And Gary Collins has proved his faith in the girls — he married Miss America 1959, Mary Ann Mobley. Collins hails from Iowa, where discos and swing clubs are, presumably, rare, and he plans on restoring Miss America to her traditional pedestal of corn.

Of course, even out there in the staunch Midwest they've got pornographic movies, cable-television programs, and calendars, and boys and girls on a date are apt to wind up in the back seat of a car. People have all sorts of progressive be-

liefs. When you get right down to it, Miss America no longer represents any place at all. The Ron Elys of the world have blinded the Cyclops of virtue and just plain taken over. Miss America is by now only a state of mind. And that, of course, is why we need her just the way she is.

Everything is getting real these days. Comic-book super-heroes turn against enforcement officers when the cause is just, teenagers confront real-life dilemmas on television. We're getting our noses rubbed in the ugly truth. Only Miss America can stand up against the uglitude. Only Miss America can raise congeniality to the status of a cardinal virtue.

Miss America, we salute your return to sanity.

Technophobia

THE YOUNG take readily to new developments in technology. They delight in the easy mastery of buttons on the video recorder; their parents, if they are not engineers, are mystified and sometimes defeated by them. "Here, *you* set the timer for the evening news," they command. "I don't have my glasses."

When an office converts to word processors, the junior people are typically the ones who attack them with joy, while the veterans plead for yet another week with the trusty old medium of ink on paper. The young are comfortable with computers and seem to know intuitively how they function: the old abominate them and don't want to know.

But in comes a certain young woman, fresh out of college, to visit with one of our editors, and she declares she wants no part of the wonderful new world of electronic communications. It is, in her words, dreadful and dehumanizing, a bleak world for a young person to enter as an adult.

"I fear for the human race," she said, "when just about everything we do happens as we sit before the cathode-ray tube. We work at home in the Office of the Future, doing research electronically on the television screen from data banks, writing our reports on the same instrument, and sending them to headquarters—wherever that is—at the push of a button. We get our mail electronically, on the television screen; read our newspaper on the television screen; check out want ads there; make our banking transactions there; buy a little housedress or a book through television. For a bit of diversion at lunch time, we play an electronic game or two.

"Then after work, we hurry to punch the right buttons to bring on our continu-

ing-education course in money management. Okay? Then it's prime time, and we settle in for a little television or the movie on HBO. What the hell kind of life is that?

"Sure," she conceded, "it saves on traveling—our bit for the energy crunch. It's efficient. We save precious time. But will we ever again see another living soul? Will we ever meet that boy at the water fountain? Will we ever laugh at office jokes, or take up a collection for a colleague's birthday, or wonder how to help the poor girl who knocked over her coffee and got it all over the correspondence and her dress? Will we ever bum a cigarette or an aspirin, or talk about a book or movie, or find someone who has two fives for a ten or knows the area code for Albuquerque?"

"I'm going into a world of isolation," she said. "I'm frightened, and I hate it. It's like being condemned never to leave the kitchen."

The editor, brushing back a shock of gray, urged her to take heart. "Human nature won't allow it," he assured her.

And then he explained that if you spend your days at the cathode-ray tube, you won't spend your evenings there. The more television is used for information retrieval and personal communications, the less you will want to use it for entertainment.

Instead of playing electronic games at lunch, he suggested, you're likely to buy some theater tickets on the tube and a pair of jogging sneakers. The Office of the Future will drive you outside in prime time, to be among *real* people. In ten years' time we will be coping with the phenomenon called video fatigue.

New Waves

YOU'D THINK THAT RADIO would be bringing up the rear in the communications race. With Dick Cavett commercials claiming we need an Apple home computer, and Zenith ads insisting that it's time we owned a television set that doubles as a phone, we're tempted to belittle radio—the one electronic medium older than Fibber McGee and more varied than the contents of his closet.

But the headphoned pedestrians milling at every city street corner, oblivious to traffic and construction crews as they absorb AM and FM waves, only hint at the extent of the medium's current revival. CBS, NBC, ABC, RKO, and Mutual seemingly cannot launch new satellite-fed radio networks fast enough to satisfy the advertising needs of their multiplying sponsors.

Radio is prized in this way because it is

omnipresent, and because it has extremely well-defined audiences. Advertisers nowadays are aware that most households have as many as five radios, that there is one in the dashboard of almost every car in the country, and that more than half the nation's homeowners awaken to the voice of a disk jockey.

The medium has cultivated its faithful by developing and refining the "vertical," or homogeneous, programming technique that it originally adopted as a defensive measure, after television's ballyhooed birth. Each station now has its own sharply focused brand of entertainment, its own mood and identity, and thus its own segment of the listening audience. If a sponsor were really willing to look, he could probably find a radio audience out there somewhere consisting almost entirely of Adidas-shod health-food fanatics.

Over the years, other factors have also assured radio's popularity in the face of television's challenge: First, it is not the "jealous" companion that television is. It doesn't demand to be stared at; it doesn't overly distract when you're trying to get something else done, and best of all, turning the dial, say, from country to classical, can provide you with an instant change of mood.

Second, the strong local orientation eschewed by television lies at the heart of modern radio's marketing strategy. Television stations do pursue a relationship of sorts with their communities, but only to the extent that it will help them get their licenses renewed. Radio stations, however, gain devotees with each new attempt at cultivating the local audience, whether it be a request for "listener's choice" musical selections or a plea to "phone in and win."

Lately, yet another rift has opened between the two media: While television broadcasters recognize the advent of new technology as a serious threat, radio does not consider the revolution a calamity.

This perceptual gap reflects the differing needs and experiences of the two media. Unlike television, which feels it must defend against the burgeoning new media, radio is *relying* on at least one of them—satellites—for its own veritable bonanza, the transcontinental flowering of radio networks whose signals will be relayed by scores of new transponders in geostationary orbit.

And unlike television, radio is used to coping with big changes and calamitous threats. Didn't everyone expect us to throw out our radios when the television set arrived? Clearly, radio turned that difficult situation—as it has done with others since—to its own advantage. It knows well how to adapt.

A Thought-Provoking Idea for Holiday Gift Giving:



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CHANNELS sorts out and interprets the developments in the booming business of telecommunications with a view to the public's stake in them. And it's written by Pulitzer prize winners like Robert Coles, William Henry III and Ron Powers. And by such outstanding writers as Nicholas von Hoffman, Jeff Greenfield, Frances FitzGerald, Lewis Lapham, Christopher Lasch, Richard Reeves, John Simon, Ann Crittenden and James Chace.

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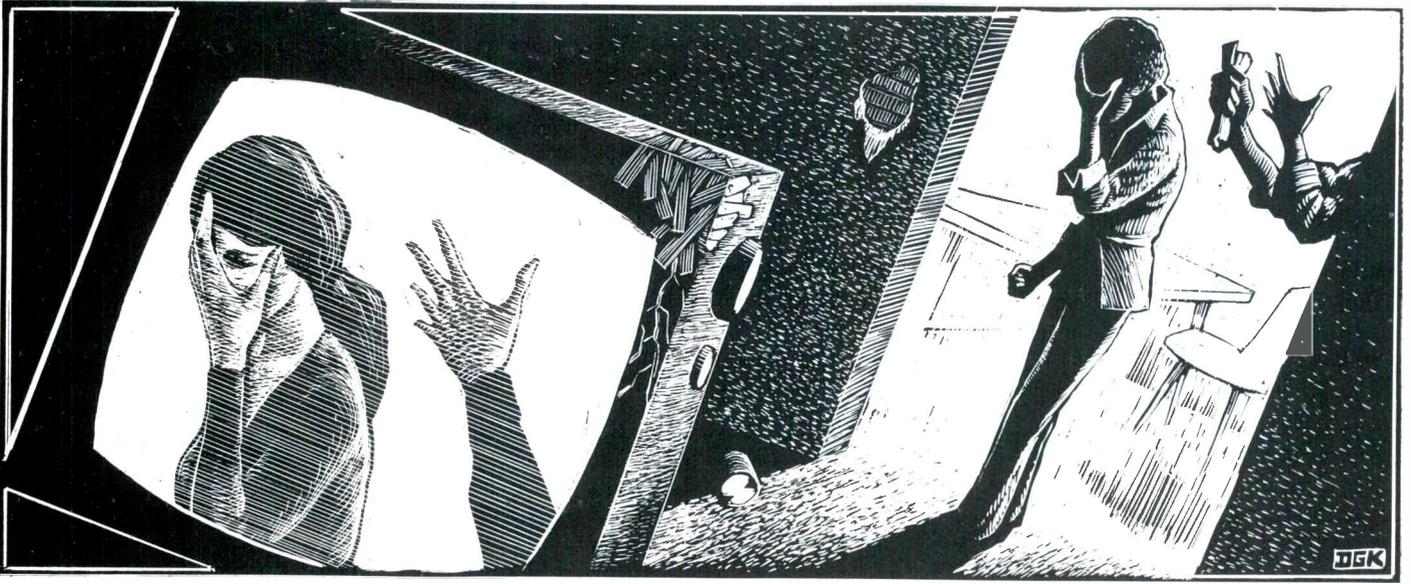
Mantel

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Reflections on Soaps

by Robert Coles

Illustrations by David Klein



I HAVE BEEN WATCHING television soaps for many years, not on my own television set, but on those of the various American families with whom I have worked. They have been, mostly, so-called working-class people, who, of course, make up the overwhelming majority of our population. They have been white and black and Chicano and from Appalachia: some, even, have been Indian. At first, as I made my visits to their homes, in order to understand, say, how children managed who were braving court-ordered desegregation in the South of the 1960s, or how a child living in a West Virginia hollow grows up, or a ghetto child lives a particular life, I found myself annoyed — anxious to get on with it, have more conversations, learn more about my host families. Instead, they seemed endlessly interested in watching television — soaps and more soaps. For a while *The Guiding Light* and *As The World Turns* became my enemies, competitors for the time and emotional response of certain parents and, often enough, their children as well.

But soon I began to realize that I was learning an enormous amount, and might learn even more, if I'd only let myself. That is to say, the people whose homes I was visiting were telling me a lot about themselves as they talked, afterwards, about a given soap opera; when I joined in, watched with them and shared with them my thoughts and feelings, I heard as lengthy and open a series of spontaneous, self-describing comments as I was ever to hear under any set of circumstances.

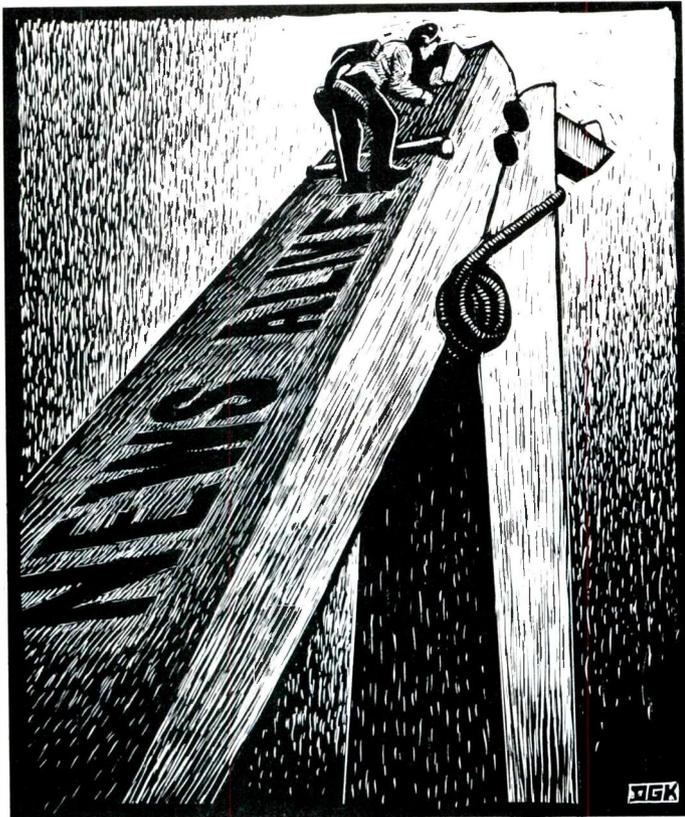
Why? Maybe because we were, together, responding to what we had seen: visual accounts of love affirmed and thwarted; of hate and envy and jealousy given expression and battled; of

accidents and tragedies and illnesses and disasters. Here on the tube were fate and luck working their ways upon lives. Here on the tube were people well dressed and well off and well educated, and yet, strangely (though to the viewers I sat beside, familiarly), people also confused, hurt, ailing, troubled in mind and soul, if not betrayed outright.

It is, of course, too easy for people like me, book readers, self-styled intellectuals, to bemoan the soaps — their preposterous melodrama, their laughable, relentless onslaught of fatuity, of arranged histrionics; their farcical pretense at seriousness; their lack of humor, not to mention self-critical irony, and more and more, the kinky sex, the uninhibited violence. I don't defend all that. But I have to remind myself that people like me are capable, in our own ways, of being mean and nasty and brutish and thoroughly absurd human beings.

Novelists and playwrights, even the best of them, understand the relentlessly universal character of our psychological and, yes, moral, lives. We all try to deal with our lusts and hates. We all struggle with the mysteries of this world. We all crave explanations for the sudden arrival of sickness, for good or bad fortune, for the attachments and losses that life offers us. The soaps enact for millions of viewers such matters of the heart, and too, of the mind, the spirit. Some of us may prefer to read about victory or defeat, the hope of romance or the despair of illness, to find through beautifully wrought words and images a means of contemplation. Others find the soaps do "right well," as it is often put in the South. As a high-school student once told my wife and me: "I come home, and listen to my serial, and I'm reminded that there's a lot of emotion to this life. I know there is a lot of emotion in me; the program shows it outside of me." I'm not sure that even our best playwrights would find that remark completely juvenile. The word "catharsis" meant a lot to the Greek tragedians, as they struggled to enact some elements of this life's meaning. □

Robert Coles is a child psychiatrist at the Harvard University Health Services, and is author of Children of Crisis, for which he received the Four Freedoms Award and the Pulitzer Prize.



Campbell's Soup Can Kidnapped: Details at 11

by Ron Powers

AMERICAN TELEVISION NEWS has been called a lot of things by a lot of people, including me. But no one, so far as I've determined, has ever gone so far as to accuse it of being a forty-five-foot-high clothespin.

I'd like to correct that oversight right now: American television news is a forty-five-foot-high clothespin.

Perhaps a dash of qualification is in order. Of course, I don't mean that television news is a forty-five-foot-high clothespin in the *literal* sense. Such a claim would suggest several possibilities for empirical testing. I am sure that some enterprising news director somewhere—Dayton, say—would immediately mobilize his Action Spotlight Skywatch Newsprobe commando unit to whip up a ten-part investigative refutation of the rumor.

But this is taking the narrow view. My conviction that television news fulfills every paradigmatic *function* of the forty-five-foot-high clothespin, and that they are thus in a certain sense interchangeable, remains steadfast.

The notion began to take hold in my mind some time ago as I watched Robert Hughes examine twentieth-century art on public television in his series, *The Shock of the New*. Hughes argued that our art has departed from its historic role of idealizing religious and nature-derived myths; it has come, in recent times, to imitate the merchandised culture we live in. "The culture of

congestion, of cities and mass media," Hughes calls it.

During his segment on the phase of modern art known as "Pop," Hughes produced footage of several famous Pop works. Among them was Claes Oldenburg's 1976 rendering of a forty-five-foot-high clothespin, which graces an office plaza in Philadelphia. Sunk in my customary public-television torpor, I indolently regarded the clothespin's realistic reddish-brown color, its twin, fanning tines, its metallic spring near the top—all set in preposterous scale against the deadpan glass and chrome of an office high-rise. At that moment a dull tremor of recognition hummed through my brain. I let it pass.

Later in the evening—as I watched a female reporter for the top-rated local television newscast in New York "try out" for a professional soccer team's cheerleading squad, in short pleated skirt and pompons—the tremor returned. Suddenly I understood.

Television news *is* Pop Art, though perhaps not intentionally. Consider these desiderata of Pop Art, set down in 1957 by Richard Hamilton, one of the pioneers in the genre. Hamilton's requirements—quoted by Hughes—are that Pop Art should be "popular (designed for a mass audience), transient (short-term solution), expendable (easily forgotten), low-cost, mass-produced, young (aimed at youth), witty, sexy, gimmicky, glamorous . . . and big business."

Like the clothespin, television journalism fulfills most of Hamilton's requirements for Pop. (You might not think a clothespin is "sexy." But then you might not think a newswoman in a cheerleader skirt is "sexy." These are variables of taste.) And, like the clothespin, television journalism often bears an uncanny resemblance to the real thing—at least from a distance. Its greatest point of departure from conventional "reality" has to do with the matter of scale.

In the Popped-up universe of television news, there is no difference in scale between a correspondent's report on trying out for cheerleader and a report (aired a few minutes later) on the President's plans to cut down on school lunches for poor children. The cheerleader feature ran, obviously, because its appeal was intrinsic to television's form ("great visuals"). It aired because it was a self-contained item and, as such, had no greater nor lesser weight than any other self-contained item on that newscast.

Cheerleading newswoman? Less money to feed the poor? Just a couple of brush strokes on the canvas. Shopping for expensive cowboy clothes with Reggie Jackson? News of a stickup in a Manhattan boutique? Fills up a newscast, doesn't it? "Coming up, Marv on sports, and we'll have a look at that deadly killer satellite . . ."

There is no physical reason why television news cannot overcome the distortions of scale that it projects so routinely. No immutable laws limit its ability to spend, say, one half or one third of its total air-time on a single important topic, throwing out or telescoping whatever is left on the agenda.

But such respect for proportion is almost unheard of on television news, short of a Presidential shooting or the outbreak of war. The unpunctuated drumroll of the vital, the trivial, the profound, the profane, the real, the false—this cadence is suited to the medium's form.

Also, it is arguable that television news might not have survived, with more than fringe status, *except* as Pop Art. The assaults of Spiro Agnew, Charles Colson, and Clay Whitehead from 1969 through 1974 are only the most dramatic evidence that breaking news can be an alien element. It disturbs. It activates. It provokes and threatens. Government officeholders, corporate businessmen, viewers—news has something to offend everybody.

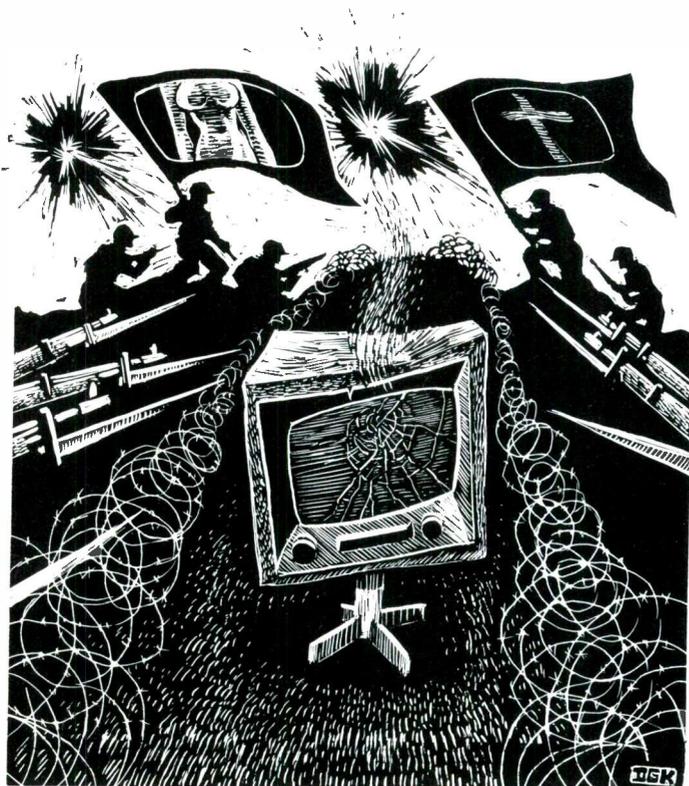
But television, an advertising medium, does not thrive by offending. It thrives by ingratiating. Television news in its present Pop Art (or "happy talk") form is a testament to video's magic

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powers. The so-called "hard," or "legitimate," categories of journalism have been interwoven with *nice* things, *safe* things, *funny* things: with state-of-the-art prime-time programming techniques that, inevitably, flatten out the scale, diminish the distinctions, and present everything as equal in "interest" to the browsing, disengaged viewer.

So the newscast format that twelve years ago symbolized elitism, arbitrary power, even *propaganda*, in the public perception, has become the dominant programming form of the 1980s.

Thus, television news as forty-five-foot-high clothespin. Although, as I've admitted, there *are* differences, I'm trying to remember what they are. □



Escapist Realism

by Brian Winston

NORMAN LEAR, Captain of the Adult Army in the service of the Republic of Realism, has won in recent years many famous victories over the Kingdom of Bland. There were the skirmishes at Fornication and Blasphemy, the repeated assaults to establish a bridgehead in Adultery, the struggle on the Heights of Masturbation, the battle at the Pass of Menopause, the campaign on the Plains of Homosexuality and, above all, the debacle in Ethnic Minorities. Bland has had but one success, off the Gulf of Violence; she has groaned for several years under the heel of Realism.

Yet the war is thought to be still unresolved, and within the Kingdom of Bland (which some name Righteous) a secret leader

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has arisen, called Falwell. It is said that he has a weapon, a bomb called "Majority," with which he will scatter all the forces of Realism.

This promised counterattack, coming as it does on the crest of other moves to the Right, alarms many. But the argument is not as black and white as either side would have us believe.

Unless we share the Fundamentalist faith, which seems to see television as the work of the Devil, we are unlikely to support any "clean up television" campaigns. We will be more concerned with freedom of speech. But is the notion that television ought to respect the sensibilities of its audience, a notion underlying at least part of the New Right's rhetoric, so unacceptable in a democracy? Conversely, is the argument so self-evident that any diminution of the industry's freedoms must lead inevitably to other curtailments? It is repeated often enough to assume the force of law — but is there no distinction to be drawn between the magnified discourse of those privileged few who use the media, and the speech of the rest of us?

This debate of principles rages so furiously that we seldom seem to get down to the nitty-gritty of the programs themselves. In fact, for the Liberal/Realist side, *discussion* about the content of the programs seems nothing so much as an early threat to First Amendment rights.

Lear is prepared to talk about content, though. He sees the new openness as a series of victories. Sexual explicitness becomes some sort of yardstick — a measure by which a television service shall be judged mature, relevant, and of public value. I think he does himself a profound disservice by arguing in this way. He is a producer whose concerns and whose programs are greater than this. But the climate for which he has struggled does not tend in general to inspire work as good as his.

Three's Company, for example, is a successful situation comedy in the modern manner. Based on a British model, it concerns a man and two women sharing an apartment. The situation is funny because the laws of the world in which it is set are as follows: 1) Homosexuals do not fornicate with women; 2) fornication with women outside marriage must be prevented; 3) no heterosexual man can share living space with a woman without fornicating with her; ergo, 4) the man must not share with the women because he will fornicate with them outside marriage, unless 5) he is a homosexual. Thus, in order to keep his room, the hero of the series pretends to be gay. The landlord is placated by this ruse — which amuses because he ought stereotypically to be more appalled by any thought of homosexuality than by heterosexual fornication, but is not. The hero, although he is a womanizer, does not fornicate with the women. One of the women has big mammaries. (This pornographic world has an implied sub-rule to rule 3 above, which reads, "Men's lust is in direct proportion to the size of women's mammaries.")

The Reverend Jerry Falwell, I assume, finds *Three's Company* deeply offensive. And (I assume for different reasons) so do I. It is, among other things, the most consistently homophobic show on television — although *Sheriff Lobo* tried hard for this title and on occasion so, too, do almost all of the other sitcoms. I have trouble with the Liberal/Realist position on this because I am by no means convinced that we as a society are ready for a steady stream of homophobic jokes. If I am asked whether homophobic jokes are better than no mention of homosexuality at all, I am afraid I must take a raincheck.

Once upon a time, before Lucille Ball got pregnant, American television eschewed all references to human sexuality. Most thinking people considered this at best strange, and at worst very bad. The assumption made by both parties to this debate, Right and Realist, is that television is part of society. Realists (and myself) make a further assumption that it ought to reflect society. For intelligent and concerned professionals, the dominance of blandness was inhibiting, silly, and finally degrading. So the

battle for relaxation of sexual mores that was taking place in society at large was joined by many in, and on, television.

In television as in society, it was not just sex that was at stake, but also race. In the time before *Lucy* was expelled from the Garden, the only blacks we saw were *Amos 'n' Andy*. Instead of a black reality at a time of extremely important change, we had black stereotyping — bland black stereotyping.

The battle was waged to open television on a number of fronts so that a more accurate picture of society could be reflected. But between the successful undertaking of this quite proper campaign for a more adult agenda and *Three's Company* (or *Too Close for Comfort*, or "documentaries" about every form of sexual deviancy, or a host of other shows), something seems to have gone terribly wrong.

The depiction of sex is not, of and in itself, mature and relevant. In fact, of and in itself it is more likely to be juvenile and scatological. We have had long periods wherein no frank representations of sex were allowed, and in equally long periods (in alternating fashion) we have had greater explicitness. The pendulum's swing seems to have little to do with the general state of society, whatever moralists may claim about the Fall of Rome and the like. (England's first empire was founded in a period of comparative sexual laxity and her second in a period of restraint, for instance.) But more important than this, restraint or permissiveness has nothing to do with the maturity or relevance of art works. Books, plays, and films that speak eloquently to the human condition in general and to relations between the sexes in particular have been produced without explicit material; just as permissiveness has produced stilted, sexually graphic, jejune garbage. So the analysis was right — bland is bad for both television and society; but the solution — sex is everything and jokes about it are liberating — was wrong.

Take jokes: In a society where many deem deep inequalities (as between the races, or between men and women, or because of sexual preference) to exist, it is not emancipating to make these various elements the butt of humor and leave it there. There is a profound difference between laughing at those in authority and laughing at those without power. The one leads to *A Modest Proposal* and the best tradition of open, healthy criticism; the other leads to those films the Nazis shot in concentration camps for their own amusement.

It is no good claiming that laughter is automatically healthy. The Elizabethans thought insanity hilarious and had no inhibitions about dealing with it in literature and on the stage. Much good that did for the insane!

So although blacks have come a long way from *Amos 'n' Andy*, my worry is that they have come further on the screen than they have in the street. A similar gap exists for homosexuals, women, and many others. And that gap between the real situation and the picture created by "realistic" television is as dangerous as the old gap between escapism and the world beyond. It is as if the television industry has enlarged the poorly silvered mirror it once held up to society to include more, with the silvering remaining as patchy and distorting as ever.

Jane Austen is not likely to titillate anybody. Compared with our output of programs she is repressed indeed. Yet it is perhaps instructive to note, as a measure of how far or how little we have progressed towards the adult, that one of her major subjects is curiously lacking from our emancipated fare. The subject is money. For Austen, people's standing in society, what living they have, is crucially important. For us, that *Laverne & Shirley* were working girls was evidenced in the original series by still photographs flashed up for seconds in the title sequence. Even in those shows with work as their setting, it counts for very little. Loni Anderson, the sensitive unsteretyped blonde in *WKRP in Cincinnati*, walked away from a job as a radio personality and back to

her reception desk without the money involved ever being hinted at — just as Victorians might never talk of sex.

But more is at stake here than simply swapping one forbidden area for another. The whole case for greater sexual realism rests on a belief that it is important for television to look unblinking at the whole world of which it is a part. We live in a violent, problem-ridden, and sometimes ugly society that we need to confront and deal with; television, realistic television, is supposed to help us do that. Instead, we have television that will sell us sanitary napkins but that cannot make jokes about wages.

As far as money and class are concerned, television is as much of a dreamworld as ever it was in the fifties; more, perhaps, because where is *Life of Riley*? As far as women are concerned, there are still very few positive role-models — one female (in *Bosom Buddies*) is a boss, but she presides over two guys who, for the sake of living accommodation again, spend half their time in drag. What kind of world is that?

Quite often the victory of realism means talking out of both sides of the mouth at once. *The Facts of Life* is a situation comedy set with breathtaking social blindness in the privileged world of boarding schools. Here, the nascent sexuality of the young females is a prime source of humor; but occasionally, as in an episode that had the youngest child becoming a model, the audience can be given an appropriate lesson in the immorality of all such exploitation.

I know of no finer exemplum of racial harmony than the one existing in the strange household of Mr. Drummond of Park Avenue (the good part), New York City, with his (obligatory?) lack of wife and his three children — two black, one white — and his absolutely startling lack of financial cares. This is a world of *Diff'rent Strokes* indeed. Gary Coleman, the small black child with the perfect comedy timing, is more than occasionally the excuse for moralizing. (The laugh track tends to go "ah" and "ooh" at such moments.) But I have never seen a racist appear on this show — that is, somebody who believes "some races are by nature superior to others," specifically the white race to the black. Arnold, Coleman's character, is always encountering "bigots," that is, "one intolerantly devoted to his own church, party, or opinion," and not the same thing as a racist in this man's dictionary.

I must not give the impression that the realist effort has been entirely confined to such glories as a local news program's searing series of exposés of incest during a sweep week. There is *M*A*S*H* (which, Atlas-like, must bear the whole output on its admittedly broad back), *Barney Miller*, and *Taxi* — comedies that bring a new air of manners to television. I look at *Lou Grant* and *Skag* (may he rest in peace), which attempt, however melodramatically and superficially, to enlarge our understanding of the world. I have enjoyed serious dramas on serious themes — a few; but overwhelmingly, these have been too many prurient and titillating exercises on the lives of teenage hitchhikers, escorts, lustful female teachers, and the like. Sex still means mainly sniggers, giggles, and smirks; there are still no "racists"; there is still very little "work."

Now comes Mr. Falwell, who would abridge the essential right to reflect the world and apparently much else besides. What in truth can we say to him and those whom he leads? It seems to me the Adult Army has nearly sold the pass, and that a great cause has been tarnished and trivialized by a tide of escapist, salacious, mealy-mouthed, second-rate programs. In reality, it is no good to say freedom must mean freedom to be silly and slightly disgusting. In reality, freedom of speech needs to be exercised with a greater sense of how mighty a privilege it really is.

Of course I will go to the gallows defending the right of the makers of *Three's Company* to produce whatever garbage they want — but I will go kicking and screaming. The mob, with more reason than usual, is dangerously close to having all our heads. ■

Fear of Fowler

by Les Brown

MARK FOWLER SCARES ME. It's not that I find him wicked—I don't know him personally. He scares me because he is at the wheel of our omnibus and has no sense of danger. He knows very little about the highway we're on, being quite new to it, yet he goes fast, disregards signs, seeks no information, and barrels ahead on stubborn conviction that it is a road without curves—and even that it is the right road.

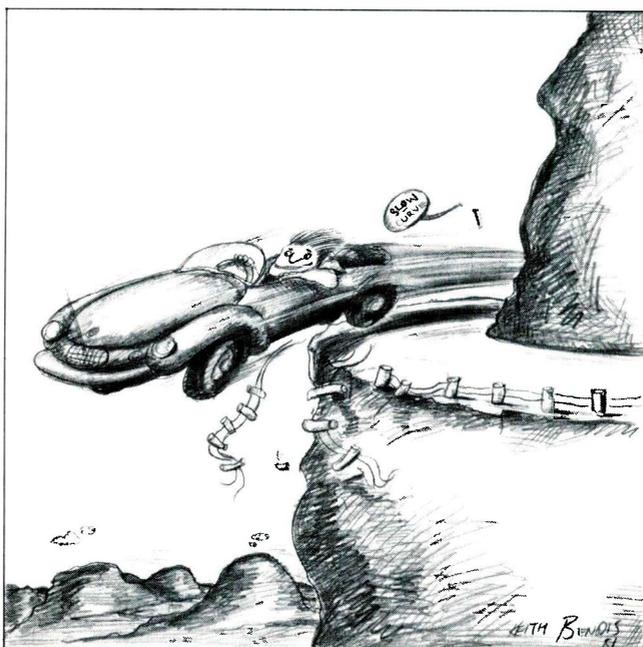
Mark Fowler reasons that since there are both large and small cars on the road, as well as buses, trucks, vans, campers, and motorcycles, there is plenty of competition on the highway and therefore no need for a speed limit. Not only does he devoutly believe this, he actually believes it makes sense.

Fowler scares me because he has been given an awesome assignment—the chairmanship of the Federal Communications Commission at one of the most important times in the agency's history—and isn't the least bit awed by it. Not by the knowledge that his actions could affect the quality of our lives, or that they could affect the future of the American democratic system. He is a regulatory nihilist in control of an agency that is supposed to look after the public's stake in electronic communications, an ideologue who believes free markets are the answer to everything. He came to the FCC last spring not to regulate or even deregulate but rather, in his words, to *unregulate*—to abolish the speed limit that was adopted for public safety.

The FCC has always had to concern itself with the public interest, and through the decades previous FCC chairmen and commissioners agonized over a way to define it. But for Fowler there has been no such philosophical struggle. To him it is quite simple: Business serves the public interest.

"Broadcast regulation is shrouded in myths," he declared in a recent speech, "myths about service to the community. . . . The FCC must deal with the reality of broadcasting, a reality that begins with the fact that broadcasting is a business."

Previous commissions created regulations to prevent a valuable



national resource, the airwaves, from being raped by unprincipled businessmen. They were not making regulatory mischief but reacting to the unseemly practices of licensees zealous to make as much money as possible in a business where making money is easy. Left to their own devices, broadcasters have been known to practice deception in news programs, game shows, and made-for-television sporting events; to discriminate against women and minorities in their broadcasts as well as in their hiring practices; to exploit the gullibility of children with violent cartoon programming and highly manipulative commercials, and to keep people off the air whose views don't agree with their own. Even with FCC oversight, the broadcast industry has had plenty of bad apples.

Yet Fowler says that under his approach, the commission should "defer to a broadcaster's judgment about how best to compete for viewers and listeners, because this serves the public interest."

I fear Mark Fowler because he doesn't know what he's talking about and is eager to turn his words into action.

