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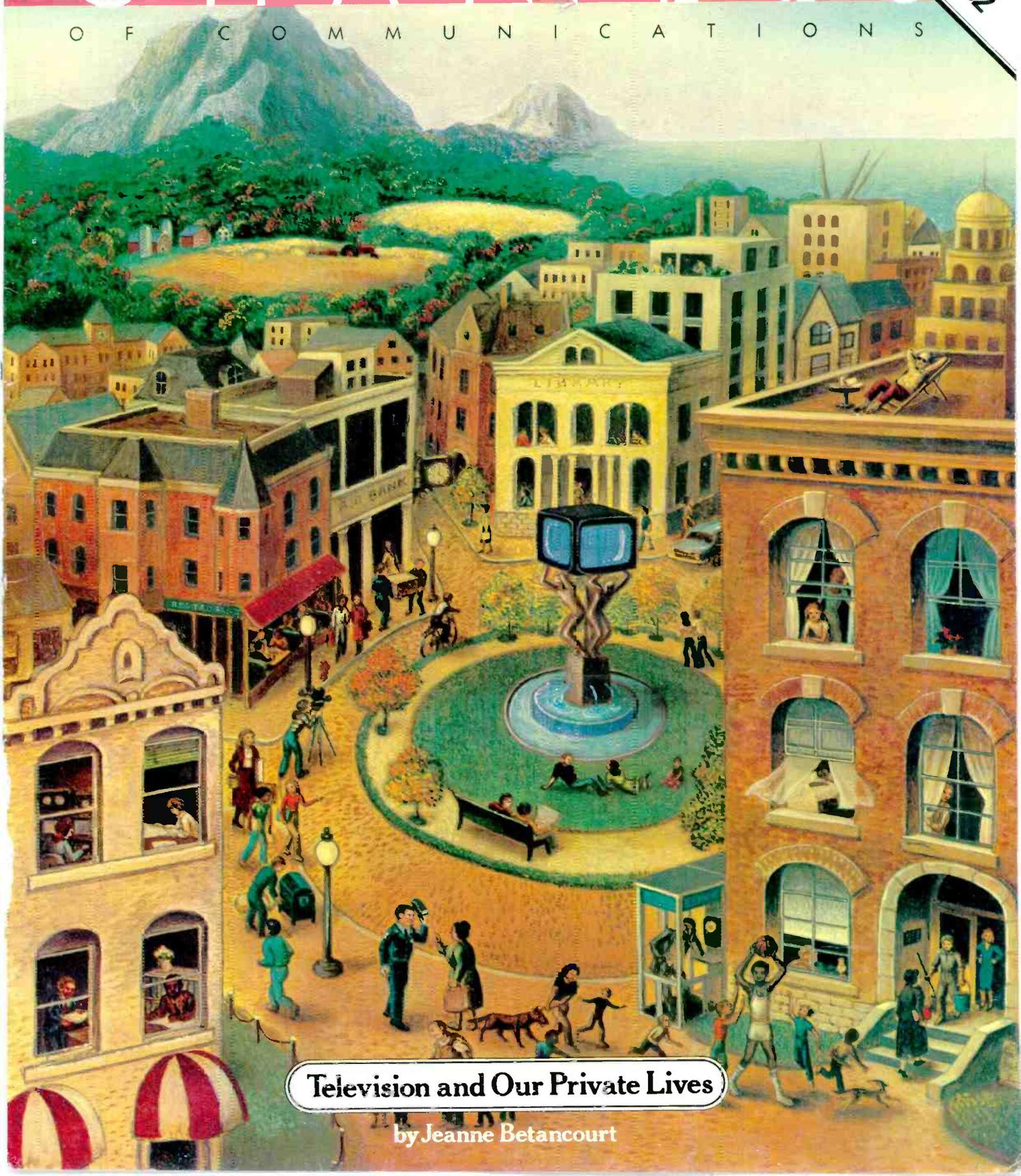
DECEMBER JANUARY

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The  
State of the  
Revolution, 1982