He came into his job at age forty with scant experience in the fields the FCC regulates; his qualifications were that he was once a disk jockey and salesman at a small radio station, and later a lawyer with a private firm that represented some media companies. Unlike his predecessor, Charles D. Ferris, who didn't make an official public statement until he had boned up for six months on broadcast history and the issues before the commission, Fowler immediately erupted with policies and proposals. Overnight, he and his newly appointed colleagues reversed decisions that the previous commission had only arrived at after long study and debate—for example, the proposal to change the spacing between stations on the AM dial. The Ferris commission voted unanimously to adopt it as a means of increasing competition and creating opportunities for minority ownership. Naturally the broadcast industry opposed it. It did not take long for the Fowler commission to shoot it down.

There is something discomfiting in the fact that after just a few

months in office, Mark S. Fowler, unknown to the public he is supposed to represent, has become the most popular FCC chairman who ever lived — with the broadcast industry. Whenever he speaks to broadcasters (he has not yet been known to speak to the public), he is cheered and paid standing ovations. The National Association of Broadcasters has been joking merrily that the industry should take up a collection to buy "key man" insurance for this young Presidential appointee, who entered public life only last May.

Fowler describes himself as a Reaganite who identifies with the President's philosophy and means to implement that philosophy at the commission — even though the agency is a *bipartisan* arm of Congress.

An indication that this FCC is programmed by the White House surfaced in the September 28 issue of *Broadcasting*, a trade journal that wholly approves of Fowler. An item in the Washington-based publication said that Commissioner Abbott Washburn jeopardized his chance for reappointment when his term expires next June because he voted with the minority (the FCC's only liberal Democrat, Joseph Fogarty) against Fowler's proposal to request that Congress repeal the Fairness Doctrine and Equal Time Rule. "In GOP quarters," *Broadcasting* wrote, "it was said Fowler's project was in keeping with Reagan's mandate and that the Administration could not tolerate disregard of its policies where reappointments are involved."

This is not a liberal-versus-conservative issue, however. Accuracy in Media, the journalism watchdog of the right, is alarmed at the FCC's move to scuttle the fairness and equal-time rules, and a trifle disappointed in the chairman. "The irony is that the conservatives who dominate the FCC are giving the liberals who dominate the big electronic media just what they want," said the *AIM Report*, the organization's semi-monthly newsletter.

AIM does not trust the three big networks; it shudders at the thought that they may be liberated from equal-time requirements. The newsletter outlined this scenario for 1984: The Democrats put up Ted Kennedy and the Republicans the lesser-known Jack Kemp. Kemp needs to buy air-time for a final blitz. But the networks like Kennedy and give him so much free time that they have none to sell to Kemp. The scenario may be outlandish, but the premise is not.

Again and again one hears from Fowler and from others in government that federal regulation of broadcasting is unnecessary because there is no longer a scarcity of frequencies in the electromagnetic spectrum, and because there is plenty of competition in the marketplace from cable and the other new technologies.

Fowler points out that in New York City, most viewers can receive nine television signals off the air and nearly fifty radio stations, while there are only three daily newspapers serving the public's right to know. "Even in most rural areas," he says, "the number of broadcast voices exceeds the number of newspapers."

He may be right in his arithmetic, so far as it goes, but he is dead wrong in his conclusion that this obviates the need for regulation. He is mistaken, first, in assuming that spectrum scarcity in the early days of radio was the chief reason that broadcasters were designated public trustees. Mainly, their obligation to serve in the public interest comes from their use of the public airwaves — the air that belongs to all the people, because it is the air we breathe. It is this that has made broadcasting a privilege rather than a right.

Second, Fowler makes a false analogy. The comparison should not be between the number of daily newspapers and the number of radio and television outlets, but between the *technologies* of print and broadcast. With his example of New York City newspapers, Fowler gives print a short count. There are also books, magazines, monographs, billboards, handbills, direct mail, neighborhood newspapers, weekly newspapers, and publications

emanating regularly from churches, unions, schools, and private organizations. One way or another, everyone has the ability to print his or her ideas, even if only on mimeographed sheets handed out at street corners. But no one has access to radio, television, or even in many instances cable, unless the operators grant him access. That's where the real difference lies.

The Fairness Doctrine for citizens and the Equal Time Rule for political candidates were devised to insure the First Amendment rights of those not privileged to operate broadcast stations over the public airwaves — and to preserve our political system. The two laws *are* the speed limit. Fowler is intent on doing away with them because he is concerned that the broadcaster does not enjoy the same degree of free expression as the newspaper publisher.

This freshly minted bureaucrat, who used to work for the wealthy and powerful industry he is now supposed to regulate on our behalf, has the cheek to petition Congress to abolish laws — favoring the citizen — that have been consistently upheld by the Supreme Court.

There is something unsettling about a deep-dyed conservative working to remove all restrictions on political coverage in the country's most influential media, whose owners at the local level are, by and large, deep-dyed conservatives.

The Fowler commission has little regard for most of the rules on the books. This is the arrogance of ignorance. The new FCC deems these rules irrelevant, when in fact they were never more relevant. Fowler and Commissioner Anne Jones, for example, have spoken out against the requirement that holders of broadcast licenses be of good character. But do they have any idea why character is a criterion for licensing? Without it, organized crime would swarm all over the broadcast industry. The Mafia loves quasi-monopolies that return huge profits on small investments.

Fowler also wishes to dispose of the rule limiting the number of stations a company may own. The so-called 7-7-7 Rule lets no company own more than seven licenses for television (provided that at least two are for UHF stations), seven for AM radio, and seven for FM. A companion regulation, the duopoly rule, prohibits ownership of more than one station in any category in each market. Has Fowler thought through his objections to these rules? They were adopted to keep big companies from owning everything; without them, each of the three major networks could conceivably own all 200-plus of its affiliates, making a sham of the ideals of localism, diversity, wide-open competition, and robust debate on the issues.

Mark Fowler would wipe out fifty years of regulatory experience and put the electronic media on a new course because he is sure, absolutely sure, that marketplace forces combined with First Amendment freedoms for broadcasters will serve the public interest better than any government agency can.

Maybe. But I am moved to ask, what if Chairman Fowler is wrong?

How can he be so sure that the broadcast interests — predominantly white, male, affluent, and politically right-leaning — will be fair under free-market circumstances and will serve more than the entertainment needs of all the people? What if the trend toward bigness continues, and giant corporations dominate all our mass-communications systems — radio, television, cable, direct-broadcast satellites, and computer networks? What if these giant corporations share a single political point of view and choose to deny access of any kind to racial minorities or political dissenters?

Fowler would strip from the system all mechanisms for citizen participation, leaving no course of action for the abused and disenfranchised but advertiser boycotts — or something even worse. He may well alter the political ecosystem of America and move the country towards an oligarchy of large corporations.

Mark Fowler scares the hell out of me, because he is the wrong man at the wrong moment in our history. ■

THE STATE OF THE REVOLUTION 1982

by Martin Koughan

Illustration by Jo Teodororescue

HISTORY WILL RECORD 1981 as the year American business gave financial substance to the Telecommunications Revolution and broke the ground for social change. The speculation and blue-sky analyses finally gave way to concrete business strategies, as some of the nation's largest corporations plunged billions of dollars into mammoth new communications projects. Most of these ventures have won the blessings of the federal government, which looks

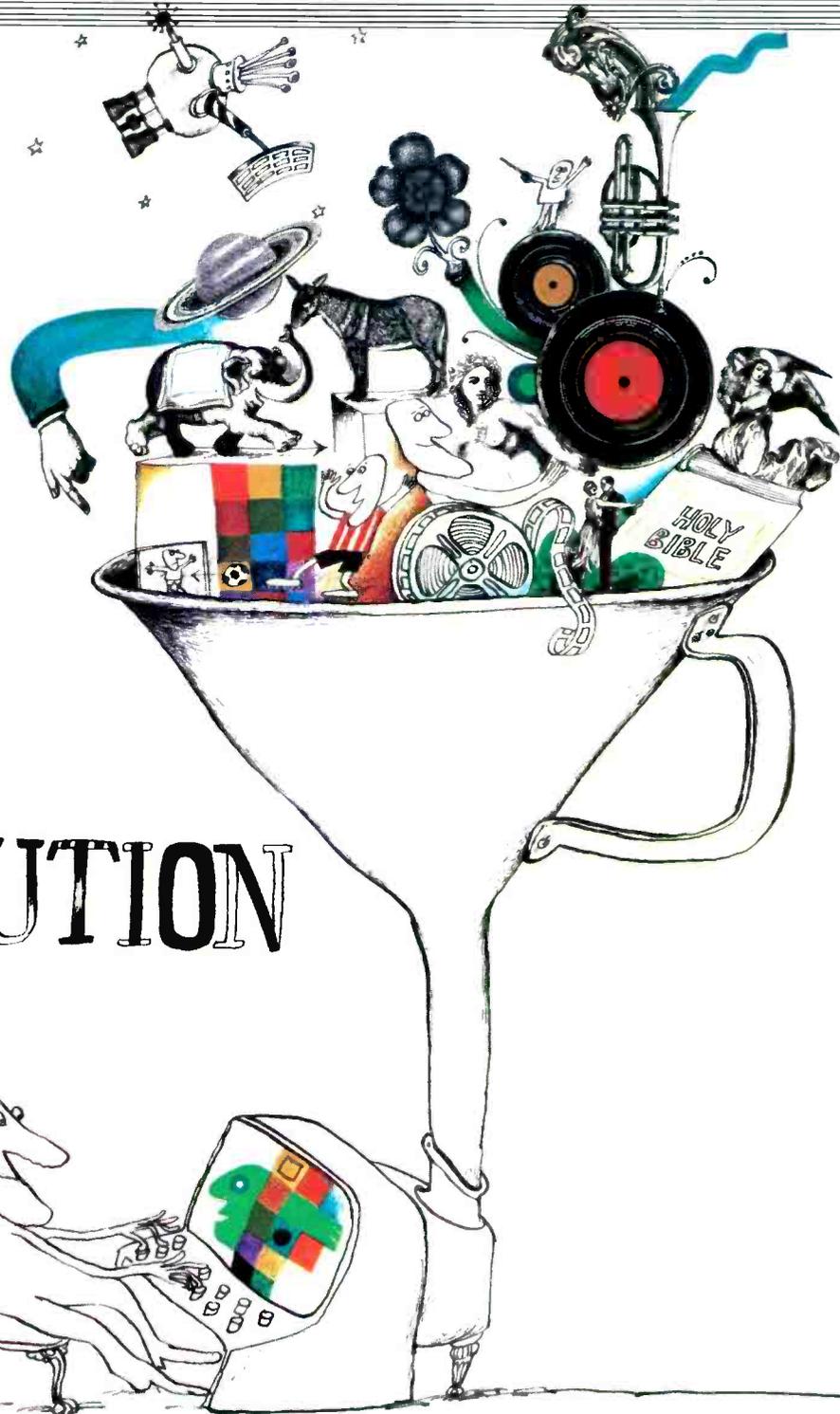
Martin Koughan is a television news producer and a frequent contributor to Channels.

hopefully to the developing technologies as keys to a revitalized economy.

The activities of the last several months were scarcely noted outside the financial community, but their effects will be felt throughout the country, and even internationally, in the next few years.

To bring the state of the revolution into focus, we examine four recent developments emblematic of the trends for the eighties:

- The entry into cable by Piedmont Natural Gas, a North Carolina utility with annual revenues of \$300 million;
- the partnership formed by ABC Inc. and Group W to provide



two satellite news services;

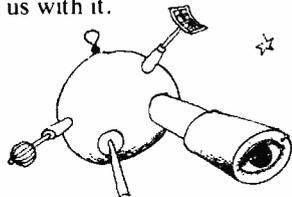
- the publication by Sears Roebuck of a merchandise catalogue in a new medium, the optical video disk;

- the introduction by IBM of its first personal computer.

Although it may appear that these business efforts are shooting off in all directions—two-way cable, satellites, video disks, and computers—in fact they are all headed in a single direction: They all converge on the same instrument, the home television receiver. What this means is that the commonplace television set will play an even larger part in our lives by the end of the decade than it already does.

The revolution has been sparked by a series of ambitious business deals. It is indeed a supply-side phenomenon, powered less by consumer demand than by businesses that are intent on reaching consumers in a new way.

But two other dimensions—the interests of consumers, and those of the society generally—must be given at least equal attention. For the Telecommunications Revolution is not just going places, it is taking us with it.



PIEDMONT Natural Gas wanted to diversify into a new, unregulated business that would allow the company to build on thirty years' experience as the natural gas utility in Charlotte, North Carolina; it decided to go into cable television. If that strikes you as a curious choice, then you may not have realized, as the executives at Piedmont already have, that the utility and the communications businesses are rapidly becoming one and the same.

"It was a business that fit. Cable television is really a utility's business," claims John H. Maxheim, the company's aggressive young chief executive officer. Piedmont is the first regulated utility to win a cable franchise, and it almost certainly won't be the last. "We just want a little piece of the action. But anyone who wants in will have to get in very quickly."

This sense of urgency is quite new to the cable-television business, which after decades of sluggish growth has entered a period of almost frenzied development that will bring it into 60 percent of the nation's television households by the end of the decade. The fierce competition for control of the wire into the home signifies the business community's recognition that cable provides a new direct line to the American consumer, an electronic super-

highway with immense commercial potential that will transform the humble television set into the most versatile, the most important, and probably the most expensive utility in the home.

"The new technologies, especially cable, will have a radical impact on our society," predicts Dr. George Gerbner, dean of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications. "What we are seeing is a shifting of the structure of investment and power. It is the new vehicle for extending capitalism in both reach and power."

Piedmont's diversification into cable was spearheaded by Maxheim, who was initially attracted by the "unbelievable cash flow" generated by such pay-entertainment services as Home Box Office. But the more he studied cable, the more similarities Maxheim saw to the gas business. Both require home installation, service, and a sophisticated computer capability. But cable's real utility function, Maxheim is convinced, stems from the new relationship between the consumer and the supplier of services that interactive systems make possible.

"Two-way cable is a tremendous opportunity," Maxheim says enthusiastically. "Cable television is going to go well beyond entertainment. I don't see any consumer service that cannot be delivered into the home over cable."

The services Maxheim envisions are made possible by a technology called "videotex" which allows the user to communicate with remote computers. The cable subscriber, using a simple keyboard terminal, will have at his disposal a dazzling array of new information services—continually updated news and weather, transportation schedules, educational programs, even electronic mail. But the most significant application of videotex will be transaction services such as home banking and "teleshopping."

Indeed, two-way cable holds promise as the ultimate energy saver by allowing routine business to be handled electronically, which will help consumers cut down on nonessential travel. But there are even more direct applications for an energy company, as the executives at Piedmont Natural Gas are learning from a test they are conducting jointly with American Telephone & Telegraph, the world's largest regulated utility, which already controls an interactive wire in most American homes and has its eye on the lucrative home-services market.

Last March, AT&T began a one-year, \$6 million test of an electronic home energy management system in nearly a thousand Charlotte homes. Each customer received a small microprocessor connected to a modified Sony television set that displays the latest weather report,

daily messages (such as warnings of power outages), and up-to-the minute energy usage figures. Participants can use the system to program major appliances, such as furnaces, water heaters, and air conditioners, to save money by operating in off-peak hours. All can be controlled remotely from any push-button telephone, allowing the customer, for example, to switch the air conditioner on at home before he leaves the office. AT&T estimates the system could cut home utility costs by 20 percent.

"The main motivation for the consumer is money. It gives him immediate, direct feedback—a way to control his destiny," says Eddie Stubbins of Duke Power, the local electric utility participating in the test. Some observers, however, question whether the consumer is the real beneficiary of such systems.

"There is an absolute gain for everyone, but the relative gain for those in control is a hundredfold," notes Annenberg's Gerbner. "Everyone will have a terminal, and that will provide the home with autonomy, but the central computer will have access to everyone and everything."

Energy management systems will save consumers money, but they will save utilities much more. Accomplished electronically, meter reading, billing, and collection are faster and more accurate, and can be done at a fraction of the present cost; to electric utilities the potential efficiencies are monumental. For the last two years, Duke Power has offered customers cash incentives for permitting the utility to install an interactive wire to major home appliances, which can then be shut down for short periods during peak demand emergencies. By 1990, this direct load management will eliminate the need for more than \$10 billion in new plant construction, according to company estimates, since the system allows existing plants to be used more efficiently.

Many experts frankly doubt there will be enough consumer interest to support such videotex services. But what the skeptics fail to take into account is that service providers have a much larger stake than the consumer in making two-way services happen, and that they are likely to provide the economic incentives necessary to get the wire into the home.

"If we had to rely on the consumer to pay for all these services, they might never happen," says John Maxheim. "There are great advantages here on the supplier end. As more and more people get cable service, the suppliers will come on line—banks, retailers, and others—and they will subsidize the service because it's good business for them."

"Using the two-way wire, we can do just about anything we can dream up in

the future," says Bill Lindner, Piedmont's vice president for technology. "For example, we could monitor consumption on a daily basis for theft. If there is a sudden drop in consumption, the computer could run up a red flag, and we could have a serviceman go to the home to see if the resident's bypassing the meter."

"What we will be doing is striking a Faustian bargain, where the Devil offers us all these good things at the cost of our souls," warns Dr. Joseph Weizenbaum, an MIT computer scientist concerned about the privacy implications of two-way cable. "When you put this together with other electronic monitoring opportunities, like home banking and burglar alarms, then it really does become possible to create a complete picture of what we are up to day and night."

"I'm sure it starts out benignly. Why worry about an anti-pilferage device? We don't pilfer. But clearly there is the opportunity here for surveillance on a colossal scale. We may be cementing things into place that, if we thought about it, we may not want at all."

There are no federal statutes currently governing the use of information collected by two-way cable, and protections written into local franchise agreements are few. With deregulation such a byword today, most legislators seem to agree with Piedmont's Maxheim that "regulations mean approvals, and approvals mean delays."

"You can't stop this thing, but you ought to have ground rules," declares Henry Geller, director of the Washington Center for Public Policy Research. "There should be the expectation of confidentiality. You should be able to know what information is being collected and have the right to access. But you have an indifferent public and a very militant industry. The pace of all this is very fast and very disturbing."



THE TURNER Broadcasting System began operating television's first twenty-four-hour news service in June 1980, and even though Cable News Network (CNN) charges cable operators fifteen cents a customer and sells advertising as well, it has been losing money at the rate of a million dollars a month. In the face of such losses, it is hard to imagine how a competitor could come along with two similar services, and offer them free of charge. If that does not seem crazy

enough, consider the fact that by the end of 1982, cable television will be trying to support not one but four twenty-four-hour news channels.

The battle for control of cable news might seem slightly unreal—a complete suspension of conventional business rules. Yet it is only one skirmish in an escalating programming war that is literally out of this world—22,300 miles above the earth, in geostationary satellite orbit.

By the end of the decade, scores of program services will be raining down from satellites, providing cable viewers a cornucopia of choices for every imaginable taste. "Narrowcasting"—the targeting of programs to relatively small, specialized audiences—is accomplished using transponders, the satellite relay points that instantly transform a local station into a national network. The intense competition to serve these special audiences by satellite is good news for the consumer but risky business for the programmer.

"The fragmented audiences won't support all this programming," predicts media analyst John Reidy of the Wall Street firm of Drexel, Burnham. "More money will be lost on programming for cable TV in the next five years than will be made in the next ten."

CNN is the brainchild of flamboyant cable entrepreneur Ted Turner, one of the first to recognize the potential of satellite distribution. Six years ago, a transponder on RCA's Satcom I turned his Atlanta, Georgia, UHF station into Superstation WTBS. With a national audience of seven-tenths million and revenues of \$50 million, it boasts being the largest television service after the three commercial networks.

The challenge to CNN comes from the very people who denounced Ted Turner's superstition maneuver—two of the nation's largest broadcasting operations, Group W (Westinghouse Broadcasting) and ABC News. Undeterred by CNN's dismal bottom line, the new partnership will actually pay cable operators to carry its two Satellite News Channels, a move that has prompted Turner to invest, grudgingly, \$15 million in a second twenty-four-hour service to match his competitors.

"There's no room for two cable news networks," argues Turner. "It's hard enough to have one pay for itself. What concerns me is who my competition is: The corporate colossi are on the way. A year ago the networks said this was crazy. Now they're killing to get in."

Broadcasters and the networks have dropped their once-determined opposition to cable with the encouragement of the present Federal Communications

Commission, chaired by Reagan appointee Mark Fowler. The FCC strategy is to lift regulation in favor of open competition and to promote rapid development of new program sources—a policy that marks the beginning of a shift from the traditional concept of public airwaves to the pragmatic reality of private airwaves.

"With the Fowler approach to the marketplace, you'll see more broadcasters in cable programming," says Dr. Roger Fransecky, public-affairs vice president for the Westinghouse cable division. "It takes tremendous capital resources and an in-place distribution system to compete. The companies with the most resources and the best positioning are going to win out. It's going to be a free-for-all."

Westinghouse took a major step toward achieving a strong position in the new marketplace earlier this year by acquiring Teleprompter, the second largest multiple system operator (MSO) in cable. The largest merger of two communications companies in U.S. history, this move gives the programmers of Group W—backed by the enormous financial and technical resources of parent Westinghouse Electric—ready access to 1.5 million cable homes.

The speed and the scope of such transactions have many observers worried. "The vertical integration of cable-system owners controlling program suppliers has the effect of freezing others out of the marketplace," contends Sam Simon of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting (NCCB). "These companies are not competing, they're just integrating."

"Right now there are almost no independent satellite networks not owned by the big MSOs," claims Turner. "And the MSOs will not carry competing services."

Genuine competition in cable programming is being further stymied by a serious bottleneck in the cable pipeline. There are currently thirty-seven program services distributed by satellite, yet the oldest of the nation's cable systems still have only a twelve-channel capacity. Until they are rebuilt—and until cable's penetration improves on the current 27 percent—satellite programmers face lean times. Only those with enough resources to withstand several years of red ink—such as Westinghouse and ABC—are likely to survive.

Yet even programmers willing to take their chances in this marketplace will have trouble finding a transponder. Although satellite capacity will triple by 1984, virtually every transponder now contemplated is already reserved.

While Westinghouse was buying Teleprompter, it was also making a deal with Western Union to secure ten transponders

on the new Westar satellites, in an arrangement that has drawn a great deal of fire.

"Westinghouse is warehousing transponders," charges NCCB's Simon. "They don't have any reasonable need for the quantity they are buying."

Others question Western Union's right to make such a deal in the first place. The Robert Wold Company, a firm that sub-leases transponder time to cable and broadcast programmers, was the first company to use a satellite for a television broadcast. Wold, one of Western Union's oldest customers, had a standing order for additional transponders and expected to receive the next one available. But the explosive demand for transponders has prompted many satellite operators to ignore their federally mandated common-carrier obligation to lease access on a first-come, first-served basis; instead they have been selling transponders to the highest bidder. When Westinghouse entered the picture, Wold lost out. Along with others, he has petitioned the FCC to enforce its common-carrier rules. Western Union declined to comment on the matter, explaining that it was in litigation.

According to Wold, these new practices could knock the small entrepreneur out of the satellite business. "As you turn from leasing to selling, you begin to rule out the small operator purely on the basis of economics," he says. "You now need \$8 million to \$18 million to be considered for a transponder."

"Give the market five years to operate like this, and how many ultimate sources of programming do you imagine there will be?" asks Don Ward, Wold's attorney.

New means of distributing program services—notably direct-broadcast satellites (DBS) and low-power television stations—are expected to open up by the middle of the decade. But DBS requires investments in the billions of dollars, and low-power stations, with a broadcast range of only ten to twenty miles, could have difficulty attracting the audience and advertisers needed to survive.

"The biggest lie in this whole thing is the claim that the marketplace will insure diversity," says Sam Simon, whose organization has filed thirty applications for low-power stations. "We have a situation where corporations are controlling the pipeline—its content and our access to it. Would we allow AT&T to decide what is said over the telephone, or who can or cannot get one, based on economics? The issue is not that these companies abuse the power, it is that they *have* this power."

"The fight has focused on the economic stakes and not on the public-policy questions," observes Fred Wertheimer, president of Common Cause. "Leaving it to a

battle of the Titans is not the way public policy should be framed."

"As long as you are not absolutely free to get into the business, there is scarcity and the government must protect my interests," says public-interest advocate Everett Parker of the United Church of Christ. "Those who can pay will get access, but if they try to monopolize it, it will bring a big outcry for hard-line regulation. This is the time when these companies should be exhibiting some enlightened self-interest. They could turn out to be their own worst enemies."



SEARS ROEBUCK AND COMPANY made its mark on retailing in the 1880s when it introduced its now-famous catalogue and began selling directly to consumers in their homes. Today, the company is preparing for the future by returning to its roots: Sears' marketing strategy for the twenty-first century anticipates a gradual return to the nation's living rooms.

A special edition of this year's summer catalogue provided an early indication of where the Goliath of American retailers is heading. Shoppers at test stores in Cincinnati and Washington who turned to the new catalogue's fashion "page" were greeted with waves crashing onto a beach as models strolled across the sand to musical accompaniment. Cheryl Tiegs then introduced herself and her signature line of sportswear, explaining why Sears means value to the consumer.

Called Tele-Shop, this unusual catalogue was assembled on a laser video disk manufactured by DiscoVision Associates, a partnership of IBM and MCA, the entertainment conglomerate. Thanks to the disk's random-access feature, customers were able in less than three seconds to summon up both still-frame and film sequences vividly describing—with sight, sound, and motion—any one of 18,000 products.

"We think the laser video disk is the ultimate marketing tool available today," says Ronald Ramseyer, national manager of Sears' catalogue advertising. "The key advantage is the possibility of getting to consumers [with] content that is more exciting, more interesting, and more persuasive than print. From ninety-five years of selling experience, we know that when you can show a product in living, breathing color, there is a direct relation to sales."

The laser video disk combines the imagery and immediacy of television with the flexibility of a printed catalogue, making it possible to "sell at each customer's

persuasion level," as Ramseyer puts it. But Tele-Shop is more than just a better catalogue; the experiment is part of a long-term strategy based on the company's recognition that consumer shopping habits are changing. Growth in the number of single households and working couples with limited discretionary time has caused mail-order sales to increase twice as rapidly as other retail sales have. This trend toward home shopping has prompted Sears to look to interactive cable as an ideal electronic pipeline for delivering video catalogues.

"The two-way dimension is vitally important," says Ramseyer. "Seventy percent of our catalogue sales are conducted over the phone, which is, of course, two-way communication." Sears will eventually be able to link a battery of video disks to the central computers of interactive cable systems. By using videotex, any subscriber would then be able to request complete video presentations for specific products, which could be ordered by pressing a button.

Teleshopping could account for as much as \$250 billion in retail sales by 1990, but perhaps even more significant, it will provide the manufacturers of consumer products the most accurate information ever available on what motivates the customer to buy. The distinctive feature of cable is that it permits the targeting of individual households within a television market, a potential that market researchers have already begun to exploit. Behaviorscan, one technique now in use, enlists test groups of cabled homes to receive specially tailored television commercials. Each participant receives an identity card to present at the checkout counter of the local supermarket. Grocery purchases are then "scanned" by a low-power laser beam and fed into a central computer, enabling researchers to study the connection between what consumers saw on television and what they actually bought.

"The effect of this on market research will be similar to the effect the invention of the telescope had on astronomy," declares John Keon, marketing professor at New York University. "For the first time, we can measure action—the impact of persuasion on consumers."

"Behaviorscan allows us to go through a community household by household and decide what ad we want the consumer to see," explains John Malec, chief executive of Information Resources Inc., the company that invented the technique. "It has already changed an advertiser's ability to identify high-potential markets right down to the zip code level. The only thing lacking to get to that level is the delivery system."

Two-way cable will not only provide

that delivery system, it will transform the moment of persuasion into the point of sale, a development with profound implications both for advertising and consumer buying habits. "Advertisers will get better and better at selling because they will know their customers better and better. One effect will be an increase in impulse buying," predicts Keon. "You will have ads designed to make up your mind very quickly. They will have a high emotional content. I can imagine the smoke-detector ads you might see."

But commercials for consumer products are not the only form of advertising likely to change with the advent of two-way cable. Politicians already rely on television to sell their candidacies to the public, and interactive cable will offer the candidate an even more powerful new tool that could effect fundamental changes in our political system.

"Following that electronic path into the home has staggering implications whether you are marketing dog food or a political candidate," observes Harry Shooshan, former chief counsel of the House Com-

munications Subcommittee. In a city that is heavily cabled, a media consultant could pick a channel and tailor his message to highlight certain issues and avoid other issues completely. A spot on abortion, for example, could be sent only to Catholic homes. It may lead to more efficient and effective campaigning, but it will not result in a more informed electorate. People who are being told what they are likely to want to hear are not better-informed."

Perhaps even more disturbing is the possibility that two-way cable will tempt elected officials to submit difficult policy questions to an electronic referendum. "I fear in that kind of system that policy could be made by whim," says former FCC chairman Charles Ferris. "You have to slow down and listen in our republican form of government. It is a slow, reflective process. It's good for a leader to stay in tune with his constituency, but there is an obligation to provide leadership and judgment. If one overemphasizes the electronic referendum, you will have a dramatic change in the way our government

works, and I think that's frightening.

"There will be some situations where the marketplace won't protect us," admits Ferris, who promoted the deregulation of the new technologies during his tenure as FCC chairman. "What should we do to safeguard the democratic process? I just don't have an answer. Maybe someone should be concerned about it."

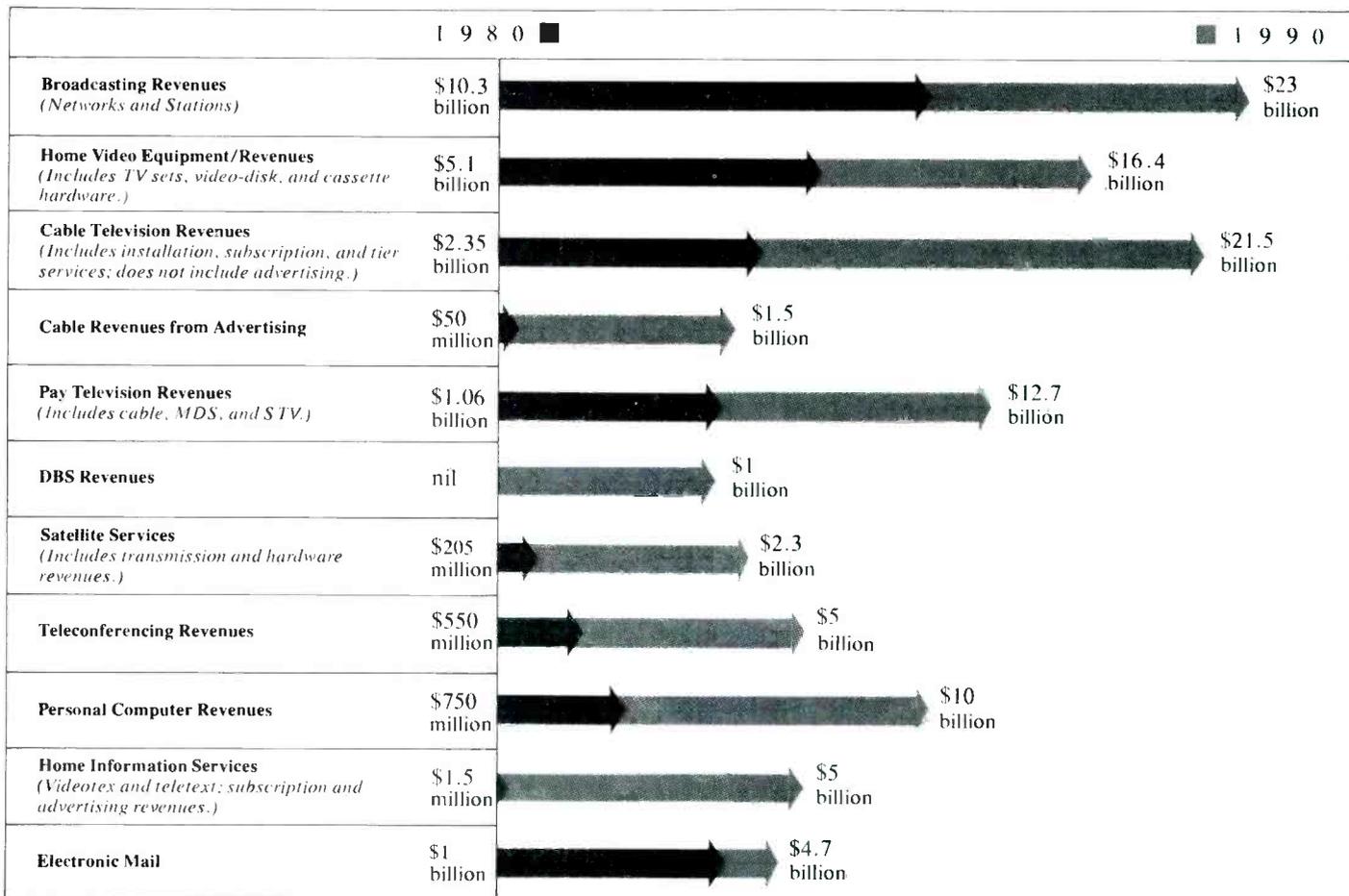


INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINES has always been something of a corporate snob. The \$26 billion colossus has cornered nearly half the world computer market with the business philosophy of building only the biggest and most powerful business computers and selling them exclusively through its own sales force. That's why to many observers, this year's most significant business event was the introduction of the IBM Personal Computer, a typewriter-sized machine that will be available at Sears and other retail outlets.

"IBM going into the consumer market

Great Expectations

New technology will make communications the most explosive business frontier of the eighties. Just how big these new industries will be depends on so many variables that predictions are risky. But on the strength of projections like the ones below, corporations are taking the plunge.



These projections were prepared with the help of Tony Hoffman of A. G. Becker, the Wall Street investment firm.

says the home-computer market is really here," concludes Robert Schrank, a specialist in computer technology for the Ford Foundation. "It will make the computer as common as the calculator. When Radio Shack introduces a personal computer, it's cute. When IBM does it, it's for real."

The home-computer market promises to be one of the most explosive new businesses of the eighties, and with the arrival of the best known and most respected name in computers on the scene, the home information revolution could shift into high gear. To the astonishment of veteran IBM-watchers, the company's basic \$1,565 model uses the standard television set for its display screen, and will perform such mundane tasks as storing recipes and playing video games. But IBM's first consumer electronics product is no toy.