# CHANNELS

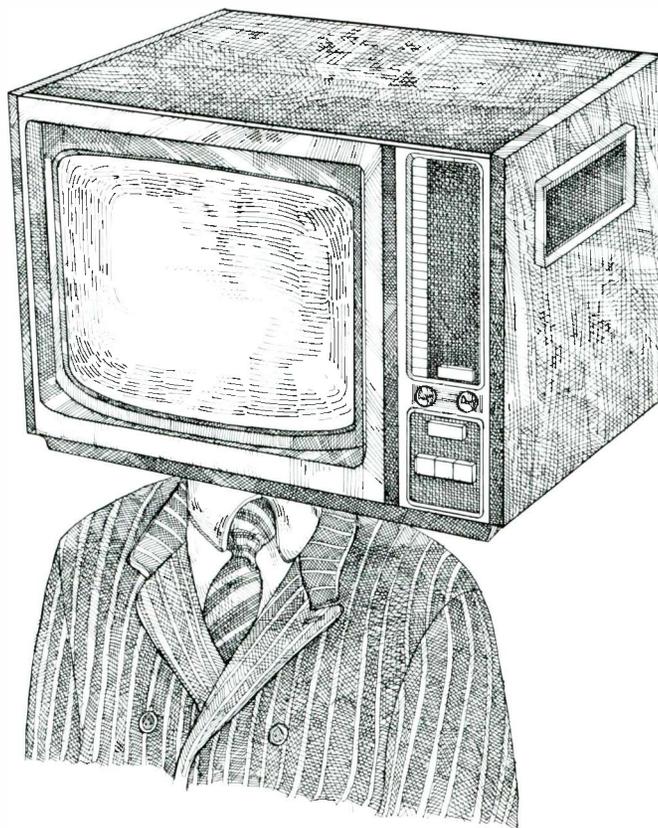
O F C O M M U N I C A T I O N S



## 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.



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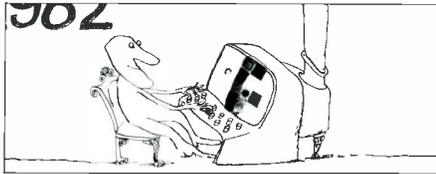
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# C H A N N E L S

DECEMBER 1981 - JANUARY 1982

FEATURES

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 5

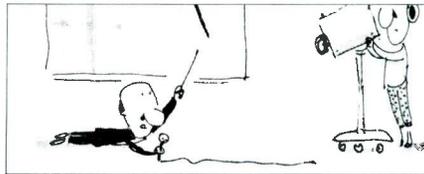


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## The State of the Revolution, 1982

by  
Martin Koughan

In true supply-side spirit, business has decided that we're ready for the telecommunications future.



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## 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.



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## The Man Who Started Television II

by  
Jonathan Black

Gerald Levin's daring proposal to wed satellites and cable made HBO — and remade television.



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## 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.



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## 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.

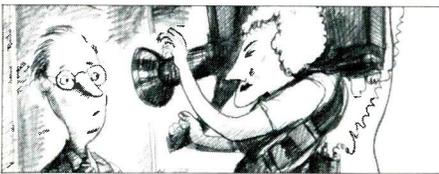


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by  
Jeanne Betancourt

Oral histories from a range of Americans explore our true relationship to television.



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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.

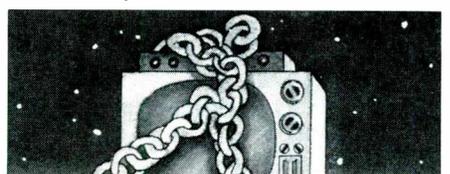


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As popular as it is controversial, booming cable pornography exposes America's split personality.



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Henry Geller

Congress may decide that cable operators are "telepublishers," giving total control of all channels.