"The IBM Personal Computer is the functional equivalent of the giant computers of the sixties that cost a couple of million dollars," says MIT's Joseph Weizenbaum. "They are essentially equivalent in power, except that the personal computer is much faster."

By bringing such awesome power to the

fingertips of the television viewer, the personal computer will become the nerve center of the home information system, and it will provide a solution to one of the most troubling questions posed by the Telecommunications Revolution: How will consumers keep up with the information explosion? The personal computer, as editor and television programmer, will be able to select, from the torrent of information and entertainment that will surge into cabled homes, those items particularly interesting to the viewer. It can perform this gatekeeper function because the personal computer will be programmed to know more about the individual user's tastes and interests than any human would have the patience to learn.

By the end of this decade, you might begin your day reading and watching an individually tailored news report prepared by your personal computer from dozens of print and broadcast sources coming in over the two-way wire. The report would highlight developments related to your business and personal interests. (If you were planning a vacation to Mexico, for instance, it would include up-to-date information on the country's

weather and the exchange rate. You could also request the computer to order your airline tickets and hotel reservations.) The news report would be followed by a daily personal schedule that might, in its course, alert you to a discrepancy on a finance charge that your computer uncovered overnight while it was communicating with your bank's computer. Then your computer would connect with the one at your office to check for any calls and messages. Before getting ready to leave for work, you might instruct the personal computer to prepare an analysis of new automobiles, including financing and insurance information, with a recommendation on the model that would most economically meet your needs. Finally you could request a rudimentary Spanish lesson (for the trip to Mexico), to follow the night's schedule of entertainment, which the computer would select and record during the day. This scenario might sound like science fiction, but all these functions and more are well within the capability of the personal computer.

"The home-computer revolution is at least equal in importance to the invention of the printing press and the Industrial

The Front-Runners

TELECOMMUNICATIONS may hold rich new opportunities for the private businessman, but when all the dust settles, the field is likely to be dominated by the familiar corporate giants. These are among the companies positioned to lead the way:

AT&T The largest company on earth is preparing to give birth to a new unregulated subsidiary that could prove to be the most fearsome infant in the history of American business. "Baby Bell" will open its doors with \$20 billion in assets and an established relationship with most consumers. Although certain to win a large share of the lucrative transaction-services market, Baby Bell does have some handicaps. Cable has 45,000 times the capacity of the telephone wire, which cannot accommodate video pictures. But the brains at Bell Labs are working on the problem.

IBM The computer giant is spending \$1.5 billion a year on research and development, an investment that makes IBM the pacesetter of the new technologies. It is the world's largest computer manufacturer, and has established a strong position in the fields of

laser video disks, personal computers, and satellite communications, through its partnership in Satellite Business Systems. And, as a high-level IBM planning group is now examining direct-broadcast satellites, a consumer satellite service could be in the offing.

TIME INC. If one were to invent the perfectly integrated media monopoly, Time would be it. The world's largest magazine publisher, it is also the nation's largest cable-system operator and controls an arsenal of choice transponders. Its future as a major cable programmer is assured by the spectacular success of Home Box Office, which is generating revenue faster than Time can spend it. The empire even includes SAMI, a market research firm employing Behaviorscan technology (see article).

SEARS ROEBUCK & CO. Sears is moving fast to protect its position as America's dominant retailer. By the end of the decade, expect Sears to hit the ground running with a coast-to-coast videotex system—and not just for retail merchandise. The company's recent acquisitions in residential real estate and financial services, when added to its Allstate Insurance division, suggest Sears is preparing to offer an entire range of services uniquely suited to electronic delivery.

THE NETWORKS The prophets of doom who forecast the imminent demise of ABC, CBS, and NBC did not anticipate how quickly they would rise to the challenge of the new technologies. In the last twelve months, all three have established new video divisions and made significant moves into pay cable, satellite networks, videotext, video disks, direct-broadcast satellites, and cable-system ownership. The networks' greatest assets, however, will prove to be their news and sports divisions, which are in place and ready to take advantage of the booming demand for both kinds of programming.

WARNER AMEX When Warner Amex invested at least \$20 million on its pioneering interactive-cable experiment, Qube, competitors chuckled. But largely on the strength of Qube, the conglomerate has won the majority of the big-city franchise competitions in the last two years; no one is laughing now. With American Express handling the cash and consumer services, and Warner Communications providing entertainment and Atari personal computers, Warner Amex has put together a formidable package. If big-city, two-way cable really turns out to be the bonanza many businessmen are betting it is, Warner Amex will be the first to find out.

Revolution," claims Dr. J.F. Traub, chairman of the computer science department at Columbia University. "It will provide unlimited access to information, and information is power. Eventually, personal computers will be ubiquitous, like the telephone and the automobile."

Many observers do not share Traub's optimism, arguing that today's consumers will probably not be willing to embrace such sophisticated technology. But this argument fails to take into account the enthusiasm of one influential group that has no fear of technology. Known as the "on-line generation," they are the youngsters who while away hours hypnotized by the genius of electronic games, who spend their summers designing complex programs at "computer camp," and who play with computers in elementary school the way their parents played with crayons. These computer kids will be the personal computer's best salesmen, and when they themselves become consumers, they are the group most likely to exploit the full potential of the new media.

The on-line generation is learning a revolutionary new way of thinking and communicating, which will mean that the children of the eighties will possess an electronic literacy beyond the experience and comprehension of most of their parents. This technological generation gap may present the family with one of its most serious challenges. Yet this is only one of the potential schisms that could result from the Telecommunications Revolution—it may also drive yet another technological wedge between the rich and the poor.

"Social problems stem from inequality of distribution," notes Dean Gerbner of the Annenberg School. "Technology never solves social problems, it extends them to different depths. Those who have the most, who own the machines, will get the most out of rapidly expanding sources of information. The more we centralize our cultural and informational resources, the more we risk widening the gap between the information-rich and the information-poor."

"All of these new technologies cost money," observes Nolan Bowie, the former director of the Citizens Communications Center. "The First Amendment says that people have a right to communicate, to receive information. In the present situation, you will get as much First Amendment right as you can afford. Technological literacy is involved here. The rich schools will be teaching their kids computer, but the inner-city schools are having a problem with basic reading comprehension. The lowest economic class can barely read, never mind use a computer." (Continued on page 70)



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Ninety Seconds Over the Economy

Hardly the stuff of 'good television,'
the economy has become the most important
and difficult story facing broadcast journalism.

by Michael D. Mosettig

HUNDREDS of international reporters and camera crews shuffled restlessly outside a luxury hotel in Geneva, waiting to pounce on any OPEC oil minister bearing even a scrap of information about the closed-door meetings inside. The deliberations of those sultans, sheiks, and ministers would determine how much more money hundreds of millions of Americans, Europeans, and Asians would have to pay to drive their cars and heat their homes.

The minister from Kuwait emerged, said simply "Arabian light at thirty-two," and immediately went back inside.

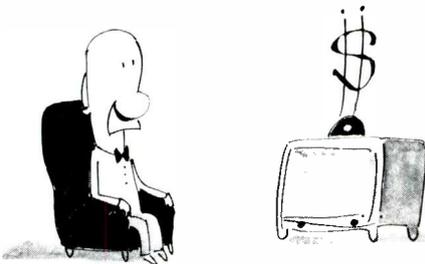
"What's the *current* price?" shouted a confused American network correspondent covering his first OPEC meeting. "Thirty-four," came back the chorus from his colleagues. The correspondent raced to the phone to tell New York the remarkable news that OPEC was lowering its oil prices. For hours his network had a scoop; the only problem was that it was wrong. "Arabian light at thirty-two" didn't mean that OPEC was *lowering* its price from \$34 to \$32 a barrel, but that Saudi Arabia was *raising* its cheaper-priced oil from \$30 to \$32 a barrel. The other OPEC nations would follow with their own \$2 increase and raise the price of most OPEC oil from \$34 to \$36 per barrel.

The correspondent's crash course in oil economics resembles what the news departments of the American television networks have been undergoing in the last decade, as they have desperately tried to catch up on a story previously ignored, one so obviously vital to the daily lives of their millions of viewers.

As the American and world economies have caromed from crisis to disaster, toppling U.S. and European political leaders in the process, network television news has been confronted with a difficult, if not impossible, job. To a largely untrained

audience now receiving most of its news from television, the networks try to report and explain phenomena that even professional economists said would never occur: simultaneously rising prices and rising unemployment, accompanied by the end of cheap energy and by the fading of the American dream of owning a house and a car.

And now the networks are also reporting a revolution in American economic policy-making that matches the New Deal in scope and boldness, a revolution based on a combination of tight money policies



and the largely untested theories of conservative Republican "supply side" economics.

How well the networks meet the reporting challenge is one of the more contentious issues in American journalism today. Professional economists, as well as many business and labor leaders, briskly dismiss the networks' economics coverage—despite their growing investment in specialist reporters, producers, and airtime—as too little, too shallow, and too alarmist. To them it is inconceivable that such a complicated subject can be adequately treated in a ninety-second report.

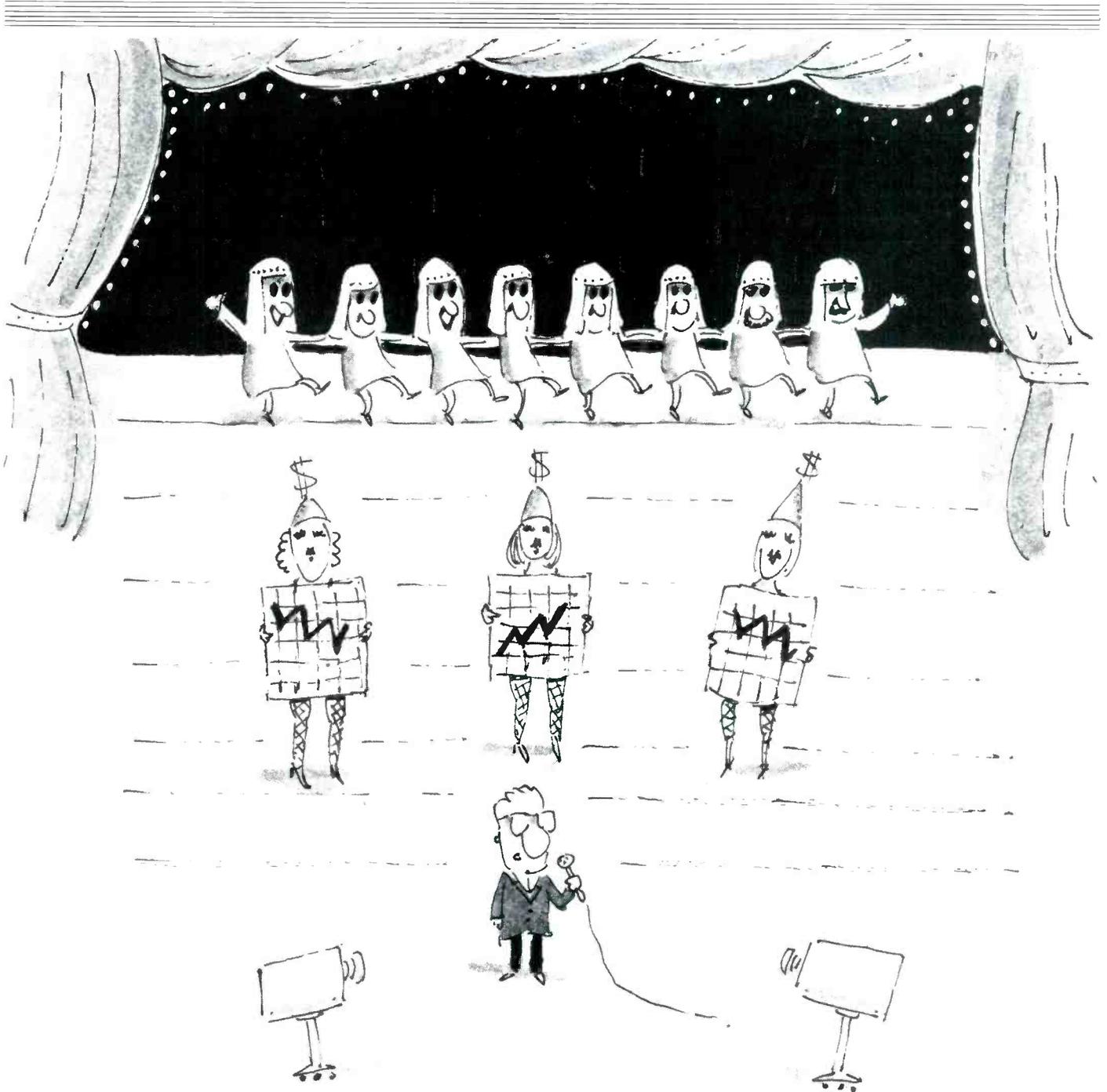
The surprising fact is that the networks perform as well as they do. The story topics—budgets, taxes, money supply, and trade—are complex and abstract, even if their effects on paychecks and prices are immediate. Many professional economists make the subject more baffling, disguising in layers of jargon their inherent inability to agree. And the "dismal science," as Thomas Carlyle labeled economics, does not lend itself to gripping

visuals, the staple of much television news. The OPEC bloopers were an aberration, especially since the networks have come to realize that economics stories must be covered by specialists. While the evening news programs obviously do not have the sophistication of *Business Week* or the depth of *The Wall Street Journal*, on any given day they can match the economics coverage on the front pages of most U.S. newspapers.

But despite network efforts, troubling questions remain. First, how many viewers are really listening, and does a large percentage of the nightly audience instinctively tune out when it hears the word "economics"? Second, will television in its relatively brief reports be able to describe what some experts see as a fundamental contradiction in the Reagan program—expanding the economy with tax cuts, military spending, and government deficits, while at the same time restraining it with controls on the money supply? Third, will television be able to explain through the fog of emotion and political rhetoric that the United States faces more than a trillion dollars in pension and Social Security claims from an increasingly aging population, and that those obligations now far surpass the money available in trust funds to pay them? Fourth, can television make comprehensible to an audience largely unaware of the problem that the state and local governments have long deferred and must soon pay hundreds of billions to rebuild collapsing roads, bridges, and water systems at the same time they are cutting taxes? And finally, can the networks explain even more than they do now that the U.S. economy is no longer dominant over or insulated from the world economy?

One alarming bit of evidence shows just how hard it is for television to penetrate the audience consciousness on such baffling issues, no matter how many spots it might run: Only two and a half years ago, as gas lines stretched from Larchmont to Laguna Beach, a *New York Times*-CBS News poll disclosed that only 51 percent of the respondents believed the United

Michael D. Mosettig is a former NBC News producer and an associate at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism.



States had to import oil. This startling display of either ignorance or disbelief followed six years in which the networks had run energy stories almost daily.

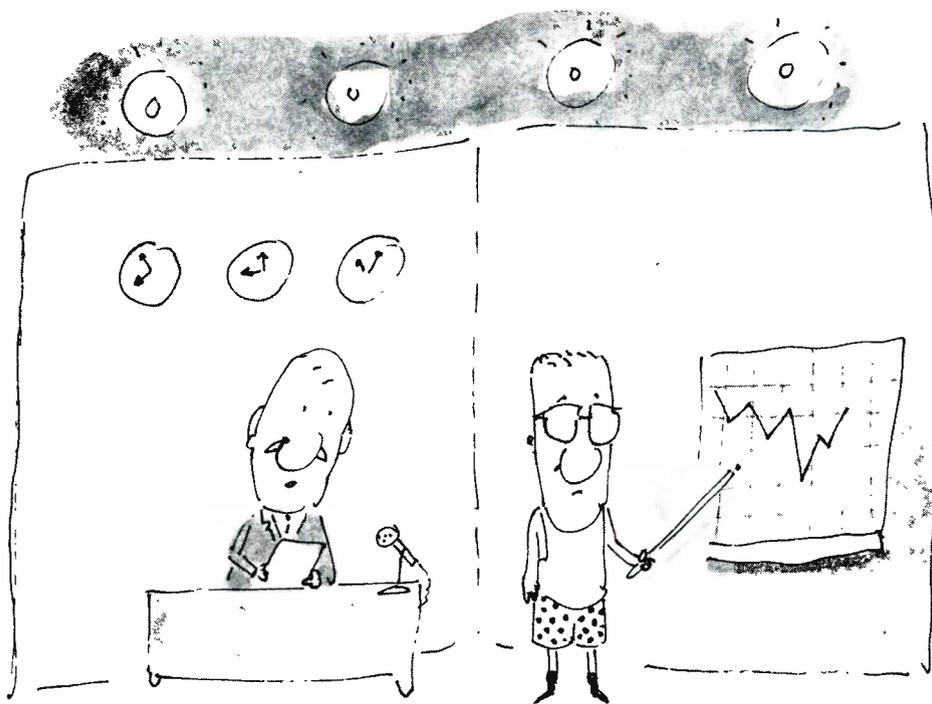
FOR twenty years, Irving R. Levine had been among the most familiar sights on NBC News, reporting on commissars and popes. In January 1971, NBC reassigned Levine to a newly created beat in Washington called economics. Many at NBC News wondered if the viewing public would ever see Levine again. For sev-

eral months, as the economy sagged in recession and with inflation at the then alarming rate of 4 percent, he tried to persuade producers to put his stories on the air.

Then, in August 1971, President Nixon made a surprise Sunday-night speech to the nation. The supposedly conservative Republican bared his conversion to the liberal economic theories of John Maynard Keynes, and announced a program of wage-price controls and, in effect, a devaluation of the dollar by splitting it from its last links to gold. In one stroke,

Nixon guaranteed his reelection. He also gave new life to Levine's career. In the decade since, Levine has probably racked up more *Nightly News* air-time than any other NBC reporter except White House correspondents.

Where Levine led, others soon followed. Economics specialists have status now at all three networks. George Herman, a CBS Washington veteran, took on economics in 1973. The following year, ABC News reached into print journalism and hired Dan Cordtz, a veteran from *The Wall Street Journal* and *Fortune*. ABC



News producer Av Westin, perhaps the first network executive to grasp the full import of the economics story, insisted on putting Cordtz on the air almost every night.

In 1978, when *The New York Times* locked out its unions, financial writer Mike Jensen went to NBC in search of temporary work. The result was another breakthrough in economics coverage, an effort to follow the story full time—beyond the Washington policy-makers to industry and finance. When the *Times* lockout ended, Jensen remained at NBC. In the three years since, he has made some six hundred appearances on *Nightly News* and *Today*.

In 1972, an editor at *Dun's Review* named Ray Brady began doing radio commentaries for CBS. In one of his early reports about OPEC, he had to explain what kind of an organization it was. Brady later joined the *CBS Morning News*, and has also become the *Evening News* correspondent responsible for covering the economy, finance, and industry outside Washington.

In television journalism, where a correspondent's personal style is often as important as the content of his stories, economics coverage has taken on distinctive characteristics at each of the three networks. ABC's Cordtz believes that journalism has an educating as well as a reporting role. At NBC, Levine's reports on Washington policy are complemented by Jensen's explanations of what an OPEC price increase or a boost in the prime rate would mean to the viewer at home. At

CBS, Brady combines the occasional skepticism of a Wall Streeter with raspy warnings of another jolt to the wallet from oil men, bankers, or milk producers.

These correspondents—and the producers of the news shows—must not only make the news comprehensible, they must also make it interesting. A newspaper reader can skim past a boring story, but a television viewer is likely to head for the refrigerator—or worse, switch to another channel. To overcome what journalists call the MEGO (mine eyes glaze over) factor, they rely on two basic devices. The first is to link a story to an individual family or worker, which increasingly means telling it outside Washington. The second is to employ, in the absence of compelling footage, such electronic graphics as shrinking and expanding boxes and revealing graphs and numbers.

THE USE OF modern video techniques produces much more interesting visuals. Only a few years ago, most economics stories contained stock footage of grocery stores, farm fields, and factories, at best distracting backdrops for voice-over recitations of indigestible statistics. Another common approach was to report economic policy through excerpts from Congressional committee hearings. As Cordtz recalls his early years on the job: "All three of us—Levine, Herman, and I—covered the beat the same way. We tended to spend a lot of time on the Hill, sitting through those damned boring

committee hearings and looking for a couple of sound bites. That reinforced my conviction that this was not the way to do it."

Personalizing economics news by relating it to the travail of a factory worker or homeowner is generally more interesting than hearing once again from the commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But when overused, this approach trivializes important news. Correspondents and producers must ask themselves whether people watch a national news program to see their neighbors, or whether they want to hear from public officials otherwise inaccessible to them.

Cordtz sums up the difference between covering economics for a specialty publication and presenting it on a network news show: "When I worked for *Fortune*, I had seven or eight thousand words to explain the story to people who already understood it. When I got to ABC, I had 300 words to explain it to people who didn't have a clue. That's still largely the case," he adds, "although we've made some progress on both counts."

Says NBC's Jensen, "You want to report on and interpret economic events in such a way that everyone who watches it can understand it, and yet you don't want to be condescending. When you talk about the prime rate, you have to relate it quickly to the interest people will be paying on auto loans and home mortgages. When you talk about OPEC price increases, you have to translate that into cents-per-gallon."

Jensen argues that television's time restrictions, and the resulting inability to explain nuances, are countered by one major advantage: With interesting pictures and graphics, he can make a point more dramatically than he could in a column of type. He cites as an example a story this summer on his own network's sagging profits. The story first showed graphics depicting the profits of ABC and CBS in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Then NBC's comparatively paltry \$75 million figure came up on the screen. "People sort of gasp and say, 'My God.' There is a dramatic effect in that."

Brady takes the iconoclastic view that television's time constraints may actually produce better coverage. "A lot of financial writing is unduly overwritten," he says. "There is a gut issue in almost every economic story, and it is simpler than economists would have you think. No one will read twenty-seven paragraphs in a newspaper to find out what the story is. The graphics on television make it a great medium. In television you smack them in the eye with the story."

More importantly, time limits are beginning to stretch, especially since ABC

and NBC incorporated three- to five-minute special-segment features into their evening news programs. These have provided vehicles to explain in detail subjects that would not otherwise have gotten on the air at all—a Levine report on the World Bank, Jensen's story on the changing face of Wall Street, or a report by Cordtz on the insurance industry.

As electronic graphics improved to the point of rudimentary animation, Cordtz was able to tackle that most arcane of economic issues—the money supply. When money is available, Cordtz explained over a cartoon of a factory billowing smoke, business will invest in new machinery. If money is not available, he said as the smoke puffs went away, the economy stagnates and workers are laid off. With another series of cartoon animations, he showed how the Federal Reserve tries to control the money supply by buying or selling Treasury securities with banks and brokerage firms. Had such a story been attempted a few years ago, it would have been illustrated with prosaic, distracting pictures of bank exteriors and clerks shuffling bills.

Yet even in such relatively lengthy reports, the nuances sometimes get lost. *NBC Nightly News* recently did a week-long series of special segments on housing problems without mentioning that for years, the government indirectly channeled billions into the housing industry, keeping it speculatively profitable and ahead of inflation, at the expense of in-

vestments in factories, technology, and jobs.

FURTHERMORE, network coverage of industry is still uneven. The auto industry, directly or indirectly responsible for one out of six jobs, receives heavy coverage, but the steel industry, whose woes even more reflect the declining state of old American industries, is hardly covered. To the extent they're covered at all, the computer and chip technology industries, which will soon revolutionize offices and factories, are largely covered as science stories. Correspondents are more likely to illustrate agriculture stories with Farmer Brown or amber waves of grain than to delve into multi-billion dollar surpluses, subsidies, and exports.

And despite the buildup of the economics beat, inconsistencies remain. On the day DuPont made its merger bid with Conoco—the largest in U.S. corporate history—it was described in a one-minute-and-forty-second spot with Jensen in the third block of *Nightly News*, and led the second block of CBS news with a one minute-and-twenty-five-second spot by Brady. ABC treated it as an anchorman copy item. Jensen has been covering OPEC meetings regularly for almost three years, but when the oil ministers went to Bali last winter NBC sent an Asian correspondent instead. Levine has covered some of the economic summits of Western leaders but not others, depending on whether the executives thought the sessions were a political story or an economic one. Brady has just begun to cover OPEC meetings, and reported the most recent summit. Cordtz covers the summits but not OPEC meetings. Labor-union coverage is particularly erratic. Especially on NBC, unions are as likely to be covered by

its crime reporter as by its economics reporter.

Bolstered network coverage has done little to stifle academic, business, and labor critics of television economics reporting.

"Terrible" is the description offered by Robert Heilbroner, a professor at New York's New School for Social Research. He cites as an example the "shallow and alarmist" reports in July on the threatened bankruptcy of the Social Security system. Treating the story in a minute or so only worried pensioners and would-be pensioners, he argues.

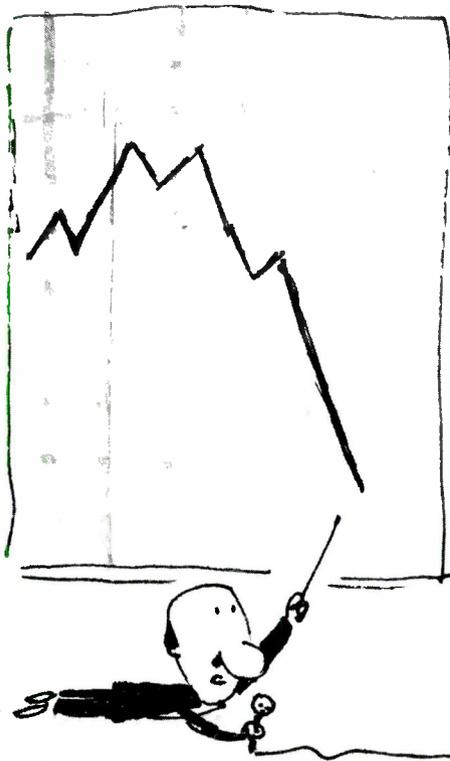
Robert Lekachman of the City University of New York complains that even on hour-long specials the networks reach out only for conventional opinions. "You won't find anyone really on the left or even the far right," he says. "A contrast between Milton Friedman and an orthodox Keynesian really adds little to public enlightenment."

MIT's Paul Samuelson, whose textbook has helped millions of college students struggle through introductory economics, thinks network coverage has improved. But, he adds, "It has a long way to go. Perhaps there are limits in the nature of the task that preclude [correspondents] from doing any deeper coverage. If you want to be informed on the American economy, you would do better reading *The Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times* than watching television twenty-four hours a day."

The business-sponsored Media Institute in Washington voices another frequent complaint—that network economics reporting too frequently follows the line set forth by Administration spokesmen. (Business makes that complaint when a Democrat is in the White House, labor when a Republican is in power.) The Institute report, prepared by *Harper's* Washington editor Tom Bethell in 1980, says the networks usually repeat the statements of government officials that rising prices or wages are the cause of inflation. Very rarely, the report adds, do the news reports cite government spending and easy-money policies as contributors.

Complicating television's economics coverage are the sometimes strained relations between network economics reporters and the economic leaders they are covering. Most business executives react to a television camera as they would to an unmuzzled Doberman pinscher. Says Cordtz, "The business community doesn't make it easier for us to do these stories."

Reporting on the Reagan economic program—a reversal of fifty years of government policy accomplished with only a



handful of major votes by each house of Congress—dramatically shows what television is up against in covering economic policy.

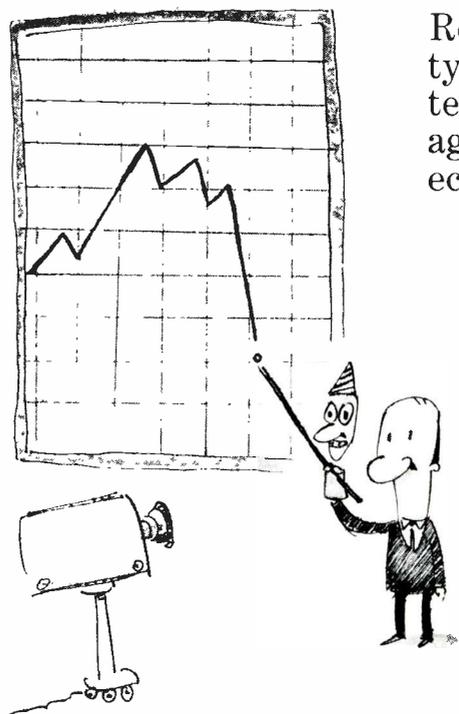
Recently, the *Washington Journalism Review* questioned a number of economists about print and television coverage of the Reagan Administration's policies. Nearly all of the economists replied that the media, with few exceptions, did an inadequate job of explaining the new theories of supply-side economics. Economists of both the left and the right complained, for example, that reporters failed to make distinctions between all the different kinds of tax cuts and investments.

All three network evening news shows did special reports after the election on the fundamentals of supply-side economics, the attempt to encourage investment and production rather than consumer demand. The programs explained how different the untested theories were from the programs of Roosevelt, Johnson, or Carter—or even from those of Nixon and Ford.

But on a day-to-day basis, coverage is obviously more limited: reports on the progress of budget-cutting and tax bills, or statements from the President's team and from the floundering Democratic opposition. Washington coverage invariably focuses on political maneuverings involved in getting bills passed, rather than on the uncharted new directions in which the bills may lead the economy. The coverage does not—and cannot—go back to basics every night, as the best newspapers can do.

This absence of consistent analysis or skepticism naturally has irritated economists, who argued that the Administration was receiving a free ride. That charge has less validity since the summer slide of the stock market and the first signs of the unraveling of the President's program. The networks were as quick as the newspapers to pick up on the fundamental doubts that some financial experts and Wall Street economists have developed. One reason for television's quick response, interestingly, was that its New York-based business reporters were able to tap doubting Wall Street sources.

Yet even the professional economists missed a more serious problem in the network coverage. In brief news spots, there is no room to explain that Reaganomics consists essentially of two separate sets of programs and philosophies going in opposite directions: expansionary supply-side tax and military-spending programs and government deficits, and contractional "monetarism"—tight controls on the growth of money, reflected in high interest rates. There has been little effort



Reagan's programs typify what television is up against in covering economics.

to explain on television that the top economic policy jobs in the Administration are about equally divided between "supply siders" and "monetarists." Some economists are worried that an attempt to compromise these divergent views can bring the worst possible combination of big deficits and high interest rates. Such a policy, says Wall Street economist Sam Nakagama, is the equivalent of strategic bombing—it only works by destroying industry, as it has in Britain.

But whether Reaganomics succeeds or fails, the economics correspondents seem secure in their hold on increasing amounts of network air-time. The success of their work is better measured by the viewing public's current level of sophistication about economic news. Even such professional economists as Samuelson believe the public is more knowledgeable about economics now than it was two or three decades ago. Samuelson says he does not know whether television is responsible. The network correspondents naturally think it is.

They often base their evaluations on the give-and-take issuing from their appearances on the speech-making circuit. "All I know is that from time to time I have had stuff on the air fed back to me as the prevailing knowledge," Jensen says. "Now whether that has anything to do with what we are pitching on television," he modestly adds, "I don't know." As

Brady notes, "When I give the price of gold, people now know why we are reporting it. When you say 'OPEC,' everyone knows what it is. There has been a change in the level of economic sophistication, and what did it was television."

Whether viewers want it or not, more economics coverage is in store for them. Both ABC and CBS aired hour-long specials on the Social Security controversy. ABC News president Roone Arledge has raised the possibility of doing a weekly show on finance. NBC specials have tackled such difficult issues as productivity and problems in the labor force. On CBS, Walter Cronkite's *Universe* plans to cover similar economic issues. And with the advent of hour-long evening news programs, which CBS and NBC are eagerly advocating, economics will be a good candidate for the expanded non-hard-news time. The correspondents feel assured, in short, that theirs is no longer a bad-news beat, that it would exist even if the economy should brighten.

For all their efforts, the networks can only hope that the next time an angry oil nation cuts off supplies to the United States and maroons drivers in gas lines, substantially more than 51 percent of the public will believe that this country is dependent on foreign oil. If that percentage shows up in the next crisis, the networks will have to ask themselves if anyone out there is really listening. ■

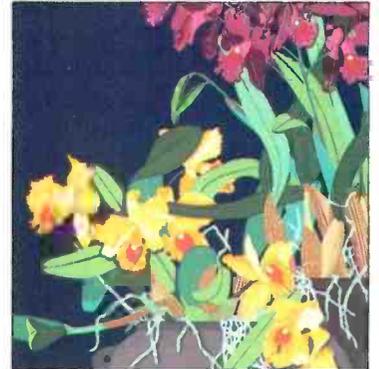
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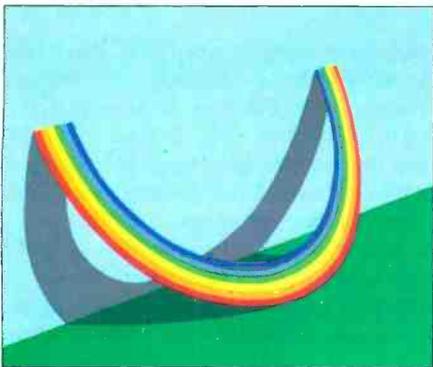
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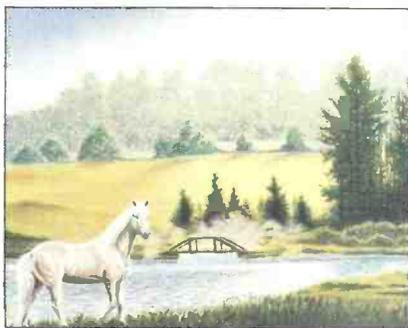
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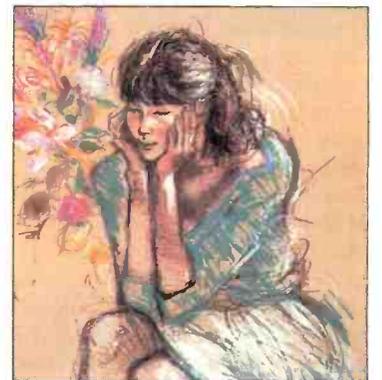
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The Man Who Started Television II

Gerald Levin's daring proposal
to wed cable to satellites
made HBO — and remade television.

by Jonathan Black

ONCE UPON A TIME, not very long ago, Home Box Office was a mere memorandum scuttling across executive desks on the thirty-fifth floor of Time Inc. headquarters. It was not a memo taken with utter seriousness. Who, after all, would *pay* to see movies or sports at home? Television's very allure had been to bring news and entertainment, free, into the American living room. So the Casandras gloated and whispered among themselves about the most perplexing stranger brought in to midwife the notion. The man was not, for starters, a Time Inc-er. Nor had he served even one day's time in the business. This man was a Wall Street attorney. A former Bible student. A thirty-three-year-old engineering buff whose firm built irrigation ditches and dams in developing countries. But give credit to the powers that hired him. No one has had a more vital, radical influence on pay television, cable — and ultimately, perhaps the networks — than Gerald Levin.

Decades hence, when the history of television is told, Levin will still be renowned for his seminal matchmaking feat: that explosive and highly fertile marriage of cable and satellite. Spawned under the astrological sign of Satcom 1, HBO's heavenly signal began to pay, and pay, with remarkable speed, began to wire the nation. Suddenly the dozing cable industry awoke from its early-seventies doldrums with a hot new product to penetrate urban markets. Once, the smug triumvirate of network television ignored the wired competition. Those networks are smug no more.

Consider one fact: In 1980, Time Inc.'s Video Group — led by HBO and Time's cable company, American Television & Communications — earned more than the entire NBC network. And consider the remarkable changes Levin wrought: Henry Luce's vast publishing and forestry empire has become, in terms of both earnings and capital spending, a cable company — with trees demoted to second place and magazines to third.

Levin might seem a most improbable star to have engineered such an upheaval. Unimposing is perhaps the most apt word to characterize a man who, in both style and personality, more closely resembles an assistant bank manager than a flashy television executive. He's the kind of man, says one acquaintance, who always introduces himself for fear he won't be remembered. At CBS or NBC, his quiet, dogged efforts would have earned him a high roost in accountancy. Only at Time Inc., where glitter and glamour come second to solid, buttoned-down smarts, could Levin have emerged as he has — a visionary giant. In many ways, Levin is the Lenin of video, its bookish seer, a man who prefers to stress "the force of ideas" rather than his own impact, a man who

toiled with talmudic attention to detail, and to his and everyone else's surprise, forged a revolution. "He's one hell of a commodity," says J. Richard Munro, Time Inc.'s president and chief executive officer. "We have not seen that many Jerry Levins in this building."

Levin first entered the building in April 1972, hired to explore the concept of pay television for Sterling Cable Network, the partially owned Time Inc. subsidiary, in the hope that pay would improve growth and help amortize costs. Just seven months later, on a wretched rainy November night, that idea became reality when 365 homes in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, were able to tune in a New York Rangers hockey game and the film *Sometimes a Great Notion*. And where was Levin on that night full of portent (so stormy that HBO's microwave transmitter collapsed and was repaired just twenty-five minutes before the inaugural feed)? Quite typically, he was busy wrestling in the realm of ideas, holed up alone in HBO's humble annex, playing furniture mover in an effort to grasp the night's implications. Out went the sterile office desks, and in came a comfy couch and coffee table — an ersatz den lit by borrowed table lamps.

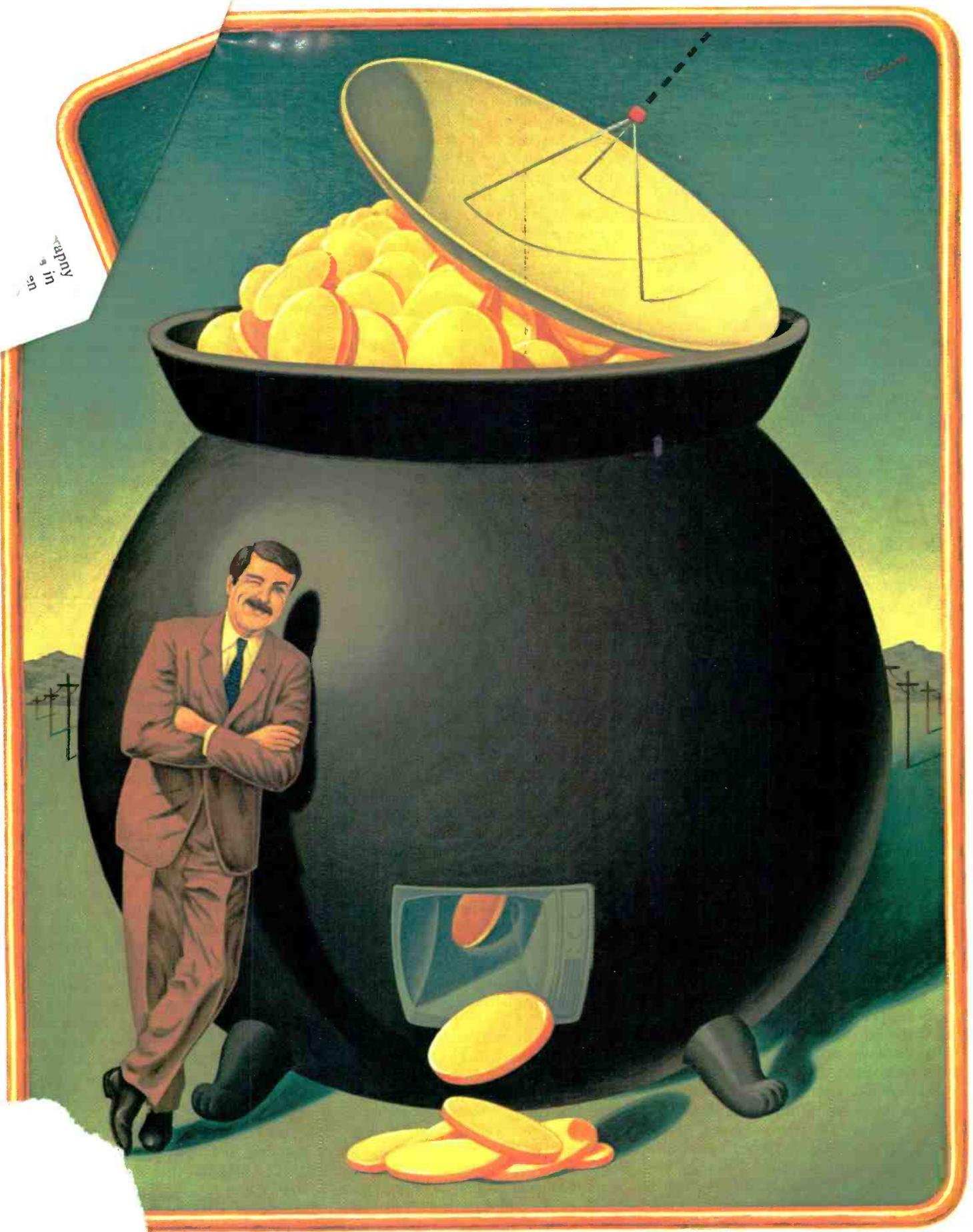
"I was trying to simulate a living room, I wanted to know how it felt." And living-room viewing felt, well, remarkable. "It wasn't just the lack of commercials or the first curse word. It was a new dynamic of the medium. That night I knew we had something significant. Something powerful."

Levin's glimpse that night of something powerful did not shake the world, or even the cable industry. Indeed, HBO was so undefined, and pay television was viewed with such wariness, that when the company urgently needed a program director, Levin aborted the talent hunt and assumed the job himself, adding it to his already cumbersome title — director of finance, administration, and transmission. Navigating those early days of HBO required a rather awesome repertoire of skills; it was a time when vision often counted less than a talent for prowling through facts and figures. There were tariffs to calculate, microwave routes to plot, gloomy projections to refute. And into this swamp of detail Levin waded with poise and patience. "There were days when lesser people would have jumped out a window," Munro remembers. "But Jerry wasn't a screamer or table-banger. He hid his emotions very well. I still find his coolness remarkable."

Praise befitting a true Time Inc-er. Up in the nether reaches of corporate headquarters, where a modest manner and solid managerial grasp denote character, Levin is much admired for his lack of fanaticism. "Jerry lives and breathes video twenty-four hours a day," says Robbin Ahrold, an early Levin cohort, now HBO's public-relations chief. "But he's not the kind of guy who's here at

Jonathan Black is a contributing editor of Channels.

Illustration by John O'Leary



six every morning and leaves at ten at night. He's not a compulsive. He's not *obsessed*."

An obsessed personality would not have survived the endless series of critical decisions that marked those nascent years of HBO. Though some mistakes were tolerable, cushioned by Time Inc.'s uncommon marketing power, Levin steered a remarkably error-free course. As programming architect he was quick to see that if pay television had a future, it had to crack a powerful habit structure, prolong a viewer's attention span, and offer unique fare not available on commercial television. He recognized early the limited grab of regional sports, and keyed HBO to movies. (Later, with bucks and clout, he would engineer another major shift, from feature films, over which Time Inc. had little control, to homegrown non-movie material—entertainment specials.) As marketer, Levin took the appropriate "high road" approach, positioning HBO in an insular, quality slot.

AND HOW would HBO charge its subscribers? All other pay-programming experiments had toyed with pay-per-view. Ever a keen observer of the American living room, Levin realized that few viewers could cope with a buying decision every two hours, and conceived the monthly subscription service. And it was Levin, faced with another crucial fork in the road, who chose the correct path in developing HBO's relation to affiliates.

Of two basic options, the more obvious one was to lease channels from cable operators, and maintain control of installation, service, and marketing. For a corporate giant like Time, it was tempting to consolidate power high on the thirty-fifth floor. In the early 1970s, however, the wired nation still resembled a medieval fiefdom, with each cable-operator prince in his own domain. These were prideful pioneers, and Levin knew not to disturb their sovereignty. Better to go the second route: Leave the key marketing decisions to the local man who knew his audience and territory best. Build a partnership, not a hostile landlord-tenant relation. The choice wasn't as evident as it seemed. An early HBO competitor, Optical Systems, went the other way and was soon gone from the business.

In forging the HBO affiliates network, Levin was a thoughtful strategist. And he was no less adroit at the critical task of selling HBO within the company. "He was incredibly persuasive when it came to obtaining funding here," says N.J. Nicholas, Levin's handpicked programming chief, who later succeeded to the

HBO chairmanship. "He was evangelical, but he always put *numbers* beside his exhortations. That was key. How many businesses don't exist because the guy with the great idea couldn't sell it?" From the start, Levin's exhortations left a vivid impression on Time management. Munro can still recall his first presentation: "Here was this guy talking about something and no one even knew what he was talking about. But we were all overwhelmed, awed. When the meeting was over, Andrew [Heiskell, former Time chairman] pulled me aside and said, 'Who was that guy?'"

Encountering Levin today, it's not hard to see why Heiskell left the meeting scratching his head. Levin's single idiosyncrasy—a moustache, too bushy to fit any corporate dicta—belies his lack of flourish. Indeed it's this lack of flash that makes him so curious, and so credible. There's no cheap showmanship about the man, no florid pretension or hoopla. Perched a bit stiffly on his office couch, he begins, even before a question is asked, weaving a devilishly seductive argument for the Video Group's current pet project: made-for-pay-television movies. Levin sees these as filling a gap, or as he puts it, "an aperture." Network television films are fine but limited—assigned to a \$2 million budget, limited by built-in commercial breaks, and geared to television stars. Theatrical films, with their huge budgets and vast promotion, must rely increasingly on a kiddie audience. Between the two, Levin infers a "lost theatergoing public," adults hungry for serious fare. A recent Arbitron study found that families—not just cable subscribers—go to fewer movies. They stay at home. Enter HBO, the premiere pay service that some think tops in quality and diversity, and that now must maintain its Number One rank with *programming*—which is, incidentally, a major source of revenue for the Hollywood film studios. Next year, cable and video film rentals will account for \$500 million—almost half the \$1.2 billion in annual revenues from domestic theatrical rental of films. Uttering such phrases as, "The critical mass is now there in terms of revenue-bearing potential," Levin moves from demography to distribution to philosophy with the ease of a man whose brain neurons seemed to carry extra charge and capacity. It's a case that he states so confidently, and with such level-headed fervor, that one quickly forgets that the yellow-brick road from broadcasting to movies is strewn with such warm corporate bodies as CBS and Westinghouse. Didn't *The Great Santini*—solid fare—flop at the box office only to be reborn on HBO? Levin suddenly makes it seem

quite possible that HBO could rescue television from the crunch of network tripe and bloated audio spectaculars. "I never can't have a conversation with Jerry, I didn't learn something," says from a conversational figure. I assume you HBO's at-encyclopedic reading... "He

How did a Renaissance literateur, to crack the highly competitive, corporate temple of Time Inc.? W little fanfare. Though Levin's biography is remarkable for its frequent lurches, career, he is one of those enviable men who seem to have intuited a secret path, whose every twist and turn leads, inevitably, to that satisfying station they'd quietly plotted all along. Born in Philadelphia in 1939, Levin grew up an avid sports and movie buff, toyed with an engineering career, "but always knew I wanted to be in business" (with those predispositions, HBO might have had him indentured right then). Majoring in philosophy and biblical literature, he graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Haverford College, attended the University of Pennsylvania Law School (he was note editor of the *Law Review*), then joined New York's Simpson Thacher & Bartlett—the prestigious law firm that, coincident with the show-biz glimmer in Levin's eye, represented Paramount Pictures and several cable companies. Roy Reardon, a senior partner, recalls Levin with the familiar litany of praise and respect: "He was extremely smart, a superb lawyer. He was more of a generalist than most and could have moved in any direction. Confident but never pushy, a real gentleman. There was very little bullshit about him."

AFTER FOUR YEARS with ST&B, deciding he wanted to "switch from law to management," Levin signed on as staff counsel with the Development & Resources Corporation, a consulting firm that works extensively in developing countries on projects ranging from engineering to public health—not the detour it seemed. Even a year spent in Iran, where DRC built a dam for the shah, served Levin well during the early years at HBO: "It helped that I wasn't intimidated by technology. After all, the movement of electrons isn't that different from the movement of electricity."

In 1971, having risen to become manager and chief operating officer, Levin gathered his troops and took direct aim at Time's conscious decision. Mr



TV had always been my avocation, so I decided to get into the business on the cable side. I was friendly with some people at Madison Square Garden who put me in touch with [Sterling Cable's] Chuck Dolan. Our first meeting convinced me that I had to give it a shot."

During the next few years, Levin's friends often fretted about his chosen target—and with good reason. There were times when HBO seemed doomed, and pay television an idea whose time had not yet come. In 1973, HBO had planned a promotional gimmick for the National Cable Television Association (NCTA) convention—a clock that would tick off the hourly gain in subscribers—but the idea was scrapped when Levin realized subscribership had begun to decline. Later that same year, Levin took a rare vacation, knowing he'd have to return to the building with a close-out plan. Happily, subscribership crept up, but by the

of 1975, HBO could count just a thousand homes in only four of the unmistakable smell of the Time Inc. video fiasco. In the future of television as at Time Inc. sold their

stations in Denver, Indianapolis, San Diego, and Minneapolis to McGraw-Hill, only to see the industry revive, and watch, red-faced, while McGraw-Hill made a bundle. Displaying a similar knack for bad timing, Time invested heavily in cable—just before cable hit its dog days in the early seventies. By the mid-seventies, HBO threatened to bomb as badly as another Time video goof, Hotelvision, and doubt on the thirty-fifth floor seemed terminal. "I despaired of the thing ever taking hold," remembers HBO's Ahrold. "I just didn't think it would go."

Where it went was up on "the Bird"—and the idea totally reversed the fortunes of both HBO and the cable industry. Or, as Levin modestly demurs: "We've never had a totally original idea here. It was the linkage, putting two disparate ideas together." That linkage was the marriage of HBO to RCA's Satcom I satellite.

In retrospect, the satellite decision looks inevitable. HBO circa 1975 faced a technological barrier to growth in its reliance on a cumbersome relay of microwave hops. To continue building a terrestrial network would have proved highly expensive and, with its stress on regional

hubs, would have thwarted the national promise that meant so much at Time Inc. Explains Munro: "The risk-reward ratio sort of screamed for a satellite."

MAYBE SO. But the risks were still considerable. Merely by renting one Satcom I transponder, Time Inc. was gambling \$7.5 million on precious few subscribers—and the rent would have to be paid whether ten viewers, or ten million, signed up. Satellite technology itself was still relatively untested: Prior to HBO's venture, use of the Bird was limited to single transmissions (from London to New York, for instance), whereupon the signals had to be distributed via land lines. Would blanket transmissions work? Would enough cable operators invest in enough earth stations? (Only two existed in 1975.) What about tariffs? It was no man's land. And perhaps the most dangerous pitfall lurked at the Federal Communications Commission. To this day, Levin wonders why the networks never bothered to file an FCC objection to HBO's application, a delaying tactic that might soon have proved fatal given HBO's rocky finances. So give Levin credit for selling the thirty-fifth floor, so effectively that Munro now calls it a "prudent business decision."

And give Levin credit for pitching the scheme to UA-Columbia, the cable system in Vero Beach, Florida. "Why did he come to us? I don't know," says Robert Rosencrans, UA-Columbia president. "I assume he thought we'd be most likely to understand the idea. He probably thought he could get a quick decision."

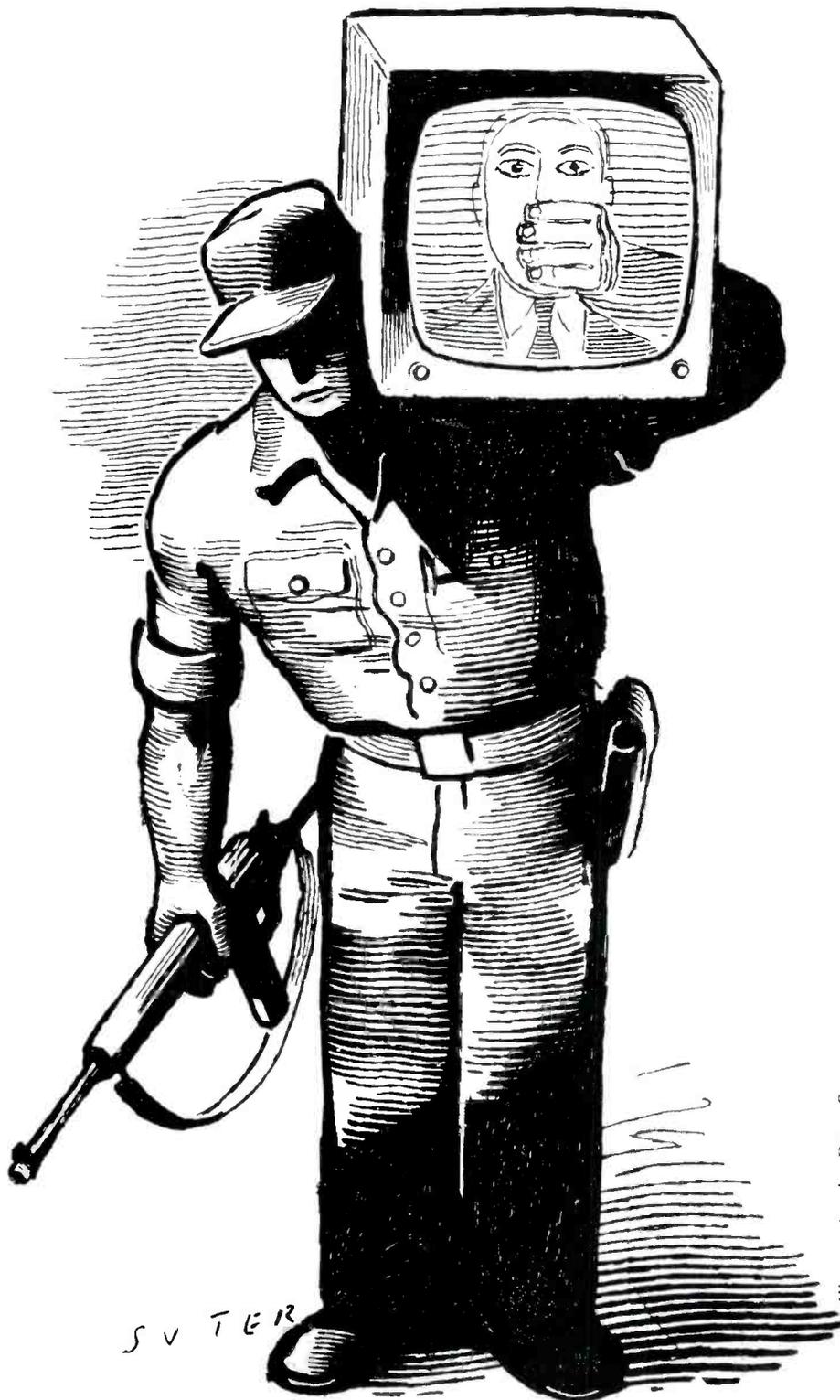
Quick was an understatement. Levin called Rosencrans Friday. On Monday morning Rosencrans called him back. Two weeks later, Levin was able to walk into the 1975 NCTA convention and announce that HBO had a cable operator to take the service and would be up on the satellite September 30. Remembering that epic announcement, a rare shiver of emotion thrills Levin's voice: "It was the compelling nature of the idea, its ripple effect. The impact was palpable, you could feel it, taste it..."

That ripple effect began to make the going easier. On September 30, the 12,500-mile feed of the Ali-Frazier fight in the Philippines was truly a "thrilla from Manila" for a cable industry that had lost its spark. At Time Inc., the Bird turned HBO from a publishing empire's poor stepchild into a favorite son. With the simultaneous signal beamed from Satcom I, HBO could finally claim itself a true video network—a vision even Henry Luce's

(Continued on page 70)

The Tug of War in Israeli Television

by Milton Viorst



TELEVISION IN ISRAEL is different from television elsewhere. It provides news and entertainment, of course, but it is also an instrument for forging a new state and society, which Israelis endlessly define and redefine. Inevitably, it is a factor in Israel's continuing struggle with its Arab neighbors, and Israelis argue constantly about television's role in a country living in a permanent state of siege.

The focus of most of the argument—largely because he is handy—is Tommy Lapid, director general of the state television. No one says Lapid is unprofessional. He came to television after a long career as a newspaperman, but has proven himself surprisingly adept at budgets, contracts, scheduling assignments, and the other paraphernalia of television administration. It is agreed that he runs the company with a sure, decisive hand. But Lapid has a talent for getting people angry at him, which, in Israel, may simply be evidence that he is doing his job.

When he first took office in 1979, Lapid shifted some department heads around, suppressed a program of political satire, established new rules for covering conflict with the Arabs—and immediately became the object of cascades of criticism from the liberal left for suppressing free speech and making broadcasting a tool of government policy.

Yet during the election campaign last spring, he was roundly denounced by Prime Minister Begin and the ruling Likud Party for authorizing "anti-government" broadcasts. At one cabinet meeting Begin asked angrily, "Can such a thing happen in a democracy?" to which Lapid snapped back, "Only in a democracy can such a thing occur."

Tommy Lapid, whose real name is Yosef (or "Joseph," as he prefers to see it in English), was chosen by the Begin government to replace a Labor appointee. Though the post of director general of the Israel Broadcasting Authority is nonpolitical by law, no one expects the stricture to be taken too seriously. Lapid, who was managing editor and a political columnist for the daily *Ma'ariv*, points out that he was never a member of Begin's party, but he had been known as a strong nationalist who took a consistently hard line in dealing with the Arabs. For the new prime minister, that was enough.

When Lapid assumed his post, Israeli television was still reverberating from controversy over *Hirbet Hiza*, a play that examined atrocities committed by Israeli soldiers against Arab villagers during the

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Illustration by Dave Suter

War of Independence in 1948. Produced by Israeli television, the play was broadcast only after a furious battle was waged within the government, the press, and the television establishment itself. While no one denied the truth of its message, the play struck at some of Israel's most cherished myths. In questioning the justice of Israel's cause in relation to the Arabs who lived on the land, it exposed some of the most sensitive nerve endings in Israel's social body.

Supporters of *Hirbet Hiza's* presentation argued in behalf of artistic integrity, of open-mindedness, of national introspection, of free expression, of ethical sensitivity. They declared that Israeli television must not be made to serve the interests of the status quo.

When asked what he would have done, Lapid says he would not have authorized the play's airing. "A hundred years ago, you Americans conquered the Indians," Lapid said recently. "Now you are at a stage to rethink the issue, with all the magnanimity of victors paying due respect to the victims. But what Israeli TV did in showing *Hirbet Hiza* was to praise the Indians while Custer was still fighting. This is overdoing it. What if American television showed how nice the Japanese were just after Pearl Harbor, before the Battle of Midway? This is the kind of stupid and suicidal generosity that we cannot afford."

Lapid at fifty is a husky man whose deep facial lines communicate a lifetime of struggle. Born in Yugoslavia, he spent World War II in the Budapest ghetto and arrived in Israel in 1948. After a legal education, Lapid turned to journalism and earned a reputation, first as a tough and tenacious reporter, then as an ambitious editor.

"I have been credited with coining an expression," he told this reporter recently, "which perhaps I don't deserve credit for, but which I believe. It goes: 'Israeli television must be objective without being neutral.' That means, in the struggle between Israel and the Arab world, Israeli broadcasting is not like an umpire in a soccer game. We play on the Israeli team. This follows the tenets established by the BBC in World War II. We never try to hide the gravity of a situation or mislead the population, but at the same time, we never pretend to be neutral in our concerns."

In many areas, starting with its organizational structure, Israeli television has looked to the BBC for guidance. Israeli broadcasting was originally under the prime minister's authority, but in 1965, responding to public clamor for depoliticization, the government established the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA), modeled on the British system. It is run by

a thirty-one-member plenary, which makes policy, and a seven-member board of governors, which oversees day-to-day operations. Responsible to the board is the government-appointed director general, who serves a five-year term. The budget, which last year was about \$36 million, is determined largely by revenue from licensing fees people pay to operate television sets, although the government provides an annual subsidy. As in any state agency, politics necessarily plays a role in policy considerations. But when the government commands unreasonably, the broadcasting authority, under a 1965 law, does have enough autonomy to fight back.

"We are influenced by the British in more than our BBC structure," Lapid said. "We are also heavily influenced by British, and American, constitutional ideas. Our journalists, who are fiercely independent, have absorbed the values of the British and American press. Naturally, the government is unhappy that it cannot tell us what to do, and we are not free of pressure, but we have succeeded in resisting it.

"Still, you must remember that what we are talking about here is not just television but *state* television. Our obligations to the country are greater, and different, from those of American TV networks, and even from the privately owned newspapers in Israel."

THE DIFFERENCES are spelled out in the broadcasting law and in the policies adopted by the plenary, which enumerate obligations on the part of the broadcasting authority not just to the Jews of Israel, but to the Jews of the Diaspora and to Israel's Arabs as well. They require the IBA "to give expression to the various attitudes and opinions current among the public," which has been interpreted to apply to the country's diverse religious sects. They impose on the broadcasting authority the duty to deepen attachments to the principles of Zionism.

Earlier in Israel's history, when the spirit of pioneering still dominated, television was considered inconsistent with these principles, too frivolous a diversion from the mission of building the Jewish state. But after the Six Day War of 1967, it was decided that television could serve to influence Israel's new Arab population and bring more vivid news to the encircled Jews. Gradually, the Arab emphasis diminished (though Arab-language programming remains important). But news remains television's dominant fare.

A look at an average week's schedule illustrates the range of obligations assumed by Israel's single television chan-

nel. Every day, the time from 9 to 5:30 is taken up by educational programming, which is followed by two hours in Arabic of news, films, and features. Regular programming in Hebrew begins only at 8 P.M., often with a fifteen-minute rabbinical sermon. Most evenings are filled with panel discussions, American movies, soaps, and sitcoms, an occasional sporting event, news feature, or cultural presentation, and finally the *Almost Midnight* news show with which the channel signs off. Most Israelis regard their television as heavy and a trifle boring, and demand for one or more new channels is growing. But few Israelis miss *Mabat*, the half-hour news program at 8 P.M., which has a nightly audience of 70 percent of Hebrew-speaking adults and in the course of a week will reach more than 95 percent of that group.

'Our TV is not like an umpire in a soccer game. We play on the Israeli team.'

"The news programs are our most important responsibility," said Professor Reuven Yaron, chairman since 1978 of the broadcasting authority's board of governors, and thus Tommy Lapid's titular boss. Born in Vienna fifty-seven years ago, he is known as a right-wing intellectual with longstanding ties to Begin and his party. According to him, "Practically everything has to retreat before our duty to report what goes on and to provide information and knowledge."

Yaron says that shortly after Begin was elected, Israel Defense Forces chief of staff Rafael Eytan declared that the broadcasting authority should disseminate nothing that would "bring pleasure or comfort" to Israel's enemies. Yaron acknowledged the right of the army to censor military information, suggesting that in fact it was in television's interest not to have to decide questions of military security. "But if we are to be guided by what is pleasing to the enemy," he said, "the long-range price would be paid by the Israeli public, in creating a fool's paradise. Israel must live with events as they take place." Yaron, then recently appointed to his chairmanship, rejected Eytan's demands forthwith.

Yaron noted that Israeli broadcasting had lost credibility during the Yom Kippur War of 1973, when it falsified reports of Israel's early defeats. "Under the circumstances," he said, "I don't think any country would have allowed full disclosure. Even the attachment to truth cannot be absolute. There can be an overriding consideration, like the need to avoid wide-

spread panic, the need of the nation to survive. Israel's defenses seemed to be on the point of collapse, but we reported what the military censor told us. But the Israeli public was accustomed to the truth, and we wound up taking the blame." Last summer, when most of the people in the border town of Kiryat Shmona fled from the attack of the Palestine Liberation Organization's rockets, the government once again tried to varnish the news, Yaron said, but Israeli television reported what had happened down to the last detail.

Yaron said that, like Lapid, he opposed the showing of *Hirbet Hiza*, since it served no purpose to rehash an unpleasant thirty-year-old event. He supports the recently implemented rule requiring television reporters to obtain permission from IBA management before interviewing Arab dignitaries. "We broadcast the news, but considerations of public policy are more complex," he said, explaining that if they were newsworthy, he would report the statements of an Arab leader and even rebroadcast an American television interview of PLO leader Yasir Arafat. But he would not send an Israeli crew to interview Arafat or other Arab leaders, he said, on the grounds that to do so would serve the Arabs' ends.

"We discuss Israel's relations with the Arabs at great length on TV," Yaron said. "We entertain a wide diversity of opinion. But the need for dialogue can be satisfied without giving offense to groups within Israel. Furthermore, I am guided by a strong desire not to have the medium that has been put in my hands used against Israel. After all, it is beyond our rightful sphere to advocate policies contrary to the national consensus. Television should follow the national consensus, not push it."

Haim Yavin, an outspoken, longtime television journalist, dismissed much of what Yaron said as nonsense. He has worked with Israeli television since it began in 1968, serving as correspondent at home and in New York, as editor-in-chief of the nightly news, director of television news, and chief anchorman of *Mabat*, the principal evening news show. He was also part of what Begin's Likud Party characterized as the "leftist Mafia" that ran Israeli television, and when the new regime took over, Yavin—who by law could not be fired—was moved into a low-profile production job. He claims that Lapid's widespread shifts of personnel neutralized the most creative people in Israeli television.

"Likud said we were not being Jewish enough, or patriotic enough," Yavin commented. "They told us we should not depress the people with bad news, or

show so many Arabs on the screen. As head of the broadcasting authority, Yaron would like us to cultivate the hawkish mood of the country. But if you serve the Likud's policies in dealing with the Arabs, can you say no when they want you to promote their economic policies? It's a totalitarian concept of TV. They argue that we do propaganda for the PLO. I think we should not do propaganda either for the PLO or for the government."

Yavin spoke with satisfaction of Israeli television's "two-minute-fifty-second strike" in November 1979, which protested Lapid's refusal to broadcast a segment of a press conference by a West Bank Arab mayor. Lapid declared that he would not allow the mayor to justify PLO terrorism over Israeli television. Yavin argued that the incident was being televised throughout the world, and that ironically only Israelis were kept from seeing it. In protest, the television news department blacked out the screen for the length of the segment.

YAVIN CONTENDS that the Begin government is pressing for the total politicization of Israeli television, though he conceded that Lapid strongly opposes the move. "But Lapid is the victim of his own policy," Yavin said. "There is no half way in the independence of journalism. If you consent to one sort of censorship, it's hard to resist another."

"We are different from most nations, whose identity is tied permanently to the land," Yavin explained. "If the French or the Germans or the British take themselves for granted, they'll still survive. But Israel is an *idea*. We started in a storm of debate and discussion, and that's how we will go on. The entire Zionist movement is a big *beit ha-midrash*, a house of debate. We must go on thinking, and television's duty is to put provocative things before people, to have them think. When we stop thinking, we're finished."

Tommy Lapid scoffs at Yavin's contention that ideology is what separates the two of them. He contends that before he arrived, Yavin and friends ran Israeli television as their personal fiefdom.

Until he stepped in, Lapid says, television reporters were interviewing West Bank mayors almost daily, because they said controversial things and made good theater. Not only did the mayors regularly declare their support of the PLO, but in Arabic they insulted Arabs who gave any support whatever to Israel. Lapid invoked the rule that future interviews could be conducted only with his personal approval. When the mayors are interviewed on television these days, there has to be a

legitimate news purpose.

Recently, Lapid has also been involved in an angry battle with the Begin regime over television coverage of economic policy. Finance Minister Yoram Aridor accused economic reporter Elisha Spiegelman of deliberately distorting facts to the government's detriment, saying he would never again allow Spiegelman to interview him. "I checked the complaints," Lapid said. "I didn't stand up for Spiegelman blindly. But I found that his reporting was objective—unpleasant to the government and not without fault, but objective." Lapid refused to assign another reporter to the economics beat, and notified the government that if the finance minister wanted to appear on television it would have to be in Spiegelman's presence.

Whether the controversy arises on the left or the right, hardly a day passes without Lapid's defenses, counterattacks, explanations, and challenges appearing in the newspapers. He obviously thrives on the publicity, knowing that broadcasting law protects him from losing his job before his term expires in 1984. He acknowledges that his tenure fortifies him in the daily combat.

"What is quite amazing is the change in the public's perception of me since I took this job," he said. "I used to be considered the hatchet man of the right. Now I'm said to be the ally of the left. In reality, my position hasn't changed at all. It's only the public eye that has shifted.