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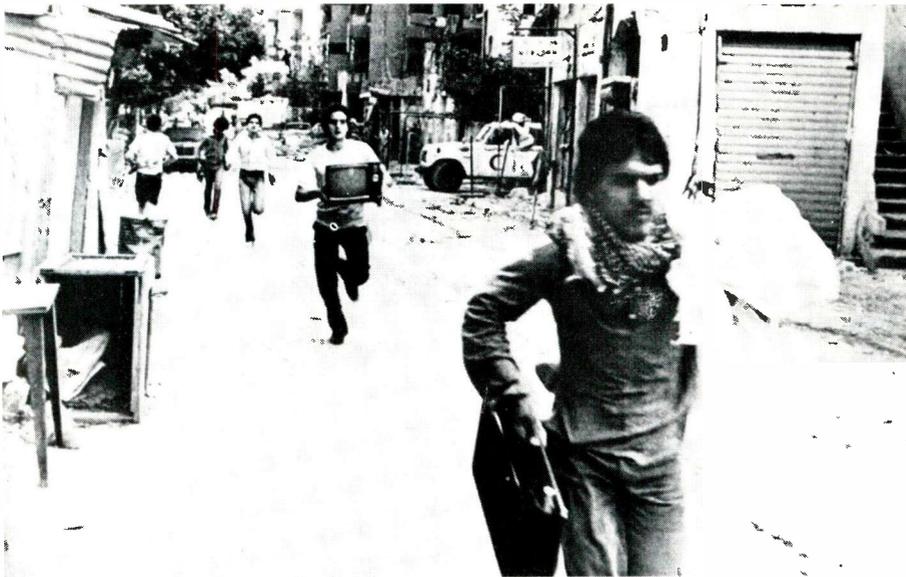
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Cover illustration by Kinuko Y. Craft

Wide World Photos



**T**HIS 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.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Les Brown

MANAGING EDITOR

Audrey Berman

SENIOR EDITORS

Valerie Brooks  
Michael Pollan

DEPARTMENTS EDITOR

Savannah Waring Walker

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Jeanne Betancourt  
Jonathan Black  
Ben Brown  
Brian Winston

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Michael Schwarz  
James Traub  
Ross Wetzsteon

ART DIRECTION

Bee Graphics

CHAIRMAN

David B. Hertz

GENERAL MANAGER

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ASST. GENERAL MANAGER

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Brad Jaffe

CIRCULATION CONSULTANTS

The Circulation Dept. Inc.

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## On the Spot

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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*

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## Moyers: For the Record

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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*

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## Arch Support

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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

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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*

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## Medium School

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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.*

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## We Shall Not Overlook

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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*

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## On Reagan and Moyers

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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

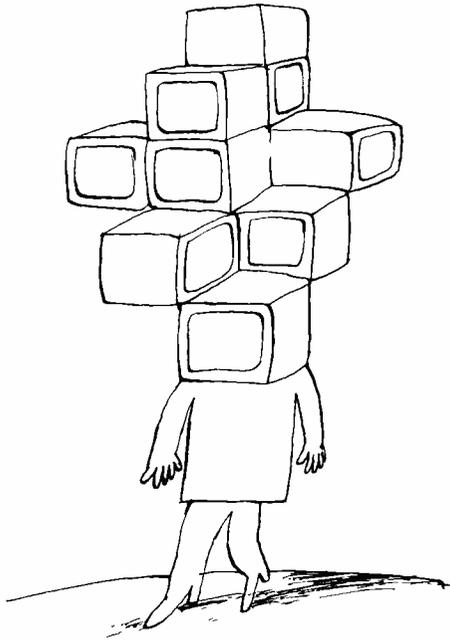
**H**AVING PRESIDED OVER the deregulation of the airline industry, actively pressed for the deregulation of the trucking industry, and formulated the Carter Administration's message advocating greater reliance on competition in the communications industry, I feel an almost paternal interest in Congress's 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.

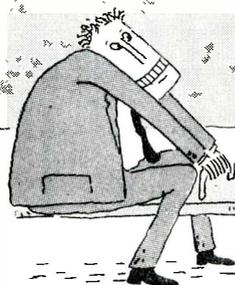
The halfway house of partial deregulation could introduce more inefficiencies and distortions than total regulation. Moreover, a gradual approach could give rise to new vested interests bent on retaining whatever protections remained.

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

**T**HE 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-

# 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

**T**HE 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 Adelman, *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

**A**N 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

**T**EN 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.

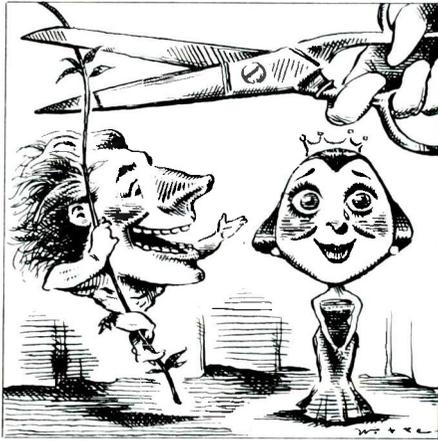
The networks, of course, would love to have the 7:30 time period back again, and have been pushing for repeal of the rule. But it does not automatically follow that the half-hour will revert to the networks if the access restrictions are lifted; the time belongs to the individual television stations, 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.