"Of course, the pressures on Israeli television are relentless. In Russia there is no pressure because Russia is not a democracy; the government gives the orders on what TV is to carry. I am convinced that no country in the world faced with the danger we are would grant so much freedom of expression. If the United States were in a position of danger commensurate with Israel's, it would not—as your internment of the Japanese-Americans in World War II and your McCarthy experience illustrate—put up with such a high degree of freedom. I don't think there are many countries in which the minister of finance, who holds a large part of our budget in his hands, could get air-time only on the terms set by the television administration.

"I am convinced that, like the independence of the courts, the independence of Israeli television is essential to the freedom of this country. I haven't suppressed free expression on television. I can honestly say that I've cut out fewer items than the editor of any newspaper in Israel, or any other network like the BBC, ABC, NBC, or CBS. As long as I'm here, neither the government nor the radicals will take over TV." ■



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Seasons of the Private Eye

by Michael Wood

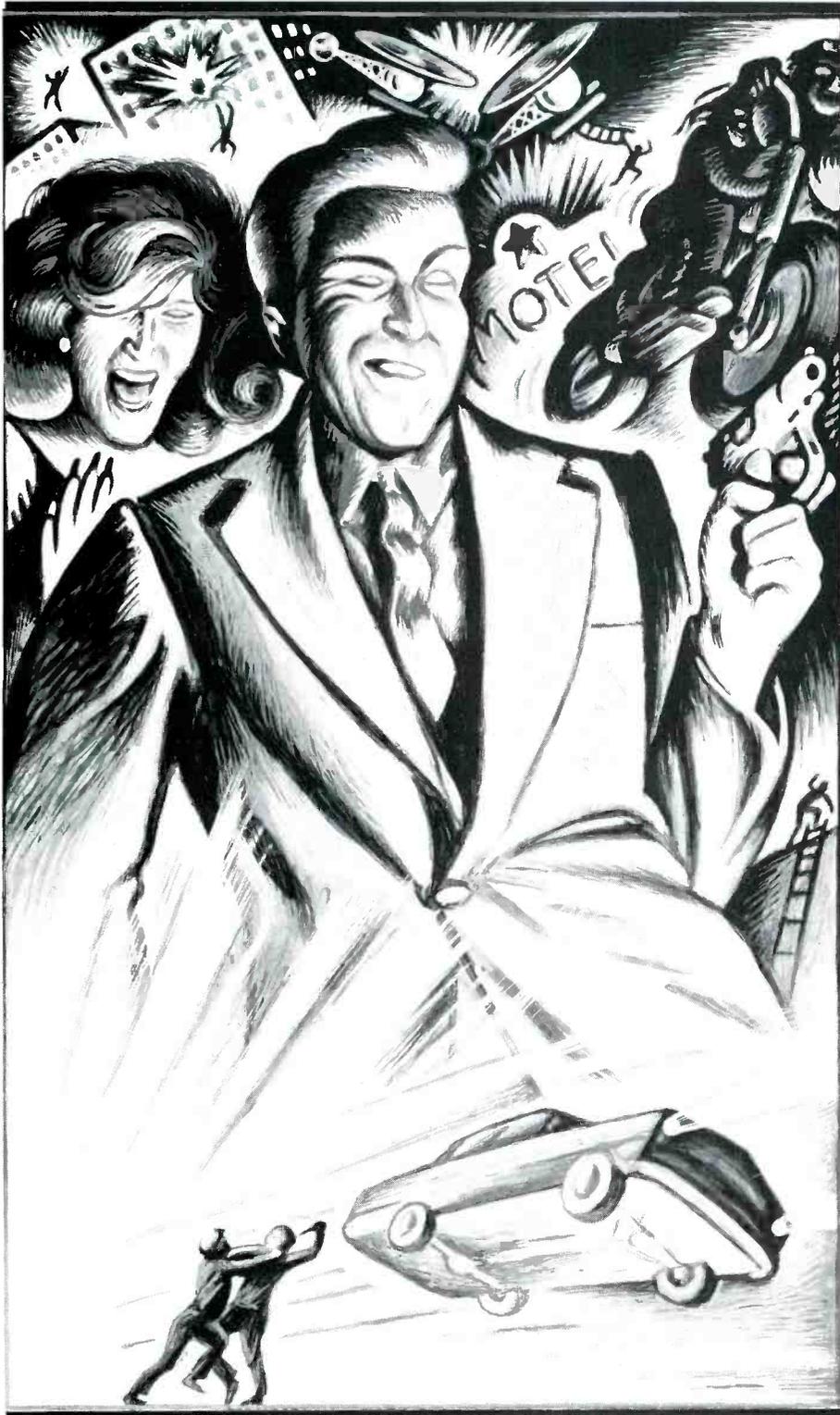


Illustration by John O'Leary

THEY HAVE A TIRED LOOK. Their eyes are heavy with the horrors they have seen. Their shrugs, grimaces, wisecracks, indicate a patience and wisdom that cannot be surprised. Yet they are not cynical. They never give up the struggle, and that is why we trust them, why we tune in again and again as they stalk assorted malefactors through hour-long segments of evening or late-night viewing time.

They are television's detectives, private and public: Kojak, Angie Dickinson, Rockford, Karl Malden, Baretta, Jack Klugman, Ironside, Peter Falk, Magnum, Rock Hudson and Susan St. James, Starsky and Hutch, Jonathan Hart and Stephanie Powers. I am lumping together current and canceled programs, as well as reruns, because that is how they appear to many viewers—well, at least to this viewer. Television has an interesting way of tampering with time, of turning dead and living shows into contemporaries.

I have also mixed performers and roles in the above list because I believe that, too, is part of how we perceive these characters. Many of the actors have screen histories. Karl Malden came to *The Streets of San Francisco* from the badlands of *On the Waterfront* and *One-Eyed Jacks*. Jack Klugman's puzzled, dogged *Quincy* is shadowed by his earlier, amiable, disorderly contribution to *The Odd Couple*. And they both seem to bring their old problems with them. They have been here before. *Here* is on film, but in a country where the past has become scarce, any sort of history begins to look like a treasure. Think of all those nostalgic "roasts" now infesting prime time. Celebrities choke themselves on memories, and we weep along. These people remember yesterday, when movies were movies (never mind what the world was like), when men were men and women were June Allyson.

Not all television's detectives are weary and wise. *Charlie's Angels*, with or without Farah Fawcett, glisten with innocence and hair-softener, and bound into every new scrape with a perfect confidence that

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Television's enduring detectives nourish our hope that character can prevail over evil and bureaucracy.

their writers cannot fail to rescue them. But the Angels are not *real* detectives — not in the sense that Kojak or Rockford or Columbo are. The pleasures of watching this program have nothing to do with adventure or the trailing of crooks, and everything to do with looking at these radiant, springy, not-quite-human women, pages of *Vogue* shuffled into the semblance of a story. The show has come to fitful life only when one of the Angels has fallen in love — usually with a charming, rugged bad guy, a man who has stepped out of the other half of the fashion plate. The Angels are just romantic heroines in flimsy detective drag, strays in a kingdom of half-hearted crime.

The Harts are another exception — but they *are* real detectives. They win out by wit and charm rather than patience and wisdom — and they never look tired. Their style recalls films like *The Thin Man* or *The Lady Vanishes*, where crime always courted comedy and was a form of mischief rather than menace.

There is — or was until last season — a third series, offering an even trickier exception to the rule of weariness. Robert Urich, in *Vega\$*, is a shrewd, quick, private eye. And he's not tired either. He is surprisingly fallible, though. Private eyes are always fallible and vulnerable, but Urich, alias Dan Tana, is vulnerable in not-quite-expected ways. He is not *ritually* wounded like Rockford or Marlowe or Lew Harper, whose bruising and bashing are some sort of ceremonial ordeal. Some of the most delicately shocking moments in recent television years have appeared on *Vega\$*, and Tana has been as shocked as we were. A strangler is on the loose, for example, and an old girl friend of Tana's is threatened. She is perky, appealing, and we are interested in her — in part because she has resumed her relationship with Tana. In older films and almost all television shows, this interest would be enough to save her life. She would be *nearly* killed: The suspense and the last-minute escape would be part of the package. In this episode of *Vega\$* she is killed, and Tana, busy, dry-eyed, desperate, mourns throughout the remaining forty minutes or so.

In another episode, a distraught father,

lumpy, touching, provincial, asks Tana to find his runaway daughter for him. Tana does, and the father, with the faintest changes of expression and intonation — wince turns to sneer, whine becomes threat — reveals himself as the evil leader of a gang that is after the secrets the girl has stolen. Tana was taken in, and so were we. Only the girl, haunted, terrified (and pregnant for good measure), sees at once what Tana has done. Of course he mends matters before the show is over, and even delivers the baby, but I can't think of another fictional detective who is allowed such a lapse. Sam Spade's slips, Rockford's constant bungling, Philip Marlowe's incessant stumbling into ugly ambushes, offer nothing like the potential for damage to *others* provided by Tana's error.

The single most interesting change in television detectives in recent years is the tremendous increase in the number of policeman-heroes. Tana, Rockford, Marlowe, Harper, Harry O, and a few others are private detectives, while all the rest are policemen (one is a policewoman). Angie Dickinson a cop? The dancing girl who made such sly, irreverent fun of Sheriff John Wayne in *Rio Bravo*? *Police Woman*? The very title would hardly have been thinkable in the fifties and sixties. A new show called *Strike Force* makes its appearance this season, and *The FBI*, which *was* thinkable in those distant days, has returned with a face-lift. Police detectives are nowhere near as vulnerable as private eyes, however ritualized this vulnerability may be; private eyes do not face the political complications — the superiors anxiously requiring premature results — that permanently afflict Kojak, Quincy, McCloud, Starsky and Hutch, and the rest.

We are worlds away from *The Fugitive*, and other earlier series, where the hero was an architect or a journalist, a solitary figure deriving no support from a deluded system. We are worlds away too from the tradition of the old private eye, from Sherlock Holmes and the Saint to Marlowe and Harper, who are all impatient with the system, rattled by its delays, or scornful of its lack of imagination. Rockford and Tana, in spite of their differences, belong

to this tradition, and that is why their shows feel so nostalgic — Rockford is frankly, agreeably nostalgic, Tana secretly nostalgic, an old-fashioned type who has been attractively but only superficially modernized.

THE "PUBLIC" DETECTIVE (as distinct from the private kind) may be a new breed of hero on American television, but not all fictional policemen have been flat-footed foils to the brilliant amateur or freelancer. Mr. Bucket in Dickens's *Bleak House*, Wilkie Collins's Sergeant Cuff in *The Moonstone*, Margery Allingham's Inspector Campion, Simenon's Maigret, the heroes of Ed McBain, all testify to another tradition. It remains true, I think, that until recently, especially in America, the independence of the private eye, his *battles* with the police — even if they were only friendly battles of the kind Rockford repeatedly has with his pal Dennis — were an aspect of his virtue, a form of guarantee that the truth he finally discovered would be his truth (and our truth), not a version tailored to the needs of the rich and the powerful.

What is interesting, and encouraging, is that we have not given up our quest for this sort of truth — or at least we haven't given up watching people look for it on television. We have merely placed our bets, or most of our bets, on a different, less isolated hero. To draw the conclusion a little too crudely: We no longer believe, except in fantasy or nostalgia or parody, that the vulnerable, unattached individual can find out what we want to know. Our newer heroes maintain the independence of the old ones (who could be more stubborn, more loyal to his sense of authentic justice, than Quincy or Baretta?), but they do it against the intimate pressures of an entangled professional life. They don't get beaten up by the bad guys (or by the cops); they get scolded or suspended or fired by their bosses, who in turn are being harassed by the mayor or the attorney general.

The rise of the police detective on television has created the need for new gimmicks. Dennis Weaver's McCloud is a

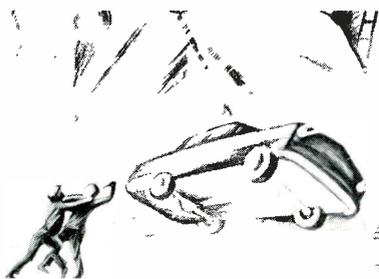
Texan in New York—a simple device, but one that works. Columbo is a policeman who makes like a private eye—shuffling gait, downcast look, scruffy raincoat and all. Quincy is a doctor, interrogating not criminals but corpses—or rather interrogating corpses that lead him to criminals. There have, of course, been repetitions. *Eisheid* was not a bad show, but Joe Don Baker did look like a stand-in for Raymond Burr, and the name of the program itself sounded like a painful mispronunciation of *Ironsides*. The producers of these series, though, have generally sought, and generally found, diversity. *Starsky and Hutch* are plainclothesmen constantly in fancy dress, hamming it up as carefree playboys on a Caribbean island, or as wealthy, arrogant gamblers penetrating an illicit club. Both David Soul and Paul Michael Glaser are gifted comedians; the series offers an interesting counterpoint to *Charlie's Angels*, the detective show that isn't, and to *Hart to Hart*, the show that flirts with sophisticated comedy. *Starsky and Hutch*, like *Hart to Hart*, is a detective show, but it always verges on slapstick: Starsky and Costello, let's say, or Abbott and Hutch. (It is for this reason that I was surprised by all the complaints about the program's violence. It is not violent; it is funny. What violence there is usually concerns cars—metal crashing into metal, or into conveniently placed walls. Can it be that we find violence to property more disturbing than violence to people? Or can't we tell the difference?)

The police, then, have an engaging, multifarious image on television. Robert Blake's Baretta looks like a delinquent kid who might run from Kojak on the street. Kojak himself, when he was only Telly Savalas, was invariably a snarling bad guy, the placid distributor of death and opium. This implies, I think, that there is no variation of style that television's imaginary police force cannot accommodate. Pluralism is the order of the decade.

What are we looking for in these shows? Detective stories—printed, filmed, staged, televised, recounted—are a special taste. Some people loathe them, and some people attend to nothing else. I can speak only of the latter group, those of us who would rather watch *Name of the Game* (time for a rerun?) than any number of games with names or numbers.

We are looking for *style*: fast music, sharp editing, crisp shooting, brisk dialogue. Detective shows are among the things American television does better than any other nation's networks. Comedy and drama, by contrast, are incomparably better on British television, and the big spectacle is better almost anywhere. We

are also looking for a reflection of our world: a place of cars, highways, high-rises, offices, slums, water coolers, coffee shops, bars, threats, and fear. Crime is always contemporary, even when its tone is nostalgic. The programs put out faint feelers in the direction of the seething social ills that are banished from all the happier shows. Or to say it another way, detective series are the least *stagey* of television shows. Even when they are shot in a studio, they manage to look as if they are full of streets. Above all, it seems to me, we are looking for *reassurance*—which is none the less satisfying because it is imaginary. If it were real, we wouldn't need to look for it on television.



The private eye preserves things we are afraid may be endangered, like decency and truth.

We have our forms of magic. Though we don't believe it will rain just because we enact certain rites, and we don't believe crime will go away just because Jack Klugman or James Garner has tracked a fictitious evildoer to his equally fictitious lair, these shows do present, week after week, remarkable triumphs over difficult odds. We may not be persuaded that delinquency doesn't pay, or that good must win. We *are* persuaded, however, that character is virtue, and that virtue is a mixture of tenacity and good fortune, a matter of hanging on tight until the lucky break occurs.

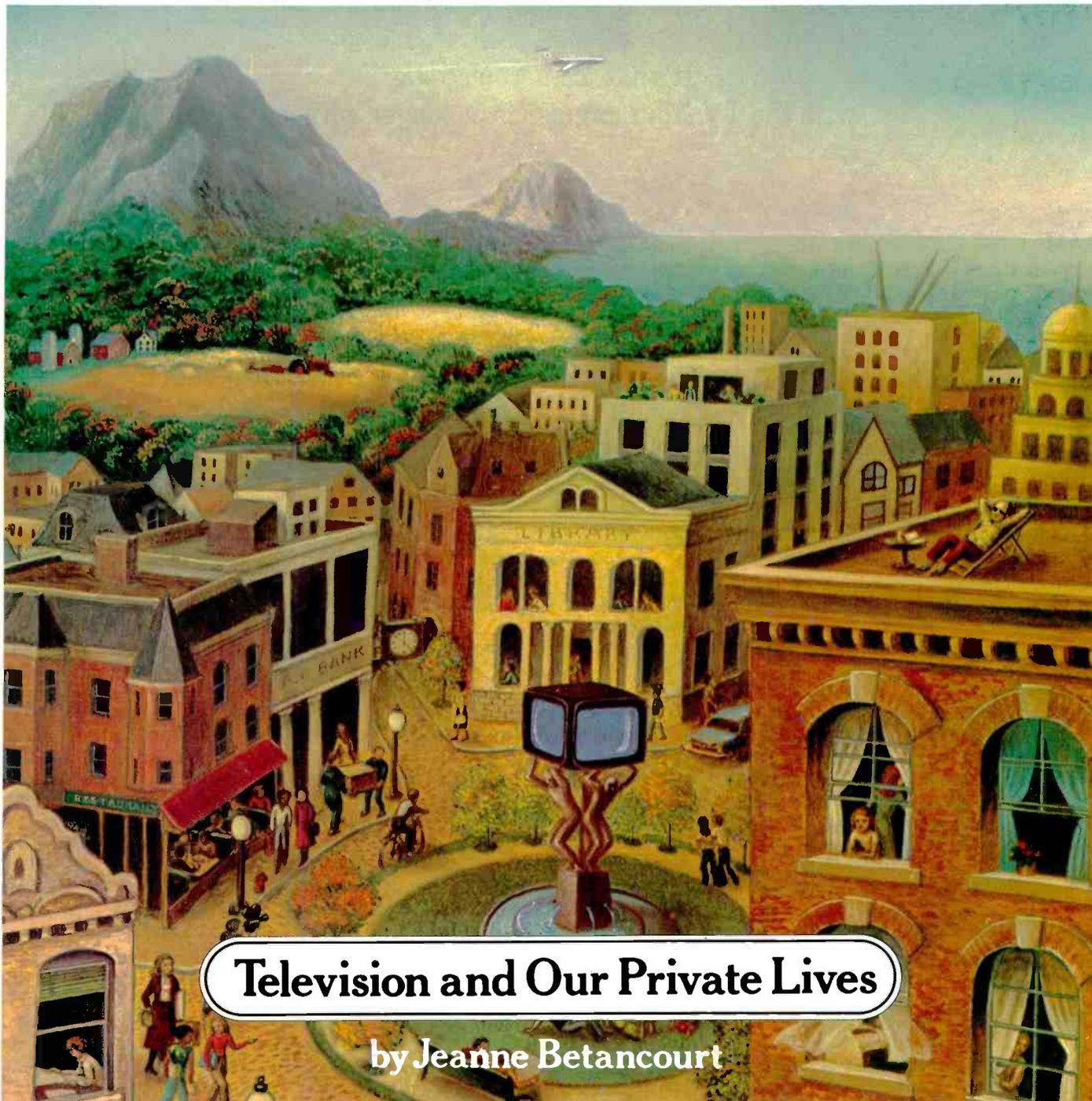
There is a serious difference between American detective shows (and films and novels) and English or French mystery writing. A mystery is a puzzle, a riddle to be solved by the sleuth and the reader, and its ultimate implication is a promise about the orderliness and intelligibility of the world. Among current or recent television shows, only *Columbo* makes much of this sort of appeal. All the other detectives are intelligent enough, of course, but their intelligence is not their chief weapon, and neither, finally, is their skill—or even their experience, in any practical sense. Their chief weapon is their stubbornness, their

unshakable honesty, in a word, their *character*. They conquer crime in show after show not out of ingenuity or guile, not because of what they know or because of what they can do, but because of *who they are*. Not to imply that the world is orderly in the eyes of gods and detectives: only that decency and persistence can make a dent in the power of those twin nuisances, crooks and officialdom. And this is why television's detectives are so likable, so trustworthy, so tired, and with one or two exceptions, so old. We have to know they won't crack or quit, and that they can count on their luck—that their luck too is part of their character.

The reassurance they offer is not a simple affair; magic is never simple. What they propose to us, by the sheer accumulation of their victories, is that honor and endurance really do get us somewhere—even in reality, perhaps. Or if we feel the need for a more skeptical claim, they suggest that honor and endurance can't do us any harm, and are worth remembering in case we ever run into them again. The world is not a better place for these shows, but it is less of an invitation to despair. Virtues that are demonstrated, if only in fiction, are more real than those never mentioned at all; just as named ghosts are less terrifying than unnamed, unnameable abominations.

In this perspective I think we can see the particular interest of *Vega\$*, and the continuity as well as the change represented by the influx of policemen into television. *Vega\$* plays with this reassurance, threatens to take it away, but always restores it. Kate Columbo simply couldn't provide it, and this perhaps was one of the reasons for the short run of her show. She was an ordinary, pleasant woman whose character gave no indication that she was bound to win the fight, and whose vulnerability was just that: awful, terminal vulnerability.

As the sixties faded away, we fell in love with law and order, and the crowds of policemen on television—the fact that they *are* policemen—expressed and continue to express that love. That is obvious enough and dreary enough. But the variety, and independence of mind, and appeal, of most of these policemen, express something older: a sense that the detective, within the system or outside it, is always different, always alone, always a rarity—which makes him valuable to us. Not because he represents some extravagant, ornery old individualism, but because he preserves things we are afraid may be endangered, like decency and tenacity and truth. The detective is not exactly a fantasy or even the fulfillment of a wish. He is more like the disheveled embodiment of a flickering hope. ■



Television and Our Private Lives

by Jeanne Betancourt

THE FLY-OVERS." That's what the American audience is called by television insiders — the network executives on the East Coast and the program producers out West. The term comes from the now-famous observation by a network president: "The public is what we fly over." Its currency is an admission that the people behind the television tube scarcely know or understand the people who sit before the home receiver. That's how it has been for thirty-three years.

It is sufficient for the networks and their advertisers to know that more than 100 million people are watching television at a certain hour on Sunday night — half the coun-

try's population — and that 30 or 40 percent are tuned to a certain program. But who these people are, what television means to their lives, the part the medium plays in their personal rituals and family relationships — all are irrelevant in the business transactions.

With the aim of probing the television experience, I set out to gather oral histories from a range of people: a retired dentist in Florida, a professional basketball player on the road in San Diego, a twelve-year-old girl, a police officer, a building superintendent, a secretary, a Harvard graduate, and others. All explored their personal relationships with this home appliance that speaks but won't be answered back.

What these people reveal, as the ratings never can, is the astonishing intensity and variety of our relationships with television.

Jeanne Betancourt, contributing editor of Channels, is the author of SMILE!, to be published this spring by Knopf.



'It's like Zen. You're one
with the TV. Your anguish is no longer with you.'

JAMES, 27, is a journalist. He is a graduate of Harvard and spent one and a half years teaching and writing in India. He lives alone.

I DIDN'T have that many friends when I was a kid so I had TV instead. When I was fourteen I'd be home alone on Friday night when I should have been out getting my braces locked with some girl's. If I hadn't had TV I probably would have moped around.

We used to watch TV every Sunday evening with my father. He would lie down on the living room floor sort of spread eagle. My brother would lie on one arm and I would lie on the other arm. I don't remember anything about the shows, I just remember the sort of experiential qualities of it.

TV was nothing like my life. And I didn't expect it to be like life. TV was my mythology. It was never a source of information for me. It was entertainment. But I wouldn't go to it to learn about the world in any purposeful way. And to this day I can't take news on television seriously.

By the time I was a junior in high school I became a voracious reader. When I got to college my life picked up and I tapered off my TV viewing to the point where I just stopped watching altogether. It always struck me as being a natural transition. You're not a kid anymore and you read books.

Now I watch on Sundays. I sit in front of a TV all day so I can watch football games. I watch baseball games during the week sometimes, but outside of that I watch very little television now. Since everything on TV is aimed at fifteen-year-olds and I'm not fifteen anymore, there's very little for me to watch. I'm a backslider like everybody else and there are moments when I think, "Ah, I'll just turn on the TV," and I start watching one of those TV movies. After, I think, "You dope, you just wasted two hours watching some mediocre movie."

One of the really wonderful things about television, wonderful and horrible, is that if you really like lowering your body temperature, like a frog in a refrigerator, you can sit in front of the TV. As long as you can really dissipate your conscious-

ness into that TV, you're not there. It's like Zen. You're one with the TV and your thoughts of anguish are no longer with you for those several hours. It's done that for me, I know. Books may give me great pleasure but they don't absorb me in quite the same way. Plutarch is never going to make you feel that sense of blissful non-awareness that television brings. Television is the world's biggest inducer of rest.

The value of TV as a source of nostalgia is down-played. There are times I'm with people I don't know, and because of TV we have something in common. It's shared history. There are many episodes of many shows that people I talk to remember as well as I do and we can sing those songs, and talk about those shows, and suddenly we're reveling in all the wonder that is childhood.

Television to me was a constant provocation of wonder. And because of that I think I'll never regret any of the TV I watched.

KAREN, 16, lives in Sacramento, California. Her father is a computer typesetter and her mother teaches English in the small Baptist school that Karen attends. There are two other children in the family.

WHEN I WAS about five years old I mainly watched cartoons and then all the regular shows. As I got older I watched the reruns in the afternoon. Sometimes I'd just stare at it. I don't know if I really understood what was going on. It was just an interesting thing to look at it. My mom said that whenever us kids watched a lot of TV we were really ornery to her.

When I watch now I'm really selective. Real easygoing shows are okay—*Little House on the Prairie*, stuff like that. I used to watch *M*A*S*H*. Mainly my sister really liked it and she got me hooked on it. But now I don't appreciate the language and stuff on there. I'm a Christian person and it just bugs me when they cuss and cut each other down. It's funny, it's humorous, people laugh; but I still think it puts that same critical spirit into your values and other things.

I hate soap operas. I've seen one, maybe two, and I think they're gross. I can hardly hack it with the immorality and stuff. One lady I know got hooked on them so bad that she was getting real emotional in these people's problems and getting totally wrapped up in their world. Finally she looked at herself and said, "This is dumb. What am I doing this for?" She's really a fantastic lady, but still she got hooked on them.

I disapprove of all the messed up lives on the soaps. You know, living together, divorcing, stealing people's husbands and wives. It just makes a madhouse. People say, "That's what life is like." But who cares? It gets more accepted because it's on TV. I think it's ridiculous.

When I have things I need to get done and I'm sitting there watching TV I feel stupid. I get hooked on watching because I get interested in the programs. Then I feel guilty. Life on TV is fake. It doesn't help me cope with my life at all. There's a really important thing that's not shown on TV. That's the family unit. You can think of maybe two shows where the family's together. The others are divorced families or people living together who aren't even married.

I watch *Old-time Gospel Hour* and stuff that's really interesting to me. I appreciate Jerry Falwell and what he's doing. His show reaches elderly people who can't get out. It's good to keep shows like that on the air and keep improving them. I'm concerned for other people. And I'm concerned for America. People are what America is, each person individually. If TV could be used to reach each person the right way, it would really straighten things out around here. If we had the right things on TV we could brainwash them the right way. You could make the family stronger than what it is now. Taking the shows off the air makes it easier for people who are hooked on them.

I'm a Christian person and I really love the Lord and I love to serve Him. I want myself to be right. Then I sit there and listen to people on TV cuss and cuss and cuss. What comes in must come out. So I have to guard myself more than I would ever have to because of TV. If I'm exposed to physical, sensual, wrong immorality, it will much easier come out of me than if I never was exposed to it.



Quite frankly, I wonder sometimes how widows were widows before television.

MARTHA, 59, has been widowed for 16 years and lives alone. She is an assistant librarian at a suburban university. She earned her bachelor's degree three years ago.

TELEVISION has been very positive for me and I get very annoyed with people who pooh-pooh it and feel it's bad. It's so fabulous. There's a lot of junk on TV, but it's still such a miracle.

In the evenings as soon as I walk in the door, I turn on that TV in the living room just to have sound in the apartment and also to get the news. I'll watch TV while I prepare my dinner and often while I'm having it.

I enjoy the interview shows. It's a way to keep up with things and be with interesting people, people who are making the news, who are important. I don't socialize as much as I used to and I miss the interesting dinner conversation that I used to have. This way I can choose my company.

I find that I get involved in some of the movies on Home Box Office. I promise myself I'm not going to watch because they're so terribly violent and unnecessarily so, but somehow you get involved. Then I'm always sorry after because I've watched nonsense.

On Sunday I watch Robert Schuller's *Hour of Power*. I started over two years ago when I was going through some very hard times and was very discouraged. Schuller has a very upbeat show. He's really more of a philosopher and a psychologist than a theologian. I've written away for some of his books. Every now and then I send money. I'd really like to send more. His philosophy is, you've got to have a goal. "Inch by inch, everything's a cinch," that sort of thing. It probably doesn't sound very sophisticated, but it helped me. People on interview shows have helped me too, like discussions on living alone and widowhood.

You know television has made me more tolerant. For example, of homosexuality. I really never had contact with homosexuals. Discussions about it on TV have enlightened me and made me more tolerant and understanding. Now, if homosexuality happened in our family, I would not

consider it that devastating at all. I would be much more compassionate and understanding.

I very much enjoy watching the tennis matches on television and feel I can always learn something to improve my game. Shows like *Meet the Press* help me to meet the politicians. You see and hear them. I appreciate the color television also. It makes such a big difference. For instance, if I ever happen to be home when the soap operas are on I just enjoy seeing the décor of the different rooms. I find them kind of pleasant—the color and clothes and décor are so beautiful.

Quite frankly, I wonder sometimes how widows were widows before television. Especially if you're on a limited income, as I am, and you can't go out to the theater and you can't go to concerts and you can't go to many things. TV is a marvelous, marvelous entertainment.

I watch TV because I thoroughly enjoy it. I'd be very lost without TV, very lost without it.

HERBERT, 10, is in the fifth grade in a New York City public school. His family is Puerto Rican and he is bilingual. He has a 5-year-old sister.

ON SCHOOL days I watch TV for around two hours because I have to do my homework. I watch for half an hour before I go to school in the morning. On weekends I watch three, four hours a day. On Sunday I watch a little TV in the morning, but then I have to get dressed and I go to church.

I was around six years old when I started to see TV. I liked *Star Trek*. I like the way they act in the spaceships. They destroy planes and it's real exciting. I like when Spock touches somebody with his hands and they fall down. I like the *Dukes of Hazzard*. I like the cars and the policemen when they crash together.

I like *That's Incredible!* I like when they showed that man who had no legs. And he could still walk. And he could still box with those short legs. And there was this man who had one arm and he still boxes with one hand. I felt sad watching

that show because that guy had no legs and one with no arm and maybe they'll be that way for the rest of their lives. It was exciting too, because they know how to defend themselves.

I like the Fonz from *Happy Days* the best. I like the way he goes "eh-eh-eh." Sometimes I act like I was him. He's cool. He has a cool jacket.

My mom's always around me saying, "What's the matter with you?" and "Do you want to go out?" If she wasn't around the house I'd feel kinda sad. We're most of the time together watching the shows. Like, if I was watching a karate movie, my mother screams 'cause she likes the way they hit each other and kick, you know. It's real fun like it was happening right here. I like acting too, like doing karate and things.

I watch baseball with my dad. Then sometimes we play baseball together and sometimes my cousins come too. I play in the park and in school. When you play sports you run or you're doing exercise keeping your body in shape, but when you watch TV you always have to stay there and stare at the TV. Sometimes you could get tired. Your eyes hurt.

When I stop watching TV I feel like I want to keep on seeing it. Watching TV is a lot of fun. But when my mother, she tells me sometimes we have to eat, I say, "Uh-uh. I don't want to eat." And she says, "You gotta eat, right now." I feel like saying, "Man, I want to keep on watching." She says, "No. When you finish eating you go and see it." But I know when I go back the show will be finished. Then when I eat I don't feel like eating. Sometimes she gives me a chance and she says, "You can eat later."

Sometimes I say to my little sister, "Why don't you watch TV instead of playing? Cause on TV you can see a lot of different things and laugh." Sometimes she'll say to me, "Let's play dolls," and I don't like playing dolls. I tell her to watch TV.

I read like one, two times a week. I sit down with a book and read for an hour or two. I like to read books like *The Black Stallion*, *Superman*, *Dynamite* magazine. In a book you understand more than on TV. On TV they talk fast and you might not understand. When you read you understand what you read. Reading is much



'We have more arguments related to watching TV than to any other thing in our lives.'

better. You read it to your own self. You don't have to hear nobody talking about it.

If we didn't have TV anymore I wouldn't be learning in school. I'd be too sad. It'd be like bad. I would feel, well, sad all over my body because there was no more TV. And you can't see your favorite TV shows anymore. And it feels bad.

I talk with my friends about TV. You know how they do bad things and nasty things and incredible things on TV that nobody never done before and it's real fun. Then in school we say, "Did you see that? That was real nasty. That was bad."

When I grow up I wouldn't use TV too much. I would go out.

MARY, 42, is a research physiologist. She lives with her husband and their two children in New York City.

DENNIS and I were married several years before we had a television set. We got it because we wanted to watch the Watergate hearings. That year, 1971, there were several interesting programs on, like *War and Peace* and *Upstairs, Downstairs*. It seemed that each night there was something we were dying to watch.

Now, sometimes Dennis and I use the television just for escape entertainment when we're too exhausted to do anything else. Then we'll watch just anything—though recently I vowed I will never again watch *Three's Company*.

Television has affected our sex life to the extent that there may be some nights where we stay up watching television, then just go to sleep because we're tired. If we had gone to bed earlier we probably would have made love.

We didn't have TV when Vanessa [twelve] was little. She's never been that much involved with TV compared to her brother, Timmy, who was born in 1972 and had a TV by him from day one.

Timmy feels that television is a part of his life and should be a part of his life. He's a terribly intelligent child. He gets straight A's and spends an enormous amount of time drawing, but still he doesn't think anything of watching TV for four hours in a stretch. He will sometimes

walk into the house and before he takes his coat off, turn on the TV. If shows he might particularly want to see aren't on, he'll watch something else. It turns out in our family if I really want to punish him, the worst thing I could do is say, "You can't watch television tomorrow." It's a real deprivation. TV evidently fulfills something. But it bothers me that he's glued in front of it. It infuriates me. In fact, we have more arguments related to watching TV than to any other thing in our lives.

The content of the shows that he and Vanessa watch is fairly innocuous and conventional. Perhaps he's getting a view of a part of life that he doesn't see in his own environment. It's interesting to me that he watches reruns of *Sanford and Son* and *Good Times*, which he really likes very much and which he tells me are "ghetto" programs. We had a black housekeeper who died at Christmas who he was absolutely devoted to. He loved her in the way he would love his grandmother, even more perhaps. Maybe these shows give him some sort of insight into black life that he craves and doesn't get from any direct experience.

I don't look forward to disks and video recorders. We are talking about getting cable for better reception, but I don't like thinking of my life surrounding this television set. I like to go to the theater. I like to go to films. I don't want to be held to the television. I don't like the world coming to me as much as I like to go out to the world. There is something nicer about going out and seeing it for yourself.

GEORGE, 74, is a retired dentist. He lives with his wife in Florida.

IWATCH TV a lot. In the first place, I'm retired; in the second place, I can't play golf or tennis anymore because of my physical condition. I'd say I watch three, three and a half hours a day. But to me, if you say a person watches TV for three, three and a half hours, I'd say he must be a nincompoop.

I'd play golf rather than watch TV, unless an important baseball game came on. But then what happened is the boys took a portable and put it on the cart.

I watch TV because I want to get my

mind off something. I'll flip it on; that's all. And sometimes good things do come on. I like *M*A*S*H* very much. I feel the way Hawkeye feels about things. If only I had his wit! I think all that crew is terrific. I've gotten very fond of Donahue because he's most unusual. He holds the people and he gets fantastic, intelligent audiences. He has a lot of things on sex. I find that I agree with Donahue on most things.

And then I always say that cartoons are the greatest in the world. I love their sense of humor. It's a wonderful teaching thing. But the ads between the cartoons are terrible. Those cereals with all that sugar. I, being a dentist, object to it.

We have three sets. Sometimes there're two things on that we want to watch. I'll bring the portable in from the kitchen and put both sets on so we can see two shows at the same time, the way the big producers do.

You know, first it was ridiculed and you were called a dope if you watched TV, but now it's become part of our lives.

BILL, 23, is center for the New York Knicks basketball team. He's married, has a small son, and lives in California.

WATCHING TV when I was little was a family thing. There were seven in our family. I'm right in the middle of six sisters. Instead of consulting *TV Guide*, you'd just ask any one of the kids what was on each station. In the morning, before school, I'd watch cartoons. After school we more or less watched the same shows.

I like the older type of comedies and the older type of westerns. When I was in college we'd sit around late at night and watch reruns of *Maverick*, and Sergeant Bilko. Then at 1 A.M. *The Honeymooners*, and then *The Rifleman*. We'd get up the next morning to play ball. We'd be tired, but we'd see our shows every night. It was great.

I'm a big soap opera fan and so are different players on the team. We sit around and talk about the different soaps. The first soap I ever watched was *Ryan's Hope*. I was home from school sick the first day it came on. I watched it those first



'When I get mad at my sister,
I try to make it feel like a soap opera.'

three or four days and then after that I started thinking, "Now what happened today on that soap opera?" I kind of followed it from there.

Everyone on the team gets into *All My Children* the most. We'll sit around and anticipate what's going to happen, like who's going to have an affair and just how they're going to get out of different situations. It's pretty interesting because we're usually right.

I'm probably aware of a lot more things from TV as far as things going on all over the world. You're able to see it right in front of you. But one thing bothers me about the way the news is presented. On one hand they'll be talking about all the crime on the East Side over here and a girl who got raped, and on the other hand, here's the sports and weather.

I use my video recorder a lot, mostly to tape my own games so I can see them and correct the mistakes. Also, I bought a whole set of *Star Trek* tapes.

I used to think when I was younger that when I was in for the night and watching TV that I was missing something. That if I went out that night maybe something would happen to me that would be really good. I think I realized later that I wasn't missing anything.

I don't think TV's bad. I think everyone has imbedded in them the rights and wrongs, what you can do and what you can't do, and I don't think TV has that much effect on anybody.

SANDY, 12, lives with her mother and her 15-year-old sister. Her parents were divorced when she was 2.

I USED TO WATCH night shows with my sister. We lived in Vermont when I was little. Most of the time I'd go outside and play. There were more things to do in the country.

When I was nine, I moved to New York. I'd get home from school and there would be more kinds of shows on. I would watch a show and then I'd watch the next one that came on, and just continue watching it. I'd say now I watch five or six hours a day. More on the weekends, because I stay up later.

About a year ago I tried to make my life

like a television show. When I get mad at my sister I try to make it feel like a soap opera and I'll say something and I'll storm out of the room. If I have a fight with my mother and I get really mad, a few minutes later I'll get sad and come in and hug her and say I'm sorry, real dramatic like TV.

In school I learn about math and spelling and things like that. When I watch TV I learn more about life. Certain shows teach you about life, like *One Day at a Time*. For example, it shows you how to handle telling your parents that you don't want to do what they want you to do. You have to make sure that they understand that you probably won't be happy with your profession when you get older if it's not something you want to do. It seems like the people on TV solve their problems easier than me.

Sometimes there are shows that I want to watch so much that I don't do my homework until the next day and I get up early to do it. Then when I go to school I'm really tired and can't keep my eyes open and can't think straight. Also, I don't practice my viola enough because I watch TV. I have to fix that.

When I'm fourteen or sixteen I figure I'll have stuff to do after school and I'll have a lot more homework and I'll get a job or something like that. I probably won't watch that much TV.

LUIS, 37, is the superintendent of a large apartment building. He lives in the building with his second wife and her two teenage sons.

I DON'T remember watching much TV when I was a kid. I was out on the street with the fellas, fooling around in the schoolyard. The other group of kids would go home and watch TV, do their homework, things like that. They were the sissy guys.

Now, I watch TV to relax a little. TV's better than it used to be. You got more programs, color, and remote control.

Sometimes I start watching TV and I ignore my wife and that gets her mad.

I'll watch baseball on a Sunday afternoon if I'm in the house. My friends and me will talk about baseball and make bets.

I've made five, six hundred dollars that way, just in one game.

The kids each have their own TV in their bedroom—two sets in the same room. One watches this and the other watches that. My wife watches her Spanish shows on another set. And I watch mine. We have four people in the house and four TVs.

If you really think about it you could pick up a good book rather than watch TV. But to pick up a good book you must like reading. Right? And concentrate. Where in watching TV you just relax and take it easy and everything is shown.

Sometimes a show makes me sad. Maybe some part of a picture where somebody gets hurt, or where this guy's been going out with a girl and he finds another girl and he lets her go, which is not fair. Or you see a film where you have a retarded person and others are abusing him. I just wouldn't do that, you know.

I would say world events have been brought to me better by TV than if I pick up a newspaper. You see actually what's happening. It stays in your mind more.

I went out of my way to buy a car product I saw on TV. Used it to clean the upholstery in my car. It actually made it look brand-new. TV advertising doesn't affect the food shopping. My wife doesn't buy food like potato chips just because she saw it on TV.

I got cable for better reception and for the movies. I've been meaning to buy a video recorder, not so much to record a program but mostly for the camera. I can go out and put myself on TV. If I have guests in my home I can record them, and later on, show it. Like I use my eight-millimeter camera, only you can see yourself on TV.

DIANE, 56, is a part-time secretary. She lives with her husband and 26-year-old son. Her daughter is away at college.

W E DIDN'T get a television set until I was twenty-two. Watching TV was something to do in the house besides playing gin rummy with your parents.

When I got married, we got a set right



'Whatever they're doing on TV,
they're going to do it on the street.'

away. We were home with the babies, and it was home entertainment.

I'm home two mornings a week. Then I watch quiz shows. The questions are delightful. You can get right in there and answer along with the contestants. I yell out the answers. I'm really crazy about words. The whole thing is fast and fun.

I can't get into soap operas. I can't see that they have any relation to real life and they're not written well. People fall in love and they break up in two months. They divorce and remarry. Romance on TV and real love are completely different. Love is a closeness you build up over the years. TV is a story.

As I get older, I don't relate to some of the new shows. The Donahue show makes me uncomfortable. I feel guilty that I don't want to watch it more, but he annoys me. They had all this business about homosexuals and lesbians, and they beat it to death. I'm still, deep down, one of those square, middle-class ladies.

If there weren't television, I'd probably get out more. TV's a temptation not to interact with the world. When I wasn't working, very often I'd stay in and watch TV. By the end of the day it made me feel that I was really out of it. I think it's the most isolating thing.

I read that people spend an average of six hours a day watching television and I can't believe it. Yet my own son and daughter spent that much time, particularly when they were younger.

I certainly would not want to be without television. I hope as I get older there is more on to watch. You can't go out by yourself at night. What else would people do? All those old people locked away at night because they're scared to go out on the streets. At least they have TV.

TIM, 38, is a police officer in a small town. He's divorced and lives alone.

ISERVED in Vietnam from 1963 to 1967. I went through a transition period when I came home. Television helped. I'd missed everything because TV was nonexistent over there. When I left, the miniskirt and go-go dancing didn't exist. When I came back they were all over the place. Television

was an education. I was fascinated with two programs, *Hullabaloo* and *Shindig*. I'll never forget those shows till the day I die.

Now, on an average I'd say I watch between two and three hours of television. Sometimes I watch with my friends, especially sports.

I have a video recorder. If I'm working I'll religiously record *60 Minutes* or *20/20*. I belong to a tape club. Three or four people I know have machines, so we swap tapes—sports, movies, porn. When there's a terrible night on TV, we'll watch tapes. I find it more enjoyable to sit home and watch a movie on my own screen than to go out to a movie theater.

Police officers talk a lot about television. Maybe it's because we work together so closely as a team—two fellows riding together hour after hour. For the sake of conversation one fellow will say, "Did you see this show last night on television?" You build a whole discussion around what you saw on television the night before. You'll start out usually talking about a show both of you have watched. Then you talk about a show he watched and you didn't. It's great, especially if you're following a series.

Kids today watch a lot of TV. You could say they're addicted to it. I find that boys twelve to fifteen are very influenced by television. They pick up the macho image, not so much from their friends, but from television. And the girls all want to look and act like Brooke Shields. Whatever they're doing on television, in the media, they're going to do it on the street. I know this from working with people.

TV doesn't really face reality. I don't see myself at all in any television program. Boy, I'd love to be able to cope with problems the way they do on TV. They can knock a problem out in twenty minutes or a half-hour.

I find television sometimes an escape from the hard, cold reality on the outside. For that hour you can lose yourself in a television program.

CHARLOTTE'S father was a pioneer in the television industry. She is 37, produces for theater and television, and lives alone.

WHEN I FIRST had a TV set in 1948. I remember I got this plastic sticky stuff we used to blow bubbles with all over the set. It took a long time to get it off. I think it was probably very hostile of me. It's like when my composer friend's son poured ink all over the piano keys.

I watched a lot as a kid. There was no limit on it. When I was a little older I'd do my homework, talk on the phone, eat dinner, and watch TV all at the same time.

The *Sesame Street* generation may grow up knowing how to learn from television, but I don't think that I could. I'm too used to associating TV with other things. If you gave me a quiz on the nightly news, I wouldn't score too well. I'm not used to concentrating on television.

Growing up as I did in front of a TV set, I had tremendous insecurities about reading. It was only recently that I realized that reading was something that you had to set aside time to do and not like television, which is wrapped around other activities. I know less about life because of television, mostly because I didn't read.

As I got older I watched TV less and less. I became very selective when I went into the TV business and very snobby about it.

Obviously television is an integral part of my relationship with my father's side of the family. It's been the cause of a lot of friction. For example, when I got old enough to figure it out, I was very angry at them because there was all this garbage on TV. I wanted them to do something about it, which of course they couldn't. I empathize with those people who kick in their TV sets.

I know that what television has turned into is not what my family had in mind, probably not what any of the people who started the networks had in mind. I don't mean that it's universally terrible. It's in sort of a vicious circle because it's a business and it does bring in profits.

TV is best when it's live. It's always been the live programs that affected me the most, even if it's entertainment like *Saturday Night Live*. It still blows my mind to know that something is happening at the very moment that I'm watching it and that I'm connected to millions of people who are having the same experience at the same time. It's magic. ■

Live! From Hutchinson, Minn.

Public-access television in this small town may look a bit ragged, but the people of Hutch have come to cherish it.

by Julie Talen

THE SNOWFLAKE POLKA blares out over the town square of Hutchinson, Minnesota. It's the Tuesday-night ice cream social, and folks have gathered to hear the Wally Pikal Band. Next to the bandstand, volunteers are serving seven varieties of homemade pie: rhubarb, cherry, blueberry, pumpkin, peach, and two kinds of apple. A slice with ice cream costs ninety cents. Most of the crowd is elderly, but off to the sides young families lean back on blankets, the mother with a tiny baby, the father wearing a hat advertising a seed company. Chubby blond children race on the sidewalks.

The only thing that keeps this scene from seeming straight out of Norman Rockwell's imagination is the auburn-haired young woman with a video camera hoisted on her shoulder, taping the event for the local cable-television system. The crowd gives her perplexed looks; one man waves. Just after the number where he plays two trumpets at once, Wally Pikal stops, yelling to the woman to tell the audience what time the tape will be shown. "Sometime next week," she yells back. "On Channel 7. Check the paper."

This is public access in a rural town of nearly ten thousand, in a town with fifteen blacks and 160 softball teams, where unemployment hovers near 2.5 percent, and where pedestrians wait on the corner for the light to flash "Walk" even when there isn't a car in sight. America doesn't get much more middle than Hutchinson.

Local access itself has a strong tradition in Minnesota, one of the few states to guarantee access channels and equipment for public use. Crow River Cable in "Hutch" (as it is called by anyone there for longer than an afternoon) offered a limited amount of public access when it began eight years ago.

Last year, Mickelson Media Inc., a Minnesota-based company with seventeen cable franchises scattered across the country, bought the system and decided

Julie Talen is a writer who often visits Hutchinson, Minnesota.

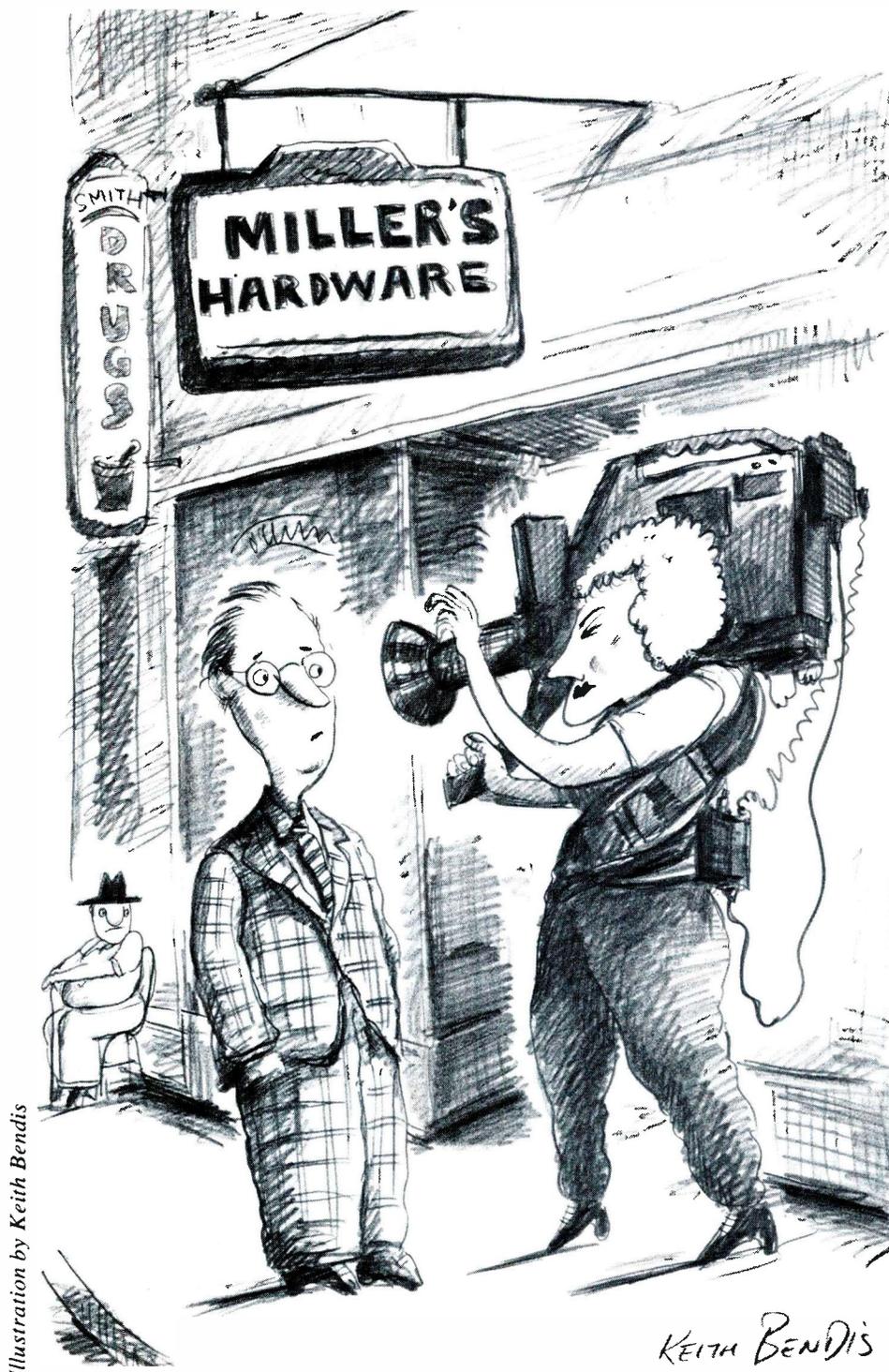


Illustration by Keith Bendis

to make Hutchinson a showcase for local-access programming. They hired Janet Wigfield, an outgoing and energetic former high-school English teacher, as local-programming director, outfitting her with \$20,000 worth of equipment—a noble sum by local-access standards. “Historically,” says Huburtis Sarrazin, the Mickelson vice president behind the idea, “local access has been a lousy investment, and it doesn’t even necessarily win franchises. But we look at it as a long-term investment—and I think it’s a really good one.”

Unlike such cities as New York, Hutch is not filled with scores of media-hungry wazoos ready to take to the airwaves. The number of genuinely “public” access shows, in the sense that a group or individual comes to the station and asks to put something on, can be counted on the fingers of one hand. None is particularly compelling—except, of course, to its

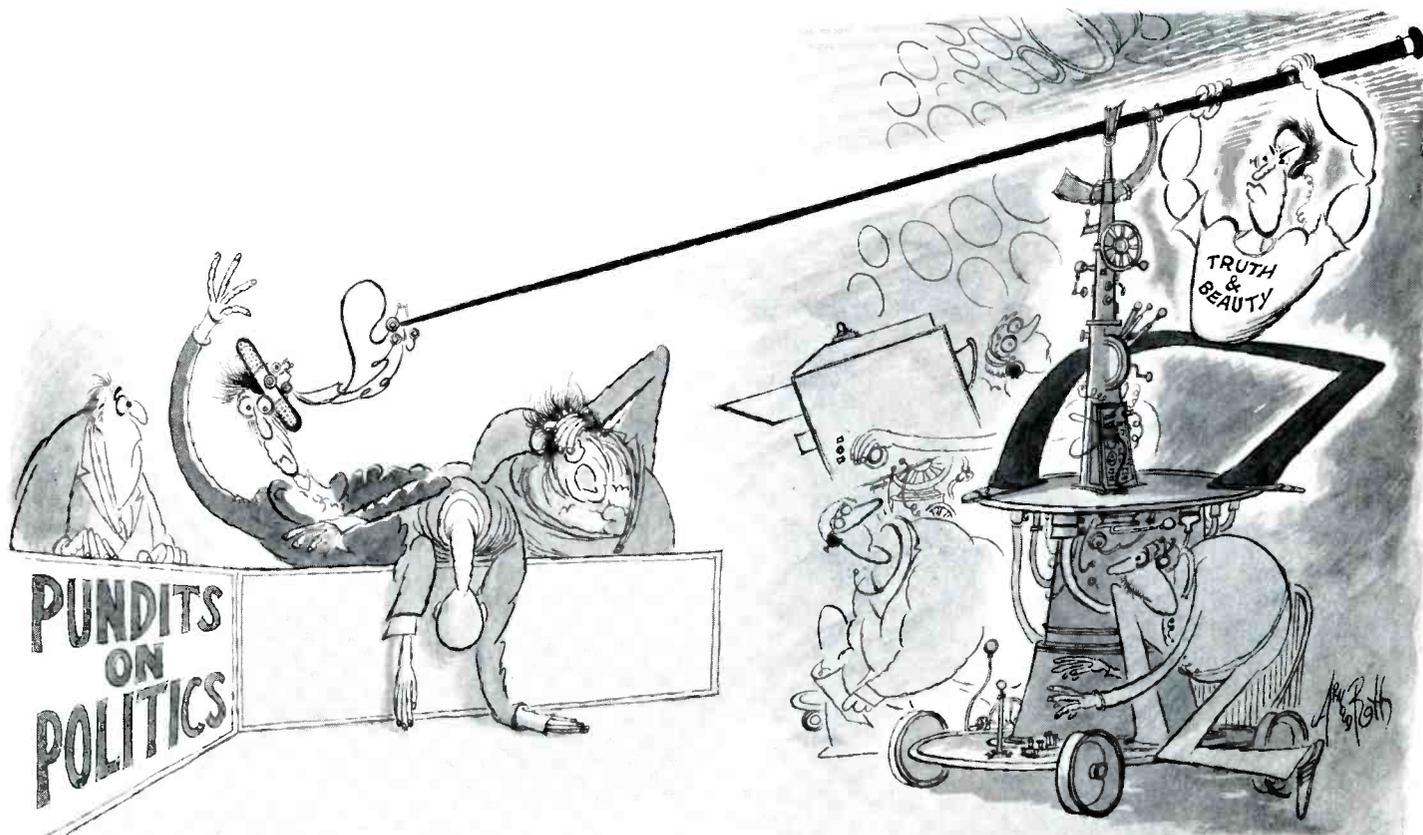
sponsors: The local Army recruiter offers *National Army Guard Presents*; there is *Hospivision* from the hospital, and every week the Downtown Retail Association presents *In Touch—Downtown Hutch*.

“I have to encourage people to use this,” explains Janet, who taught broadcast-production courses in her high school. “I have to talk plainly and say, ‘Of course you can do it.’” Even after eight years, the citizens of Hutchinson react to local-access programming rather like a tribe being presented with photography for the first time. Their response is part delight, part aversion, and a fair amount of indifference. The delight shows when a young woman, just off her shift at the 3M plant, tires of the Royal Wedding and flips the channels to find Mary Kay Cosmetics getting trounced in Youth Girl’s softball. Aversion becomes evident when a merchant on Main Street refuses to be on *In Touch—Downtown Hutch*, even though

it amounts to little more than a half-hour of free advertising. As for indifference, Janet suspects that more people see her lugging her equipment than actually watch the programming on local access—although, with no ratings to go by, the station can’t know just which of its 1,000 subscribers watch the access channel, or what they think of it if they do.

As Janet sees it, her job is to help interested citizens exercise their rights to cable. That often means interviewing a parade of personages from all parts of Hutchinson life: the cheerful, balding president of the safety council; a woman from Planned Parenthood; two women from anti-abortion groups, who want equal time after seeing the woman from Planned Parenthood. The historical society sends over the resident amateur historian with an hour-long film containing footage of Hutch in the first third of the century. A woman from the Minnesota

IN ARNOLD ROTH'S VIEW



Egg Council makes an omelette.

Most of them are stiff, awkward, uncomfortable in front of the camera. Some try to talk with fake casualness or the forced joviality they've seen on a thousand talk shows. ("Well, Dave, I understand you've got some new lines of lawn mowers here." "Yes, Dennis, I sure have.") They can rarely just be themselves. John Ball, a farmer elected to the school board, appears on *School Board Update*. His large hands fidget, his brow gleams with sweat. "My family's not from here," he says, staring uncertainly into the camera. "We came over from near LaCrosse in 1940, just after the Armistice Day blizzard. Some of you may remember that." When the taping is over, the farmer sinks into his chair with relief. "Boy," he says to the other school-board member, a dentist who has a patient waiting back at the office, "I tell you. I always thought that Johnny Carson was a real ding-a-ling. But he can't be any dummy to sit up there and talk like he does. This is *hard*."

To folks in Hutch, Channel 7 isn't local access, local origination, or public access. ("Public access?" one person asked. "Isn't that how you get your boat to the lake?") Channel 7 is being "on TV." No matter that the television audience plummets from several millions to whatever fraction of Crow River's cable subscribers feel like tuning in to Channel 7. "When your own hometown is on television," says a salesclerk at the Krazy Days sale, "well, that's pretty exciting."

NOT SURPRISINGLY, then, the best viewing on local access comes when Hutchinson dwellers are taped doing the things they'd be doing anyway: Krazy Days, the graduation at the high school, the Water Carnival (in this land of 10,000 lakes, towns make a habit of celebrating water), the bowling tournament, the school plays. The tapes on Hutch's local-access channel, like home movies, are watched and enjoyed more by the people who were there than by anyone else. Seeing the event "on television" repeats, confirms, elevates the original experience.

When the summer-school production of *The Jungle Book* was taped, its airing became a major local event. David Jopp, Janet's wisecracking, seventeen-year-old assistant, reports that his neighbors pestered him about when the tape would be

played. (His girlfriend's sister, he adds, had a part.) The mother of the leading actress invited guests over for a party the night of the showing. Another mom set up the home movie camera — no home video center here, at least not yet — and, if the kids stayed quiet, hoped to film the tape for posterity. And though only about a third of Hutchinson's households have cable, everyone seems to know a subscriber on whom he can impose when there's something important on.

Softball, dear to the heart of Minnesotans, is a vital part of Channel 7's programming. Most of us have forgotten, in this age of instant replay and multiple cameras, that a single camera strategically placed between first base and home plate can adequately, if inelegantly, cover the essentials of a ball game. That is especially true when the cameraperson herself is an avid softball player who loudly urges on the losing team from behind the camera, and has been known, on occasion, to tape a game and play in it as well. Bruce Erickson, the city's recreation director, provides most of the play-by-play and color commentary. (John McGrath, an assistant, helps.) Erickson has done so many games by now that he pesters Janet to buy him a special sports coat. "Howard has one," he argues. "I want one, too."

Twice a month, cable covers the city council meeting, from the opening prayer to the mayor's stifled yawn upon adjournment. Though few things can be as dull as a city council meeting taped in its entirety, even this will occasionally provide some lively viewing, as when the mayor and council, for example, had to defend their proposal for a new airport to a throng of heckling farmers. One farmwife, whose land would become runway under the proposed plan, came to the Crow River Cable office just to watch the broadcast of the meeting (the adjacent countryside is not hooked up to cable). "We're watching the *Mickey Mouse Show*," the ample woman announced to passersby, thoroughly enjoying herself while she hurled insults at the mayor from a safe distance.

A motley assemblage of volunteers helps Janet with the perpetual chores of packing, loading, setting up, shooting, and editing. Last summer, the crew members ranged from a gum-chewing fifteen-year-old from nearby Dassel to the seven-months-pregnant secretary at the chamber of commerce. Professionalism is

not the point; getting people to use the equipment is. "Part of what I have to offer," Janet notes, "is a free education." In fact, Janet wouldn't object if she worked herself out of a job. Ideally, local-access programming will someday see Hutchinson citizens taking over her work.

But no matter how adept the people of Hutch become at the craft of television, no one is likely to confuse Channel 7 with network television. For example, the chamber of commerce secretary, Mary Kappan, shoots the goodwill visits the group regularly makes to new businesses. On Mary's second taping, Janet neglected to tell her about the color filter. In the bright July sun, the subjects — an owner of a new gas station, a woman who opened a fitness shop — come out in ragged, intense blues and maroons. The result looks like something that belongs on the screen of a New York rock club.

Janet doesn't mind. "It doesn't need to be perfect," she says. "If you want people to write a letter, you don't ask them to be grammatically perfect, you want them to communicate. You have to expect swooping pans and a glimpse of the concrete every once in a while."

One July afternoon, a 3M worker trotted in off the street to suggest that Janet tape the Demolition Derby at next month's county fair. The man had only just learned of local access while reading the television listings in a recent issue of the local paper. "But I think all this local-interest stuff is a good deal," he said. Seeing how receptive Janet was, he added a plug for taping the upcoming Pork Chop Feed.

To Janet's delight, people are gradually catching on. That seemingly unbridgeable distance between network television and "homegrown video," as she calls it, has begun to lessen. Certainly something is happening when a local recreation director and a farmer on the school board suddenly feel they have something in common with Howard Cosell and Johnny Carson.

Back at the Wally Pikal (that's pronounced "pickle," by the way) concert, the pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church commented on local access. "Something is entertaining," he said, "when it's meaningful. And that's what makes local programming so entertaining — because it's so meaningful to the people who watch it." Tune in next week for the Pork Chop Feed. ■

Porn on the Fourth of July

As popular as it is controversial,
booming cable pornography
exposes America's split personality.

by James Traub

SOFT-CORE PORNOGRAPHY was just beginning its migration from seedy theater interiors to sacrosanct living rooms when Buffalo's cable operator decided to hop on the gravy train. After ten years of supplying the Buffalo area with the conventional fare of cable television — movies, sports, out-of-town programming — CableScope Inc. decided last spring to get in on the trend by selecting Escapade, a new "adult entertainment" programmer, as one of its upcoming offerings.

In order to push this audacious new product to potential subscribers, the company adopted a time-honored technique from the world of eroticism, the teaser. In March, CableScope offered a brief peek at Escapade to viewers of its regular channels. "Send your children to bed early tonight," the item began. It was nothing much, says CableScope vice president Dave Kelly, "a little skin, some violence, some foul language." But the ad didn't have quite the intended effect: Some Buffalonians, it turned out, considered sex on television an affront to their morals, an invasion of their privacy and, above all, a shock. Angry letters were written to members of the Common Council, the Buffalo city government; angry denunciations were made to the press. Even before the actual programming began to appear, Escapade became a local *cause célèbre*, and its merits were finally debated at an acrimonious four-hour public hearing. Nothing was resolved. "Maybe the teaser wasn't such a great idea," concedes Kelly.

CableScope's blithe salesmanship and the furious reaction of some Buffalonians are being echoed in cities across the country, as cable officials discover the bull market in sex programming, and angry citizens arm themselves against what seems to them an assault on traditional values. Both the availability of sex on cable and the protest against it are increasing at a terrific pace. Escapade now has well in excess of 100,000 viewers nationally, as does an even racier competitor, Private Screenings, which offers such titles as *Love, Lust and Ecstasy*. Neither is much more than a year old. And ON TV, another rival operating as a pay service through the ultra-high-frequency broadcast spectrum, has more than 570,000 viewers. Fancy hotels now routinely contract to show their guests films like *Virgin Prize* along with more conventional fare. At least \$60 million worth of X-rated video-cassette tapes are expected to be sold this year. And in what is surely the most striking omen yet of the vast market for televised sex, Playboy Enterprises Inc. and Penthouse, the diversified giants of the sex-and-fun industry, each bought into partnerships with adult-entertainment cable programmers last summer; Playboy now owns half of Escapade. "Give people a chance," says Stuart

Altshuler of Quality Cable Network, a group that distributes minimally pared-down X-rated films for cable, "and they'll line up in droves to see what we've got. People want sex materials. That's the bottom line."

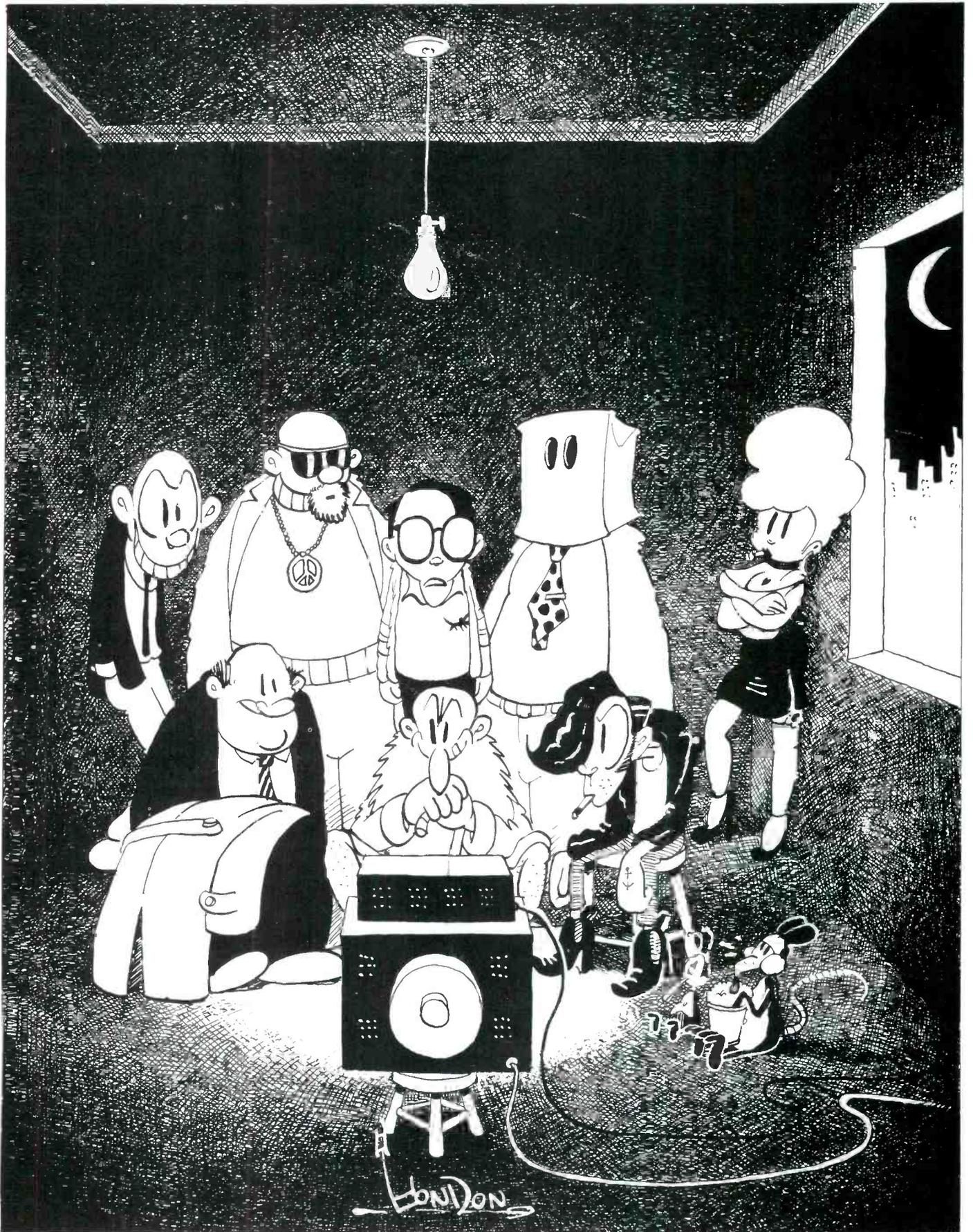
Is America really ready for sex materials? And beyond its impact on cable, what will be the effect of all this commonplace sex on our lives?

The gathering vehemence of the protest against such institutions as the public school system and network television, and the "progressive" values they appear to embody, is rooted in the argument that the apparent moral revolution of the last fifteen years has outdistanced a great many Americans, who will not line up in droves for sex "materials." As for cable, only a few years ago (in times that now seem prehistoric) it was touted as a revolutionary medium. It seems naïve today to hold cable to its original promise — that it would make technology serve democracy and let a hundred electronic flowers bloom — especially as the industry comes increasingly under the control of established media powers. Yet the sudden apparition of high-gloss sex, along with its palpable trail of euphemism, seems a particularly blunt reminder of the failure of this promise.

Sex has attained legitimacy on cable so swiftly that groups like the Moral Majority have lagged behind in orchestrating an attack upon it; but it seems reasonable to expect that the protest against "cableporn," as opponents call it, will only grow more vociferous in the future. Cities that do not yet have cable — and most do not — may become battlegrounds for this issue. In the upcoming competition for franchises, citizens groups can be expected to challenge would-be franchise owners on the issue of sex programming. A number of cities have been trying to write clauses into the cable contract prohibiting sexually oriented material. And some of the more conservative nationwide cable system operators have been speaking up for virtue, keeping sex programmers off their local systems, and disowning them as best possible where they do in fact appear. Though over at Escapade the optimism is unbounded, it is unclear whether almost all Americans, or almost none, will be able to watch *The Sensuous Nurse* in their living rooms in the near future.

Buffalo has already suffered from the kind of rhetorical and legal skirmishing now developing among municipalities, citizens, and cable operators around the country. Buffalo is not what you would call a liberal town. Like other cities on the Great Lakes, it enjoyed a heyday in the industrial boom of the first half of the century, and has since been in decline. A high percentage of senior citizens live in Buffalo, which is predominantly white,

James Traub is a contributing writer for Channels.



Catholic, and blue-collar. But along Delaware Avenue, just beyond the fringes of downtown, more and more of the dilapidated Victorian homes are being occupied by relatively prosperous young white-collar workers who may ultimately rejuvenate Buffalo.

PROSPEROUS young people, says CableScope's Kelly, form the constituency of Escapade. He should know. At thirty-seven, Kelly is president of the Buffalo school board and a pillar of the local liberal establishment. His views on television, like those of most cable operators, are *laissez-faire*. Standing up to his accusers on the Common Council during the tumultuous hearing last April, he said, "Are you going to decide what's moral? You want to talk about morality? You want to set standards? You can't set standards, because you don't represent the community." Who does represent the community? Kelly feels that's a moot point, because individuals should be able to watch whatever they want on television. Community standards should not apply.

A lifelong Buffalonian, Kelly knows the citizenry well enough to expect that Escapade might not be able to creep into

town on little cat's feet. "I anticipated some bullshit," he says offhandedly. He felt that with an election coming up council members would use the pornography issue for political capital, and that his enemies among local conservatives would use it in their drive to unseat him from the school board. But Kelly refuses to believe that any of Escapade's critics are genuinely offended by its programs.

James Likoudis, on the other hand, has a hard time crediting anybody who watches Escapade with any semblance of morality. As a board member and unofficial theoretician of *Morality in Media* of Western New York, Likoudis led the campaign against cableporn, speaking to members of the press, writing to council members, helping to build up the pressure that eventually led to the public hearing. Likoudis is middle-aged and conservative, lives in the comfortable Buffalo suburb of Williamsville, and describes himself as "a Catholic, a teacher, and a lecturer."

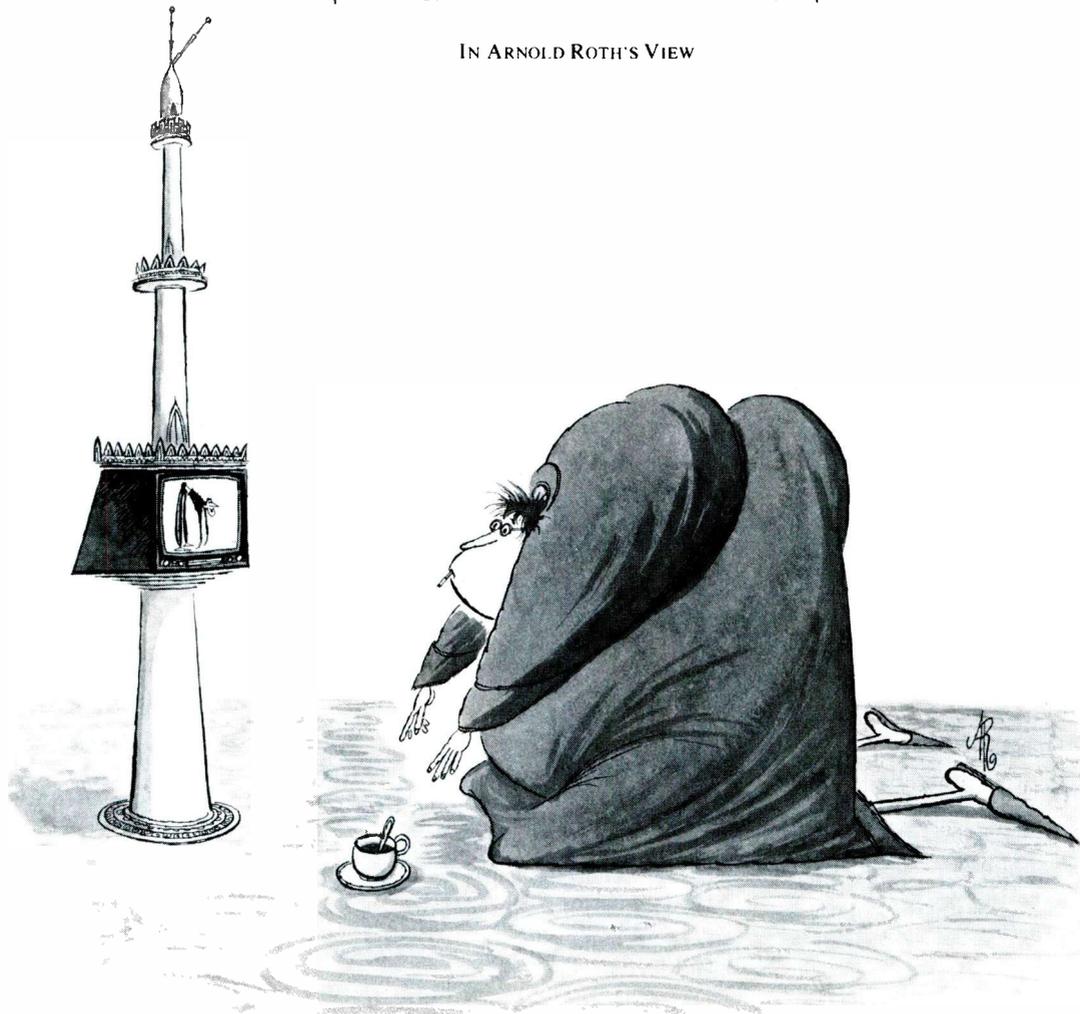
It seems no accident to Likoudis that Dave Kelly is the head of the school board. The same "subjectivism" that he feels now dominates and undermines the public schools has become the prevailing ideology in the entertainment industry.

Sitting amidst a forest of papers scattered on his floor and chairs, Likoudis pictures his struggle against pornography as part of a grander moral battle — between those who hew to the traditional values rooted in the Bible and the American past, and those "change agents" who, like Norman Lear and Phil Donahue, wish to "impose their lower standards on the whole community."

But don't many people enjoy erotic movies? Likoudis, suddenly the implacable Catholic moralist, retorts, "Many people approve of genocide." The same people who approve of pornography? Yes.

Violent rhetoric and intractable opposition have become common in our national discourse, but it seems clear that the issue of sex on cable will make its own special contribution to the widening gulf between those with "progressive" and those with "traditional" values. Though the Moral Majority and the Coalition for Better Television have not yet paid much attention to cable, *Morality in Media* has taken up the slack. The group has affiliates around the country and has been consulted in efforts to restrict the dissemination of obscene material on cable in Houston, Fort Worth, Milwaukee, St. Louis

IN ARNOLD ROTH'S VIEW



County, and Pittsburgh. A related group, the National Obscenity Law Center, has worked with state legislators to devise bills that would ban televised sex without, it feels, infringing on legitimate First Amendment freedoms.

While the opposition to adult entertainment has grown better-organized and more self-assertive, the identity of its purveyors has changed altogether. As cable sex has evolved from an act of rebellion to a growth industry, the amateurs and ideologues have been replaced by businessmen for whom the key word is respectability.

The new breed of cable-sex purveyor calls his work "adult entertainment" and is very clear about what is and is not kosher. Ernie Sauer of Private Screenings says, "We go as hard as we can," and offers titles like *Has Anyone Seen My Pants?* as well as *Gas Pump Girls*. But Private Screenings draws the line at those X-rated films that include penetration, and Andrew Fox, Sauer's lieutenant, insists on calling their goods "light entertainment."

The palm of respectability, though, clearly belongs to Escapade. Until recently the channel was offered in a package with Bravo, a highbrow culture channel. Gerard Maglio, president of Rainbow, the parent organization, is at pains to defend Escapade against charges of undue prurience. He is a strong advocate of "parental control boxes" to lock the set away from curious youngsters, and he points out that Escapade does not show its tapes in public at cable conventions. "People who know Rainbow," says Maglio from the edge of his seat, "know that we're not exploiters of anything. And now there can't be any doubt that we'll be within the boundaries of good taste."

NOW, IN FACT, Escapade has just become a part of the Playboy empire, the bastion of good taste in sex. The Playboy Channel will be *Playboy* magazine on the air, presumably competing head-on with the slightly less prestigious *Penthouse* channel. *The Sensuous Nurse* will still appear, but now it will be surrounded by talk shows, all kinds of earnestness, and such whimsical inspirations as a strip-tease game show.

Escapade did its best to persuade, or disarm, its critics in Buffalo. It commissioned a poll that asked cable subscribers, in a suspiciously leading fashion, whether they objected to legal restrictions on their choice of viewing material. It turned out that 96 percent did so object. Escapade also sent a company representative to the public hearing to speak up for its concern

about young people and its all-around integrity. The hearing didn't resolve anything, since city attorneys had already pointed out that New York state law prohibited restrictions on material offered through cable. (New York is one of the few states to have such a law.) It did give Morality in Media and other angry citizens an opportunity to air their grievances and to prove that they were not a tiny band of fanatics. James Likoudis claims that "people in Buffalo don't want dirty porno movies." But since there are at least as many subscribers to Escapade as there are members of Morality in Media, this would be a difficult claim to prove.

BUT THE PEOPLE in Buffalo have said neither "yea" nor "nay" to porno movies. It was the Common Council, presumably their representative body, that discussed the issue and conducted the hearing; in Buffalo as elsewhere, the city council awards and supervises the franchise, and stipulates its terms. Buffalo's Common Council, which consists of whites and blacks, liberals and conservatives, arrived at no clear point of view on Escapade after much discussion. Of the fifteen members, only three seemed to favor some sort of restriction on CableScope. Councilman James Keane was the principal spokesman for the Morality in Media point of view. In the hyperbolic style typical of Escapade's foes, he argued that pornographic movies "encourage rape and all kinds of sexual deviation and deviant behavior." On the other hand James Pitts, a liberal black, defended CableScope stoutly, calling the dispute "a classic struggle of censorship versus choice."

The laws governing programming on cable remain inconsistent and unclear. The Federal Communications Commission, which regulates television and radio, has over the last few years relinquished almost all control over cable practices to states and localities. All media are subject to federal regulations and state laws prohibiting "obscene" material; according to the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Miller v. California*, material is obscene if it violates "community standards." If a jury says it's obscene, it's obscene. But whether cable should be subject to the stricter standards applied to television and radio remains to be decided. "Indecent" material—for instance, "dirty words" that are not necessarily obscene—is also prohibited on television and radio. Legal precedent exempts cable from this added stricture, which was originally adopted because people cannot easily avoid indecent material on broadcast

media such as radio and television. Also, the use of the public airwaves entails a special public responsibility. Cable, on the other hand, does not use the airwaves, and offers potentially unlimited viewing options.

Nobody at present is very happy with the legal state of things. Few disputants wholeheartedly accept the "community standards" concept. Many civil libertarians and cable businessmen consider it an offense to the First Amendment to subject free speech to a popular test; many conservatives consider it an offense to morality to subject ethical standards to a popular test.

Of course, no one knows what most Americans think about "adult entertainment." Indeed, no one knows what most Buffalonians think, the Escapade poll notwithstanding. Random interviews with residents turned up no more definite point of view than one would expect in a large, heterogeneous city. Carol Scharlau, who says she likes "artistic pornography" but mostly likes public television, says of Escapade, "It's mostly B or C movies. There's a great deal of violence. I don't think much of it myself." Richard Woods says, "If I had cable, I'm sure I'd get a program like that. It just costs too much, is all." (Basic cable costs \$8.50 a month, the additional thirteen-channel Supercable another \$6, and another \$10 for Escapade, which is only available to Supercable subscribers. The total cost is \$24.50.) Some of those who have Escapade, not surprisingly, think it's just fine. Dorothy Holmes, who says she watches television eight hours a day—it was audible in the background as she spoke—said of the channel, "I have it and I like it. I can see better movies than on any of the networks. It's worth the money I spend on it."

The idea of "community standards" is chimerical. Some approve, some disapprove, most don't care. Cable's many options tend to break the community down into a series of interest groups. Network television is majoritarian, but cable is pluralistic. This "narrowcasting" capacity has always been considered cable's special virtue, both for viewers and programmers. Escapade can reach some 3,000 households in Buffalo, appall everyone else, and still be profitable. Yet paradoxically, the community-standards concept makes cable programming subject to the will of the community at large.

A recent cover of *Cosmopolitan* magazine featured a model with ample cleavage, who was tugging downward with both hands at her already plunging neckline. It seemed as if she wanted to expose her nipples in a gesture of de-

fiance, but knew that if she did, *Cosmo* would no longer be *Cosmo*. This ambiguity is at the heart of contemporary American opinion on sex and nudity. Some beaches have gone nudist, though the idea still deeply offends many people. In movies, of course, nudity and sex are hardly debated issues. But on television the naked body remains an upstart with an uncertain future. Sex seems to be teetering on the edge of respectability; surely television will push it one way or the other, for better or for worse.

Sex therapists point out that Americans, only now emerging from the dark mists of repression inherited from their Puritan ancestors, will be helped over their fears if sex becomes publicly acceptable. Cable has the additional virtue of being the first mass-marketer of sex that seeks to appeal to women as well as men, since it will now be coming into the home. The *Penthouse* channel's Bob Jacobs, especially sensitive on this score, says, "We don't want to denigrate women." Jacobs is planning to have female film director Lee Grant host his racy talk show, *Gods and Goddesses*. Indeed, moral traditionalists' fears that cable sex will lead to home-wrecking, rape, and so on, may prove quite unfounded, given the apparently ir-

resistible tendency towards more soft-core, sensual, nonviolent sex.

But will all this adult entertainment really be so good for adults?

The sexual revolution as a whole seems to have led to a widespread sense of inadequacy. With traditional restraints to sexual gratification gone, everyone is exposed to the unattainable ideal of high-powered performance, total knowledge, uninhibited bed-hopping. Nowhere is this ideal more thoroughly taken for granted than in erotic movies, where most of the characters are sex machines. Who can be equal to these fantasy-projection characters? Maybe The Playboy Channel will show us movies about overweight people in their forties who can't get it up. But don't hold your breath.

There is a deeper point, though. What happens if and when television pushes sex into the realm of respectability? James Likoudis points out that television "desensitizes" us about sex, as it does about violence. How can sex be all that special if you can sit in your living room and watch it hour after hour? Similarly, a child may wonder how anyone can make a fuss about his smoking a joint when he can buy rolling papers in the local dime store. Television seems to have a unique capac-

ity for turning whatever it touches — sports events, political candidates — into a commodity, readily available, readily dis-countable. Many clergymen feel apprehensive about the electronic church, fearing that television worshippers will lose their capacity to appreciate the beauty and mystery of faith. How can sex, whose allure and popularity need not be compared to that of religion, survive such ubiquity? To put it another way, what will instant gratification do to sex?

What, it might also be asked, will sex do to the media? Adult-entertainment programmers like to point to cable's something-for-everyone capacity in vindicating their product; Andrew Fox proclaims gravely that Private Screenings is "meeting the promise of the communications revolution in one additional way." But titillation was not among the local needs that cable was once expected to satisfy. And if sex becomes commonplace on cable, can sex on network television be far behind?

Already the issue of sex on cable has been clothed in the holy garments of the First Amendment, as well as in the more secular dress of the consumer's right to choose. To most cable operators and programmers it is simply a question of giving the public what it wants. John Lack, the executive vice president of Warner Amex Satellite Entertainment Company, puts it succinctly. "If there's a community that says 'we want X-rated programming,' I don't see why the cable system should be the arbiter of taste." These are businessmen, after all, making marketing decisions: If people want it, it can't be bad and shouldn't be prohibited. The other side says it's bad and therefore should be illegal.

Neither side seems willing to consider the possibility that the televising of naked people may gain constitutional, but not moral, sanction. The world of "victimless crimes" — gambling, prostitution, recreational drugs, and even adult entertainment — may occupy precisely such a twilight area. It is possible to regret the appearance of *Caligula* on television without demanding that it be removed. Yet we have become such a legalistic society that we cannot clearly distinguish between rights and responsibilities. The dispute over sex programming on cable is only now beginning to materialize fully, and its capacity for inflicting further harm on a nation already remarkably divided has become clear. Perhaps the cause of rational debate would best be served if opponents recognized that an unpleasant and even dangerous activity may nevertheless be legal, and if advocates considered the possibility that a legal activity may nevertheless be harmful. ■

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Putting the Lock on Cable

by Henry Geller

WITH ITS VAST channel capacity, cable television sounds like a First Amendment dream. But it in fact poses a serious First Amendment challenge, because the system owners claim the right to control what comes over *all* of a system's channels.

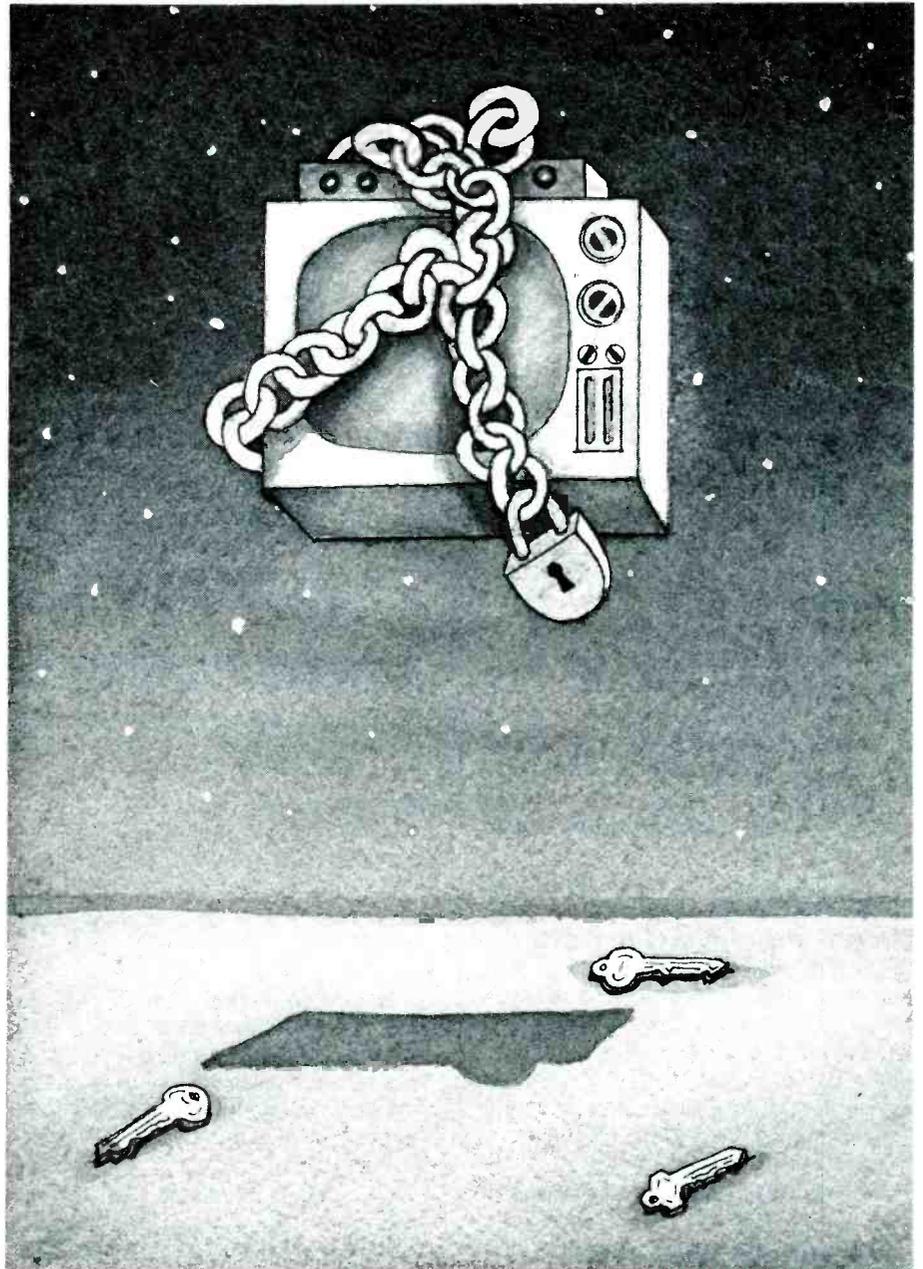
Though federal regulation prohibits one person from owning two television stations in the same community, no regulation now precludes a cable operator's control over as many as 140 channels. In 1978, the cable industry fought successfully in the Supreme Court to knock out federal regulations requiring that it provide access channels, and now it is seeking to do away with municipal regulations as well. Cable operators argue to Congress that they are "telepublishers" on all their channels and must therefore be given the same degree of control a newspaper has over its pages.

The cable industry is at least halfway to getting its wish. On October 7, the Senate passed the Telecommunications Bill, which contained an important provision, sought by the cable industry but hardly noticed by anyone else. Subsection 43 of the bill's definitions said that a person providing any cable service "shall not . . . be deemed a carrier."

Before the vote, at the eleventh hour, a number of other industry-sponsored measures had been deleted from the bill. But this small paragraph defining cable sneaked through because it had been written into the bill separately from the aborted provisions. It contained the crucial language specifying that cable is not to be designated a common carrier. (Common carriers are generally required by law to sell or lease access to all who desire it, on a first-come, first-served basis. Telephones are common carriers.)

What this means is that cities may not

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be able to require cable systems to provide leased channels on a nondiscriminatory basis to program providers. Further, while a local franchising authority could insist on public-access channels, the cable operator would apparently not be required to give up his control over the content of these channels. This concept has been accepted by the Senate: its fate now lies with the House.

The leased-access issue is thus most current. It is also of the greatest importance, for its resolution will affect competition and diversity in the information area for decades. Unfortunately, the cable industry so far is the only player on the field, and its strong lobbying effort may well carry the day in the face of an uninformed, unconcerned public and an essentially indifferent legislature. The newspaper, broadcasting, and motion pic-

ture industries have maintained silence on the subject, even though they will be negatively affected, because they don't want to dilute their lobbying on other matters.

What does it matter if cable takes complete control over all its many channels?

First and foremost, such control obviously violates the "Associated Press Principle," which holds that the First Amendment "rests on the assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public" (*Associated Press v. United States*, 326 U.S. 1, 20 (1945)).

Experience strongly suggests that sooner or later some persons will exercise rigid ideological control over the channels of communication they own. A racist group did so during the 1960s, over a television station in Jackson, Mississippi, and

religious groups have had radio licenses revoked for the same reason.

The cable operators argue that they don't really control content, since they afford full autonomy to the satellite program services carried on their systems. But the fact is that the operator does ultimately control content, by selecting the services his system will carry. And he may censor what he wishes on any of them (unless specifically barred from doing so by contractual arrangements with the program service).

Allowing cable operators unlimited control of a system's channels makes for another practical obstacle to the free flow of information. Since cable operators enjoy a local monopoly of the broadband wire, they may create a serious bottleneck in the distribution of program services. Pay programming can be distributed by several means—over the air on regular television stations or the new low-power stations, via MDS (multipoint distribution service); DBS (direct-broadcast satellites), disks, cassettes, or cable. But pay programming delivered by cable can be offered at a substantially lower price—roughly half that of the closest competitor—and therefore failure to gain cable access can doom a service.

The consequences of this bottleneck can be far-reaching. The FCC has high hopes, for example, that direct-broadcast satellites will serve rural areas too sparsely populated for both terrestrial television and cable. But for DBS to be economically feasible, satellite operators may need a critical mass of subscribers—and to reach that figure they might also have to gain access to cable systems for their programming. Failure to do so could foreclose satellite competition and deny new networks to the rural areas.

Newspaper companies venturing into videotext, an electronic information service for the home, may encounter the same bottleneck. Cable entrepreneurs could conceivably offer their own videotext service and shut out others.

It might be argued that the cable entrepreneur would not act in this fashion but rather would welcome all comers. Past experience, however, and proper regard for human nature, belie that hope. As Harold Horn of the Cable Television Information Center stated in recent testimony to Congress:

When Times-Mirror began its new movie service, Spotlight, it was acting as a publisher. However, when it removed HBO from most of its systems and substituted Spotlight in its place, I don't believe it was acting as a publisher, but rather as a vertically integrated monopoly.

The bottleneck problem could also preclude or inhibit the growth of pay cable. Industry is developing an addressable converter—a Computer Age device that allows programs to be sold to consumers on a per-viewing basis. A motion picture company or a sports entrepreneur, using a satellite for distribution, might wish to release its "blockbuster" event to millions of cable homes in this fashion. But will it be trapped in the bottleneck by the cable owner's other, competing interests?

I believe that leased-channel access represents the last chance for a healthy structural alternative to more intrusive forms of government regulation. In principle, the leased-channel concept permits use of a cable channel to any citizen with the necessary financial resources; in practical terms it means that the major program services could have access to any cable system on a nondiscriminatory basis.

Cable regulation has been following the model established for broadcasting, with the result that such broadcast laws as the

The free flow of information is at stake.

Equal Time Rule and the Fairness Doctrine apply today to cable. We are thus going down the same slippery slope of content regulation we did in the broadcast field: government intrusion to insure operation in the public interest. But cable, with its great channel capacity, is quite a different animal.

Some efforts to arrest this drift are being made—the attempt, for example, to eliminate the Fairness Doctrine's applicability to cable. But if the cable entrepreneur can control access to all 100 channels, it will be a difficult, if not impossible, task to convince Congress not to apply the doctrine more carefully. Leased-channel access is thus consistent with the general deregulatory pattern so desirable for cable.

Similarly, the leased-channel approach is needed to allay increasing concern over multiple-ownership patterns in cable. The large companies are swallowing the smaller ones at a rapid pace. The four largest pay-cable suppliers serve 85 percent of the nation's pay-cable subscribers; each has an ownership interest in one of the four largest cable companies, which together serve 21 percent of the nation's cable subscribers.

Leased-channel access may not be a complete answer or panacea, but it is preferable to any of the obvious alternatives.

What are the arguments against leased access? I give them short shrift only because it is difficult to take them seriously. The cable industry argues that it must retain its control because it is a capital-intensive industry and could not otherwise innovate and attract necessary capital. Whatever merit this might have in the case of a policy *completely* separating ownership from control, it is farfetched to argue that cable needs control of all fifty or a hundred of its channels to attract capital or to engage in new services.

Nor is it sound to argue that the cable entrepreneur must control all 100 channels in order to excise programming deemed obscene or in bad taste. First, no single entity should rightfully have such powers of programming judgment over *all* channels. Second, the public can be protected from offensive programming by technological means (for instance, the "locked box" or the addressable converter), and by the legal proscription of obscenity.

As to the cable operator's own First Amendment rights, it is enough that they can be exercised on many of the channels; a limited leased-channel access provision would be consistent with the very kind of multiple-ownership or monopoly restriction that the courts have repeatedly upheld.

There is a petition pending at the FCC, filed by me, urging the commission's prompt initiation of a proceeding seeking leased-channel access on the new large-capacity cable systems. The petition places the leased-access concept on a new jurisdictional base not precluded by the 1978 Supreme Court decision. But it faces the problem of convincing a commission seemingly dedicated to wiping out as many regulations as possible.

Some localities have acted to require leased-channel access in the franchising process. But this can be sporadic and does not necessarily result in the nationwide pattern needed for leased access to benefit program suppliers. Further, enforcement at the local level is suspect.

Fundamental policy issues will be decided early in this decade: the future of public-trustee regulation for both commercial and public broadcasting; the future of direct-broadcast satellites, and the leased-access issue—determining whether the cable operator is a "telepublisher" free to use all channels at his discretion, or whether cable systems will provide substantial access to companies or individuals who want to lease the channels. The free flow of information is at stake. And the outcome of the debate may well depend on how much the public cares—on whether there emerges a force countervailing the cable industry's bid to control all channels. ■

Remembering Television

Watching TV: Four Decades of American Television

by Harry Castleman and Walter J. Podrazik
McGraw-Hill, \$14.95

ONE NIGHT in 1953, enraged at something he'd seen on *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, Frank Walsh of West Hempstead, Long Island, whipped out a gun and blasted his television set to bits. Less than a week later, Walsh turned up on CBS's *Strike It Rich* — "the program with a heart" — and won a new television set.

An NBC press release in 1937 had called television "[a] vital new form of electronic theater that augurs an exciting and challenging new cultural era . . . the imperishable wonders of a vibrant and articulate stage will be spread to the far corners of the land . . ." Frank Walsh, in his own crazed way, understood what that meant to the folks at home: Television promised everything to everybody. It would entertain, educate, amuse, shock . . . and even when it drove him so wild with rage that he would literally try to kill it, television would quickly replace itself in his living room. All would be forgiven. Television taketh, but television also giveth away.

There's something poignant about those early days. NBC mobile vans raced from one end of New York to the other, covering fires, baseball games, boxing matches, anything that moved. Dennis James hosted an early talk show, *Television Roof*, broadcasting scenery and interviews from atop Rockefeller Center. *Missus Goes A' Shopping* made the jump from radio to a weekly slot on television — the first game show to do so. Every new program was an experiment. How can we fail to be touched by a look back at those early days? It wasn't so long ago, after all. That's *us* back there, scratching our heads and wondering what to try next.

That sense of gentle understanding is at the heart of *Watching TV*, a season-by-season history of network television in America. The authors, two Northwestern University graduates who have co-written several other books, spent two years compiling research for the work; their atten-

tion to detail certainly gives that away.

They pause at every opportunity to remind us of television's oddballs, on screen and off, and their obvious love for the medium embraces even the oddest of those. Remember, for example, *The Continental* (CBS, 1952), in which Renzo Cesana was a television gigolo who apparently had no other job than to sip cordials in an apartment setting and pitch woo directly at the camera? "Don't be afraid, darling," he would murmur, one eyebrow raised. "You're in a *man's* apartment." Just why this information was supposed to be reassuring is never explained. The authors recall the show with grace and good humor, though, and the text is peppered with just enough savories to keep the reader involved when the sheer volume of material threatens to overwhelm.

That's not to suggest that *Watching TV* is lightweight, however. Indeed, it's admirably organized and thorough, and each television season since 1944 is recounted with care. Charts displaying the networks' fall schedules for each season are useful in providing a quick graphic fix on the text. Also helpful, though strewn with one-liners, is the book's running digest of milestones: "June 16, 1959. Death of George Reeves a.k.a. Clark Kent a.k.a. Superman. Age: forty-five. Cause: type-casting." Cruel, but not inexact.

A minor flaw in *Watching TV* is the authors' disconcerting habit of dropping in important pieces of information without adequate preparation. They note casually that video tape came into general use in 1957, but fail to give us either the background on that development or any lengthy explanation of its implications. Similarly, they close a section on the birth of the *Today* show by noting that after some initial problems, the show had edged into the black. When next we hear of it, in the fall of 1954, *Today* has "turned into the biggest money-making show on television." It has? When? How? That success story would have been worth telling. Such lapses are far more the exception than the rule, though. Digressions on blacklisting, the introduction of UHF, and the RCA/CBS battle to perfect color television are comprehensive and logically situated.

If the reader feels a little numb toward the end, that's not the authors' fault. They — and we — have covered a lot of ground by the time the narrative reaches the seventies. We're more familiar, perhaps too familiar, with the contemporary material. (Does anybody who watches television today really need to read through a plot summary of *Happy Days* — or want to?) The authors are no less thorough in the late going, though, and that's to their credit.

Castleman and Podrazik care about television, and that makes this a book worth reading, both exhaustive and affectionate. The great advantage of viewing television history as a continuum is that we're reminded of the medium's youth, of how close we still are to its beginnings, and of how evanescent our judgments have been along the way.

"This removes all doubts as to television's future," a critic wrote on viewing *Missus Goes A' Shopping*. "This is television." You can make of that what you will.

BILL BAROL

Bill Barol is a writer living in Philadelphia.

In a Flea's Navel

by Don Freeman
A.S. Barnes & Co., \$8.95

TV: The Casual Art

by Martin Williams
Oxford University Press, \$15.95

THESE SLENDER BOOKS ARE everything you'd expect from collections of essays on television. They differ in style, attitude, and depth, but both are self-consciously light, clever, and as fast-moving as a commercial. Both are also occasionally passionate apologies from men who not only love the much-scorned tube but respect it.

Don Freeman's defense of the box unfortunately reaches sanctimonious proportions. He calls television "the cool fire, the national hearth . . . the most universal symbol of a culture of universality." He quotes John Mason Brown, drama critic and essayist: "People who deny themselves television deny themselves

participation in life today. They are atrophied; they are self-exiled from the world . . . in general [they] are simply self-buried people." That television is universal is not the best defense. Disease is universal. And while it's undeniably true that watching television reveals a lot about what's going on in this culture, there are other ways to learn just as much. To state that people who don't like television are wastrels is preposterous.

Freeman's essays, most of which were originally printed as syndicated newspaper columns, seem ironically to support criticism of the tube while trying to disclaim it. Though often graceful and funny, his style is so smooth as to be almost oily. His essays rehash the sentimental reflections about W.C. Fields and Humphrey Bogart (he actually writes, "Play it again Sam. Here's looking at you, Bogie"), as well as the "grand old trooper" gunk about Bob Hope and Phyllis Diller's jokes about her looks. His love for television seems blind: John Denver is described as a "rural romanticist" and Barry Manilow is treated as a serious artist. His idea of poignancy is painfully exposed when he quotes sketch artist LeRoy Nieman in an essay on the Palestinian guerrilla attack at the Munich Olympics: "In the attic of my mind, I'll store many a memory."

Freeman puts forth some funny, delicate insights and some lovely silliness, such as the description of an *Andy Griffith Show* episode in which Barney buys his parents a septic tank for their anniversary (" . . . two tons of concrete in it. All steel-reinforced") and a hot debate between two CBS correspondents on what constitutes good or even acceptable barbecue. The book is so pleasant and easy to read that it's innocuous.

Martin Williams's book is better-written, and is critical and original where

Freeman's is sentimental and indulgent. His defense of the tube is simply that the vast bulk of literature, film, and theater is bad or mediocre, and that it shouldn't startle anyone that the same is true of television. He also points out that critics of the box make a mistake in expecting television to function like film or theater when it is an entirely different medium, and he deplores early attempts to make television like theater: ". . . you can't do something aesthetically virtuous just by setting up cameras in front of even the best stage play." He illustrates this with such examples as the brilliant satirical cartoon *Rocky and His Friends* which, he successfully argues, would fail in any medium save the tube, and with sarcastic descriptions of the well-meaning "serious" television of the sixties: "I remember one about a girl who decided to give up that piano-playing sharpie and return to her minister father's bosom. (Yes, Electra, you *can* marry your father. This is America!)"

Williams reserves much sarcasm for the ponderous culturefests that are so often applauded as "educational" while the dramatic and comic regulars are ignored. "In my early youth I heard lots of radio news and saw lots of newsreels and some much-praised film documentaries. I acquired lots of prejudices and a careless ragbag of facts, but I certainly never became really informed about anything . . . *Guns moke* often sees humanity with a compassion I have never encountered in a 'public affairs' discussion and never expect to."

Among other sacred liberal concepts, Williams attacks the old saw that television is predictable. In an imaginary argument with David Susskind (whom Williams apparently detests), he says ". . . a predictable story is a good working ingre-

dient of tragedy: Everybody knows 'what happens' in tragedy . . . the dramatic question is *how?* and *why?* Your question of *what?* is the melodramatic question."

He points out, correctly I think, that despite its clumsiness, the wide use of psychological drama—the depiction of how actions affect emotions—as opposed to the straight chase-and-fight action of most old movies, should stand as evidence of "astonishing development in American culture."

The only time Williams reaches shallow water is in minimizing the effects of television violence on children. He dismisses any worries in a brief essay in which he drags out, unsupported, the old argument that violence on television is "purgative." The truth in this is not as evident as Williams seems to think it is.

His style is discerning and modest, never gushing like Freeman's sometimes is, and he can begin an essay snappishly—"I wish everybody would come off it about Bob Newhart." His comment on the sixties series *Arrest and Trial*: "Ben Gazzara has so far been willing to act. Anthony Franciosa was willing to in the first episode. (Chuck Connors can't act, but he's willing to try.)"

Most of Williams's essays were written for *The Village Voice*, *Kulchur*, and *The Evergreen Review* in the early sixties, and one final pleasure of *The Casual Art* is the cultural curiosity it induces. I got a romantic sense of the passage of time when I read in a 1962 essay, "Late at night, Radio Free Europe asks you to send in a dollar to protect Ozzie Nelson's world from communism. I'm still thinking it over."

Me too.

MARY GAITSKILL

Mary Gaitskill is a New York-based writer. ■

IN ARNOLD ROTH'S VIEW



The New College Try in Football: Let's Win It for the Bottom Line

by Bob Kozberg

PUBLISH OR PERISH" has long been the curse of university academic departments. University athletic departments are now feeling a similar pressure, except that while prestigious print exposure is prized in academia, bringing renown to the institutions and tenure to their professors, lucrative television exposure is prized in athletics, bringing millions of dollars to the institutions and instant fame to their teams. So much is at stake, in fact, that the new slogan may become "televise or terminate."

After a series of complicated and controversial deals with the three major networks, the nation's top college football teams will share nearly half a billion dollars over the next four years. But unlike the academic departments, which can at least call their own plays, the athletic departments are under the control of umbrella organizations that decide how to allocate this financial bonanza. The sharing of wealth is something you'd expect our citadels of disinterested scholarship to applaud, but none of them seem happy — the schools that receive television exposure want a larger piece of the pie, and the schools that don't want more than just a taste. This dissatisfaction has led on the one hand to overt rebellion (the formation of a new group of colleges challenging the long-established National Collegiate Athletic Association), and on the other to covert scandal (recruiting scams and transcript frauds that threaten to keep

"student athletes" permanently on the bench). It's fourth and goal for college football, and everybody is calling a different play.

How many people want to spend a Saturday afternoon watching Wake Forest take on Virginia Tech? Not many, says ABC, which reluctantly carried this game last year. But the NCAA, the governing body of college sports, insists that such games be broadcast so that the maximum number of member schools can get television exposure — and the money that comes with it.

The NCAA has been negotiating television contracts for college football since 1952, when it signed a \$1 million deal with NBC. But while ticket prices and operating costs have risen with inflation, television revenue has soared — in 1978, ABC signed a \$30 million deal for four years, and beginning in 1982, ABC and CBS will ante up a combined \$65.7 million a year for four more years, a package totaling \$263 million.

But if the NCAA is in business to protect its members, the networks are in business to expand their ratings. Wake Forest? their negotiators asked. Virginia Tech? People want to see Notre Dame, and Michigan, and Southern California. So under the terms of the new contracts, the maximum number of times the NCAA will allow a school to appear on network television during any two-year period will rise from three to six. This means that while eighty-one different teams made at least one regionally televised appearance in 1980, that number will shrink dramat-

ically between now and 1985. Moreover, in a rich-get-richer spiral, most of the fees will be distributed to the schools appearing on television, instead of being divided up equally among the 139 so-called "major" members of the NCAA. Conferences usually require their well-endowed members to redistribute a percentage of their money among the less fortunate ones, but what of the independents? Last year, for example, Notre Dame earned \$813,390 from its appearances on ABC — while Villanova earned nothing and within a few months announced it was abandoning its big-time football program. The NCAA may want to "share the wealth," but from the perspective of the weaker schools, it's about as successful in achieving this goal as J.P. Morgan was.

From the perspective of the stronger schools, however, even this limited sharing seems like galloping socialism. Questioning whether the NCAA has the right to negotiate a television deal for all its members, University of Oklahoma president Bill Banowsky recently said, "We are not money-grubbing. . . . All we want is what we think we are entitled to — the money our football programs generate." Other major powers apparently felt the same way — why should we share our money with Wake Forest and Virginia Tech? — but instead of taking their ball and going home, they headed straight for NBC.

Last August, just one week after the NCAA deal with ABC and CBS was announced, the College Football Association, made up of sixty-one major football schools (all NCAA members as well), signed its own four-year package, worth \$45 million a year. "We've had 75 percent of all the saleable college football product, and yet we receive less than half of the television revenue during the contract now in effect," says Chuck Neinas, executive director of the CFA. "It's really unfair."

The CFA contract with NBC supposedly voids the NCAA package with ABC and CBS (the NCAA has scheduled a meeting for December to deal with the

Bob Kozberg is a writer based in Los Angeles.

Colleges have always bent the rules relating to 'amateur' athletics. Now with so much TV revenue at stake, they're openly breaking them.

issue), but this is only the first down. CFA's real game plan, according to many observers, is to pressure the NCAA into labeling fewer of its member schools "major"—in other words, into sharing the wealth only among the schools that actually generate it. "The NCAA," says Neinas, "has constructed a plan to force games on television that obviously aren't being watched," but that "unfairly" take money out of the kitty.

The CFA's big play, apparently being held for the fourth quarter, seems designed to capture the burgeoning pay-television market. "The NCAA is like an ostrich with its head in the sand," says Virgil Lubberden, athletic business manager at USC—a member of both the NCAA and the CFA. "It's staggering the amount of money that's available from pay television. Schools should set their goals real high for a financial return because the dollars are there."

Indeed, as the American Council on Education stated in 1979, "Campuses that sponsor revenue-producing sports are facing increased, even excessive pressures to win in order to support winning teams." This is known in freshman English as understatement.

Colleges have always bent the rules relating to "amateur" athletics, but now, with so much television revenue at stake, they are openly breaking them. Investigative reporters are as common a sight in the locker room as sportswriters. In 1980 alone, the Pac-10 Conference placed five of its members—Arizona State, Oregon, Oregon State, UCLA, and USC—on one-year probations for violations including forged transcripts and "students" receiving "extension course" credits for classes they never attended. Nine other colleges, mostly on the West Coast, have been implicated in similar infractions, although no disciplinary action has yet been taken.

"I wouldn't say that all this represents an ethical crisis," says Tom Hansen, assistant executive director of the NCAA. "It's just the desire to excel that creates most of the pressure; although the past

year has certainly been a source of concern to us. The television money, of course, might add to the pressure." And coaches who don't win "might" be fired. The members of the Pac-10—or perhaps it should now be called the Pac-5—well know what such established coaches as Alabama's Bear Bryant openly admit:

Players at their schools are athletes first and students second.

Make no mistake, television contracts have brought our nation's universities into professional football. Or as the coach at Wake Forest might soon say at half time of the big game with Virginia Tech, "Let's win this one for the bottom line."

Zimbabwe Report: A New Nation Rebuilds Its Media

by Jill Severn

WHEN ZIMBABWE became independent in 1980, and Robert Mugabe was elected its first prime minister, 85 percent of the predominantly white staff at the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) quit. The longstanding tradition of white minority control of the media had abruptly ended, and with the mass exodus of staff, the collapse of Zimbabwe's broadcasting system—one television station and three radio stations—appeared certain.

But it didn't happen. Educated black Zimbabweans who had been living in exile returned home and filled some of the gaps; the remaining black staff members worked longer hours; a few whites stayed on, and the system was held together. Now, not even two years later, Zimbabwe's broadcasting system is thriving.

Supported entirely by advertising revenues, the annual budget for ZBC is \$7 million. Its facilities, though dated, are far better than those of most developing

countries. And improvements are coming: The British and French are providing loans for \$6.7 million worth of new equipment, which will make it possible for Zimbabwean television to broadcast in color and for the system to launch a new, education-oriented radio station.

Major problems remain, however. ZBC's program manager, Lucas Chideya, complains that inadequate equipment severely limits local production. "We want to expand our coverage of rural development," he says, "but about all we can do now is to send out a small crew to ask farmers how their crops and cattle are doing. We need more production facilities and more mobile cameras."

Until that problem is solved, says Chideya, Zimbabwean television will continue to fill part of its broadcast day—from 5 P.M. to about 11:30—with syndicated American programs and other imported material. Among the current crop are *Sanford and Son*, *Dallas*, and *Vega\$*. The new season will bring *The Incredible Hulk* and *You Asked for It*. Although Chideya is not enthusiastic about such programming, "That doesn't mean that I think everything imported is evil. I like

Jill Severn writes frequently for The Seattle Times, The East Side Journal American, and Interlink News Service.

The collapse of Zimbabwe's white-run TV seemed inevitable when Mugabe came to power. Now, two years later, the system thrives.

the Muppets, which we also run, and some of the English programming has real educational value."

Scarce manpower also remains a serious problem; because trained engineers are in short supply, staff members must work fearsome amounts of overtime. Richard J. Meyer, station manager of KCTS-TV, a PBS affiliate in Seattle, Washington, recently did management consulting work for ZBC under a grant from the U.S. International Communication Agency. In his view, staff training needs may pose the system's single most important challenge. "The current leaders of ZBC are very competent professionals," he says, "but they're not really making full use of the television medium yet. More work is needed on interviewing techniques for the local Meet the Press-type shows, and in general more work on upgrading production values and pacing."

Meyer notes that the Zimbabwe Institute of Mass Communication has just turned out its first graduates. "That's tremendously important; there are fifty trained people coming out of the class, and jobs are waiting for them."

To the viewer or listener, the most obvious change in content since independence is in the newscasts and local programming. According to Chideya, the Ian Smith government "used ZBC as a propaganda machine and an instrument of psychological warfare." Today, newscasts follow what Meyer terms "the Third World party line. There is no criticism of the government; South Africa is always referred to as 'racist South Africa' and Israel as 'Zionist Israel.'"

Chideya acknowledges these changes, but sees them less as the result of government policy than as expressions of popular opinion.

The ZBC nevertheless does espouse political goals, which Chideya says include "reconciliation, discussion of rural development, and the politicization of the people. We try to sharpen people's awareness that they are participants in the development process. And we want people to realize that this is not a racially segre-

gated world—that South Africa is an aberration." These broadcast policies reflect the progress of Zimbabwe as an independent country, he says. "1980 was the Year of People's Power; this is the Year of Consolidating People's Power."

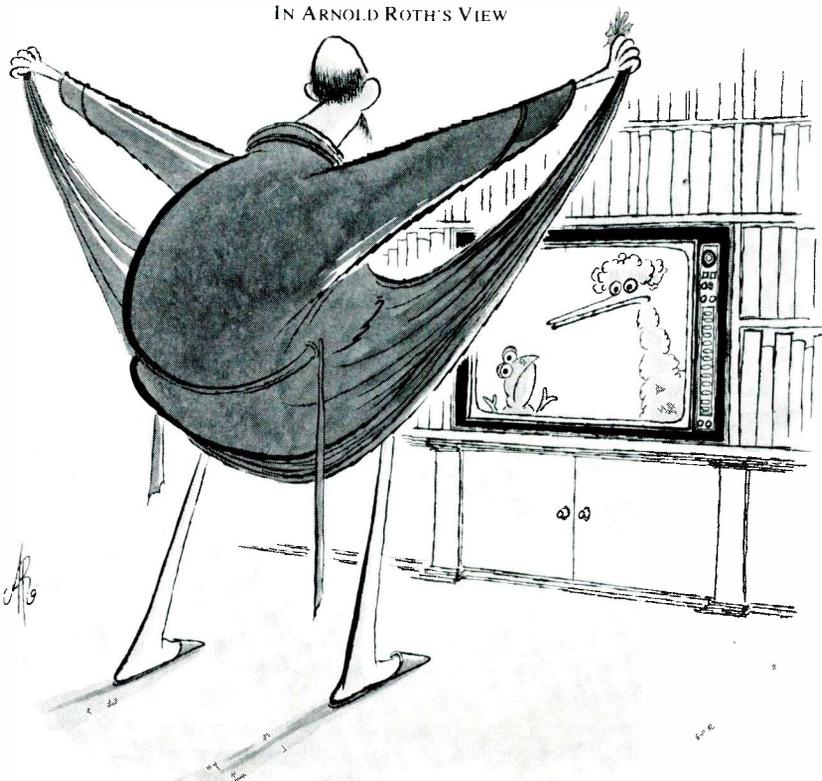
The impact of these policies is limited, in television at least, by the fact that only 30 percent of the 150,000 television sets in the country are owned by blacks. This percentage is expanding as rapidly as the blacks prosper, but radio is still the more popular medium. There are an estimated 250,000 radios in the country, though the real number may be much higher, since the sale of radios is not closely monitored.

Of the three existing radio stations, one broadcasts in English, one in Shona (the language of the majority tribe), and the third, a pop-music station, alternates English with various local languages. The fourth station, now on the drawing board, will stress educational programming for

the rural areas. The English-language station serves a predominantly white audience, offering a varied program of classical and popular music. The other stations also play mainly imported music—from the Bee Gees to John Denver—but the audience for local music is growing. One disk jockey proudly points out that three of the Number One tunes he's played this year originated from local bands in a Salisbury recording studio.

Such recordings signal Zimbabwe's growing awareness of its own national and cultural identity—an awareness that ZBC will both reflect and promote. But when asked to speculate on such matters, Lucas Chideya only shrugs. "Everything that needs to be written on the social role of radio and TV has already been written. The question now is implementation. What I'm really most concerned about is having a camera available to cover a story."

IN ARNOLD ROTH'S VIEW



The great gold rush may not pan out
if the new networks must provide Canadian culture
to audiences craving Hollywood fare.

Canadian Pay Television: 'Biggest Crap Game Around'

by Hester Riches

DREAMWEAVERS" with "visions of riches" have joined "the biggest crap game in town," also known as "the hottest race in the country." Gold-rush and horse-race metaphors seem to be the most popular catch-phrases for reporters this year as they describe the race of Canada's big bidders for long-awaited pay-television licenses.

The Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) issued its first statement, a general definition of pay television, in October 1972, and since then the issue has come before the CRTC at least once a year. But not until April of 1981 did the commission actually call for license applications. By the July 20 deadline, fifty-five groups had applied for licenses; the CRTC then narrowed those down to twenty-seven "feasible" groups—fifteen regional and twelve national applicants. The CRTC began hearings on September 24, and by 1982 it plans to have chosen the rightful license recipients, as well as the regulations that will govern pay television upon its arrival in Canada.

Almost all the leading national applicants—companies based in Montreal and Toronto—are calling for a single monopoly service, arguing that the marketplace can't yet support competition. On the other hand, the CRTC has stated that a monopoly is "not desirable," and the regional applicants, particularly from Western and Maritime provinces, are op-

Hester Riches is a reporter for the Toronto Globe and Mail.

posed to what they perceive as another in a long history of power-grabs by the Eastern establishment.

The would-be licensees include a few newcomers to the big business of electronic media, but most applications involve interests in the fields of broadcasting, cable, newspapers, or politics. A federal agency charged with enforcing competition policy has recommended that the CRTC consider demanding a separation of pay-television packagers from program-production companies. But most applicants have nevertheless been calling attention to their related business involvements, feeling that a good "track record" in such fields as film and television will help their chances of being chosen. As entertainment and business heavyweights gather at industry conferences to distribute press kits, signatures of support, and promotional buttons, they make grandiose promises of financial commitments to the Canadian film and television industries. (The top bidder so far is the nonprofit Telecanada, which pledges to pump \$570 million into the industry over a five-year period.)

At the earliest, it will be a full year before any pay-television package reaches Canadian homes. Already far behind the booming industry in the U.S., Canadian pay cable faces several problems in getting started. Basic cable has existed across Canada for years (penetration has now reached 55 percent overall, and is up as high as 70 percent in some urban markets). In the States, pay packages have been used to sell basic cable services, but in Canada it may be difficult

to sell additional services to customers already overfed by a veritable feast of viewing options. (Toronto cable subscribers, for example, already receive thirteen Canadian broadcast stations and five American ones, as well as various public-service channels.) All of those options may have given the Canadian audience slightly more sophistication than its American counterpart. A pay-television company starting off in Canada will have to be "particularly skilled," says license applicant Moses Znaimer, "to weave together a distinctive package that people will be interested in."

Another hurdle is the cost any national service will incur in trying to provide French programming to an officially bilingual country. The applicants are facing the problem bravely and optimistically. "We have historically, as a relatively small nation with two major language groups, recognized the need to develop our own response to every challenge," said Paul Audley of Telecanada in a mid-September speech. "We have learned the need to insure that necessary enterprises are in place to protect the public interest."

Probably the greatest problem particular to the Northern market, however, is the factor of required Canadian content. Even though Canadian content rules are enforced in traditional broadcasting, the average viewer's greatest interest is in standard American programming, whether television drama, sports, or movies. But CRTC chairman John Meisel is a strong nationalist, as evidenced in the commission's initial public notice, which stipulated that any new services must "make a significant and positive contribution to broadcasting in Canada [and] make effective use of Canadian resources," and that "a significant amount of the revenues [must] flow to the Canadian program-production industry."

The great gold rush of the 1980s may not pan out if the eventual Home Box Offices and Showtimes of the North are required to provide prescribed doses of Canadian culture for an audience primarily interested in standard Hollywood fare.

One device, the TV equivalent
of a hall of mirrors, allows patients to shape a new self,
to aim for an ideal size.

Britons Prescribe Video For Anorexia and Obesity

by Richard Gilbert

VIRTUG SOUNDS LIKE it should be the name of a Lithuanian chess master. In fact, it stands for Video for Interaction Research and Training Users Group, a new 200-member organization comprising a group of British psychologists and researchers who use video as an aid in the treatment of a wide variety of illnesses.

Psychiatrist Bernard Rosen of Guy's Hospital, London, has discovered that victims of obesity, anorexia (a pathological aversion to food resulting in dangerous weight loss), and agoraphobia (fear of open spaces) are much more likely to recognize the serious consequences of their illness by seeing themselves on a television screen than in a mirror or a photograph.

Anorexics often have a distorted image of their bodies, Dr. Rosen explains. By starving themselves, they fight an irrational fear of gaining weight. But video has led to a breakthrough in their treatment: In one important experiment, Dr. Rosen and two psychologists put six young anorexic women in front of a video camera. Before the recording began, they were asked to describe their own personality and character with a set of adjectives, such as assertive, attractive, ineffective, hostile. They were then asked to critique several paintings in front of the camera. After the recording, the women viewed their video tape and rated their performance with another set of adjectives. What emerged was a uniformly

Richard Gilbert is deputy editor of the BBC weekly magazine, The Listener.

more honest and accurate self-assessment.

"Video helped the anorexics to change their perception of themselves," says Dr. Angela Summerfield, who supervised the experiment. "It opened them up therapeutically and speeded up their learning process."

Says Dr. Rosen, "Video is a unique form of feedback. It's the only way you really see yourself as others see you. Video playbacks—like audio-tape recordings—amaze people. The anorexics were suddenly confronted with themselves as seen by other people."

Video has also been helpful in treating patients with the opposite problem—obesity. Celia McCrea, a member of the psychology faculty at the Queen's University, Belfast, videotaped eleven obese female patients over a period of eighteen weeks, and these "carboholics" watched themselves regularly on closed-circuit television. At the end of the experiment, seven of the eleven had lost weight, while all showed constructive changes in self-image after seeing themselves on the television screen.

Agoraphobics have responded to video as well. Dr. Rosen has videotaped them walking across London Bridge, thus reinforcing their sense of achievement in braving open spaces.

One of the most ingenious uses of video is still in the planning stages. Belfast's McCrea is developing a technique pioneered in Sweden using the television equivalent of a hall of mirrors. Obese patients see a picture of themselves on a television screen, and by turning the con-

trols that create vertical and horizontal distortion, literally reshape their image to conform to that of an ideal, which is used as the "target size" during treatment. The patient's progress is then monitored by measuring down to the last millimeter the difference between the reality and the ideal.

And after the obese have shed their spare poundage thanks to video, what next? McCrea has an ambitious plan to let patients with behavior disturbances *edit* video tapes of themselves. These edited highlights will reveal patients in a positive light, or—and this is invaluable to the psychiatrist—in what the patient perceives to be a positive light. ■

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Revolution, 1982

(Continued on page 29)

Access to the new technologies will also be limited by factors other than age and economics. "For the completely interactive telecommunications system, only the big cities will work," predicts Stephen Effros, a lawyer who represents small cable-system operators. "In small cities, two-way cable will be totally uneconomic. The rural-urban schism has existed for years in terms of schools, hospitals, and other facilities. It will deepen with the new communications services."

Effros is a former FCC attorney who works out of his suburban Washington home using a personal computer; the experience has led him to wonder if the liberation provided by the new technologies might not also isolate us. "If my personal computer focuses on one area, and your personal computer focuses on something else, we will only see what we want to see. We will know nothing about anything else. The information explosion could turn out to be an information *implosion*,

where we all focus too narrowly. We will be experts and idiots at the same time."

FOR THE PAST THIRTY YEARS, television has served as the main vehicle of the nation's mass culture, the source of information and ideas common to us all. But as the new technologies spread, and the mass-television experience becomes a more personal dialogue, something important may be lost. "Television is a mass ritual," says Dr. Gerbner. "It provides interaction for people who have little in common and has brought everyone into a huge mainstream. It is not an entirely negative phenomenon. The mass ritual is a window on the world, and that is a need and a desire that the new machines won't satisfy. The big question is whether the new technologies will replace and impoverish the mass ritual."

"Whatever this thing is, it is a social experiment on an extremely grand scale," claims computer scientist Weizenbaum. "Technology will not only allow you to enjoy luxuries, it may become a member-

ship card required to function at all in society. What happens to those who don't participate? The differences between those out and those in will be much sharper in the future, and migrating from one group to the other will be more difficult. It is possible that we will have a society split apart, in a permanent state of civil war."

Today's synergism of two-way cable, satellites, laser video disks, and personal computers will mean a quantum advance in human communications. But with all the exciting new opportunities for business and for the consumer will come a host of new problems and challenges. Television's radical transformation will in turn transform us.

"One of the fascinating things about television," observes Fred Wertheimer, "is that we tend to think we're conscious of the effect it's having. But we have never been as conscious as we should have been about TV's effect on our lives. We have all along missed the implications of the role it has played. And we are about to do it again." ■

Television II

(Continued from page 39)

print minions respected. And by 1977, a pivotal year for both Levin and HBO, the thirty-fifth floor could at last rejoice with a measure of confidence: The FCC had just approved use of the small four-and-a-half-meter dish, opening the way for cable operators to join the service cheaply and effectively; in May of that year, the 100th earth station joined the network; in March, the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned a key FCC decision restricting pay-television programming content; in April, HBO's Bette Midler special won the first NCTA pay-television program award, and in October, with close to a million subscribers, HBO turned its first profit.

Today, that milestone seems like ancient history. HBO subscribers now number eight million, and Time Inc. can boast control of more than 60 percent of the pay-television market. Just as important, HBO throws off a tremendous cash-flow profit—rare, and highly useful in the capital-intensive cable industry. Spurred by HBO's success, Time has methodically bought control of the multiple-system owner ATC, which now counts one-and-a-half million subscribers, making Time the nation's largest cable operator. On top of these two wildly profitable video ventures sits Levin, who was promoted in 1979 to vice president of the Video Group—the umbrella division that also includes Time's 600,000-subscriber movie channel, Cinemax. In 1980, the Video

Group was granted almost one third of Time's entire capital spending, a fact that hints at the internal clout Levin now wields. For instance, an experiment with a twenty-four-hour teletext service in San Diego that will allow customers to retrieve print information on their television screens is being run by Levin's Video Group, and not by Time's print honchos. A new cable magazine—rejected two years ago when proposed by the magazine group—has been revived, with Levin as co-venturer. "We have taken our place internally," says Levin. "It's still hard for people in the building to get used to the culture shock."

By the look of things, Levin will continue to send gentle shock waves through Time Inc. headquarters. Strengthening the role played by cable, he recently managed to fold Time-Life Films (which suffered 1980 pre-tax losses of \$18 million, charged to the Video Group's earnings). "In theatrical films," explains Levin, "you have to be a major player. And if you're in motion pictures, you better be a distributor. To start a theatrical distribution business—well, we're looking into the future here, not the past." The Time-Life Cassette Club is also finished ("because basically cassettes are going rental . . . and because the mail-order business isn't big enough"). Announcing their demise, Levin seems decidedly pleased. More energy and bucks available for ATC and HBO—the launch pad for new programming.

After made-for-pay-television movies, Levin's next horizon is theater—new

drama commissioned, staged, and distributed exclusively by HBO. Though nothing is definite, Levin hints at such big-name playwrights as Arthur Miller. He would like to focus increasingly on documentaries and, as always, discerns a vital perceptual gap between commercial and pay television: "Network documentaries work in a very narrow mold. They have a particular *feel*. But there's a fascinating chemistry that occurs when you take a pre-existent program format and mate it with pay. It's just one more marvel of this medium."

Though Levin doesn't anticipate the demise of network television, he does see it being forced to adapt and concentrate on "what it does best": news, sports, sitcoms. Only mildly flattered when HBO, after nearly a decade of struggle and angst, is termed the "fourth network," Levin promptly cites research indicating that viewers go first to their HBO folio, and *then* consult the network channels. "But even HBO isn't enough," he adds. "Already viewers want more than one pay service."

Is Levin worried that the dazzling success of HBO and the ravenous video appetite it has spawned may have created a nation of stay-at-home television zombies? Yes, he acknowledges, a little. But he prefers to think he has "domesticated the TV set," given viewers the chance for intelligent choices, made people "TV-smart." "We are redefining the way the American people relate to their television set," says Levin with that quiet urgency that bears so much attention. ■

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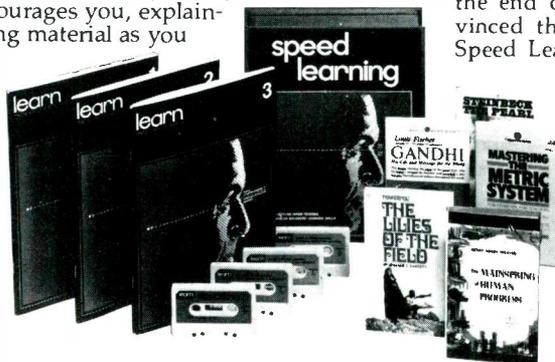
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Is Television Good for You?

by David Finkle

ALTHOUGH research continues on the awfully important question of whether television is good for you, it's clear that a definitive answer has been coming into focus for some time now. The long-awaited response is: yes . . . and no.

Recently published findings indicate that the benefits of television have everything to do with who—and where—the television watcher is. They include (for those of you who have been skipping the entertainment pages in your local papers in order to avoid yet another interview with Alan Alda) the following:

Television *is* good for children. Children are naturally curious, and as any child psychologist will tell you, they need something to look at a good deal of the day. If the television weren't there, what would be—the draperies, macramé wall-hangings, a bowling trophy? If you're a parent, ask yourself this question: Which would I rather have my child watching for an average of six and a half hours a day—television, or the chintz drapes? The answer should be obvious enough, whether or not you've read Piaget.

Television *is* good for TV repairmen. Before television, most—if not all—of them had little chance to practice their trade: some even had to go into other lines of work, where studies show they got very little job satisfaction.

Television *is not* good for doctors. There's so much medicine being discussed on television before, during, and after *Marcus Welby* reruns that a medical phenomenon known as Robert Young Syndrome has developed. The syndrome is very much like Medical Student's Disease—only in the latter, the medical student thinks he's suffering from every ail-

ment he hears about; in Robert Young Syndrome, the television watcher thinks he can *diagnose* and *cure* every ailment he hears about. This makes it hard on doctors who want to charge exorbitant fees for performing the same services.

Television *is* good for interior decorators. It's a daily challenge for them to figure out where to conceal the silly thing—behind the Coromandel screen or in the Shaker cabinet. And a daily challenge is good for anybody, including a frazzled A.I.D.

Television may or may not be good for poets. Until enough of them can afford television sets, we'll have to refrain from drawing any conclusions.

Television *is not* good for cats. Were the programming for them substantially improved, the situation could change. *Sitting on* television, however, *is* good for cats; it's warm, and the flat surface is very supportive.

Television *is not* good for cat owners. It's a well-known fact that television shows us how life is lived outside the immediate community; so it's not a good idea to have a lot of ailurophilic television watchers getting the notion that life outside the immediate community has a cat's tail sweeping back and forth in front of it.

Television *is* good for senior citizens. It's nice for them to have a frequent reminder that when they go, they won't be missing much.

Television *is not* good for looters. Too heavy and cumbersome; hair dryers and jewelry are much better.

Television *is not* good for teenagers. In point of fact, television is a lot *like* teenagers. It spends a remarkable amount of time just sitting there staring blankly, and it also distracts your attention when you'd much rather be doing something constructive, like living your own life.

Television *is* good for plants. It can talk to them when you don't feel like it. A

grow-light, however, might be preferable; it's certainly cheaper.

Television *is* good for people who live alone. It gives them something to yell at, thereby providing—for those who lack one—the semblance of a typical human relationship. You might think the same effect could be achieved with a radio, but curiously enough, it can't. People don't talk back to radios; they do talk back to televisions. (Don't ask why.)

Television *is* good for teachers. It's an invaluable visual aid—and if you believe that, I'll tell you another one.

Television *is* good for athletes—what else explains their million-dollar-plus salaries?—but *is not* good for sportscasters. For some reason television encourages sportscasters to ramble on and generally make fools of themselves. They may know that one picture is worth a thousand words, but they're going to give you the thousand words anyway.

Television *is not* good for chauffeurs. It makes them take their eyes off the road, which explains why, whenever you see a television in a limousine, it's in the back half.

Television *is* good for video artists. Without television there would be no video—obviously. A more important question: Is video good for the rest of us?

Television *is not* good for rock-and-roll fans. There's just no question that rock-and-roll doesn't sound right on television. They say that rock-and-roll will never die, but if it ever does, it'll be television that killed it.

Television *is not* good for politicians. It makes them look very grainy (cf. Abscam Tapes).

So there it is, and now that the question of whether television is good for you has been answered, it is expected that researchers and survey makers will move on to the next pressing question: Does television like you? ■

David Finkle is a freelance television viewer.

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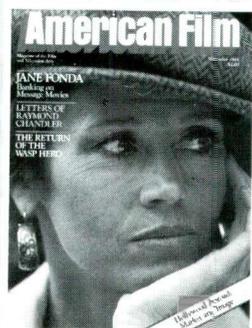
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MGM — June 25, 26 & 27

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MGM — October 15, 16 & 17

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