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## Technophobia

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**T**HE 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.

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## New Waves

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**Y**OU'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 awoken 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.

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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.

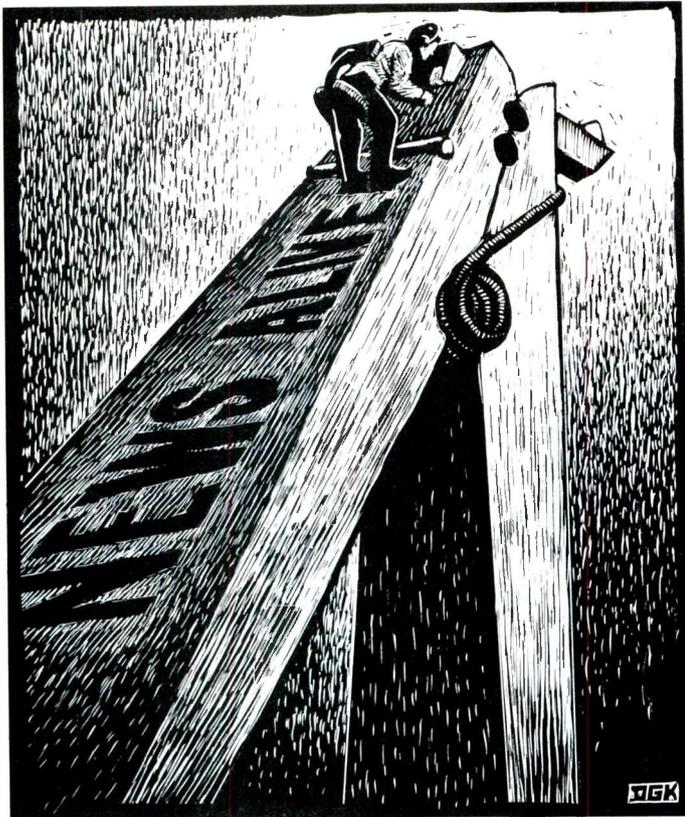
Why? Maybe because we were, together, responding to what we had seen: visual accounts of love affirmed and thwarted; of hate and envy and jealousy given expression and battled; of

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

**A**MERICAN 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

*Ron Powers is a Pulitzer Prize-winning television critic and the author of The Newscasters. His most recent book is a novel entitled Toot-Toot-Tootsie, Goodbye.*

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

**N**ORMAN 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

*Brian Winston, a contributing editor of Channels magazine, is a professor of film and television at New York University.*

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

**M**ARK 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.

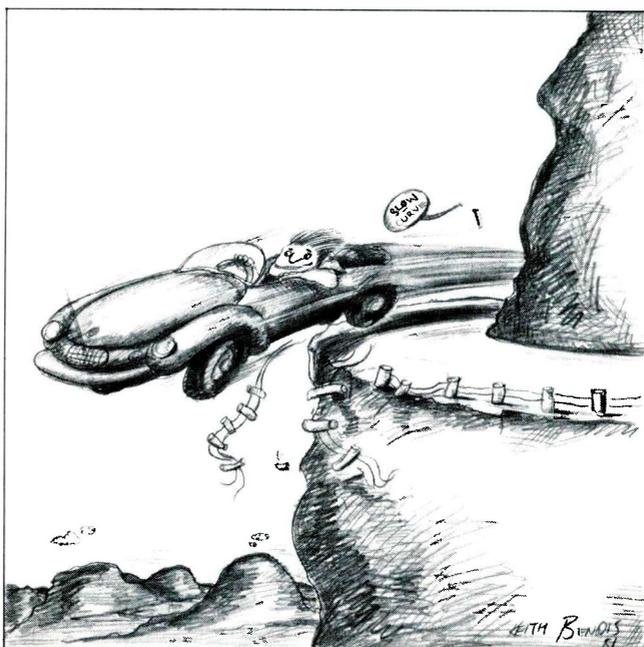
Mark Fowler reasons that since there are both large and small cars on the road, as well as buses, trucks, vans, campers, and motorcycles, there is plenty of competition on the highway and therefore no need for a speed limit. Not only does he devoutly believe this, he actually believes it makes sense.

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

**H**ISTORY 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

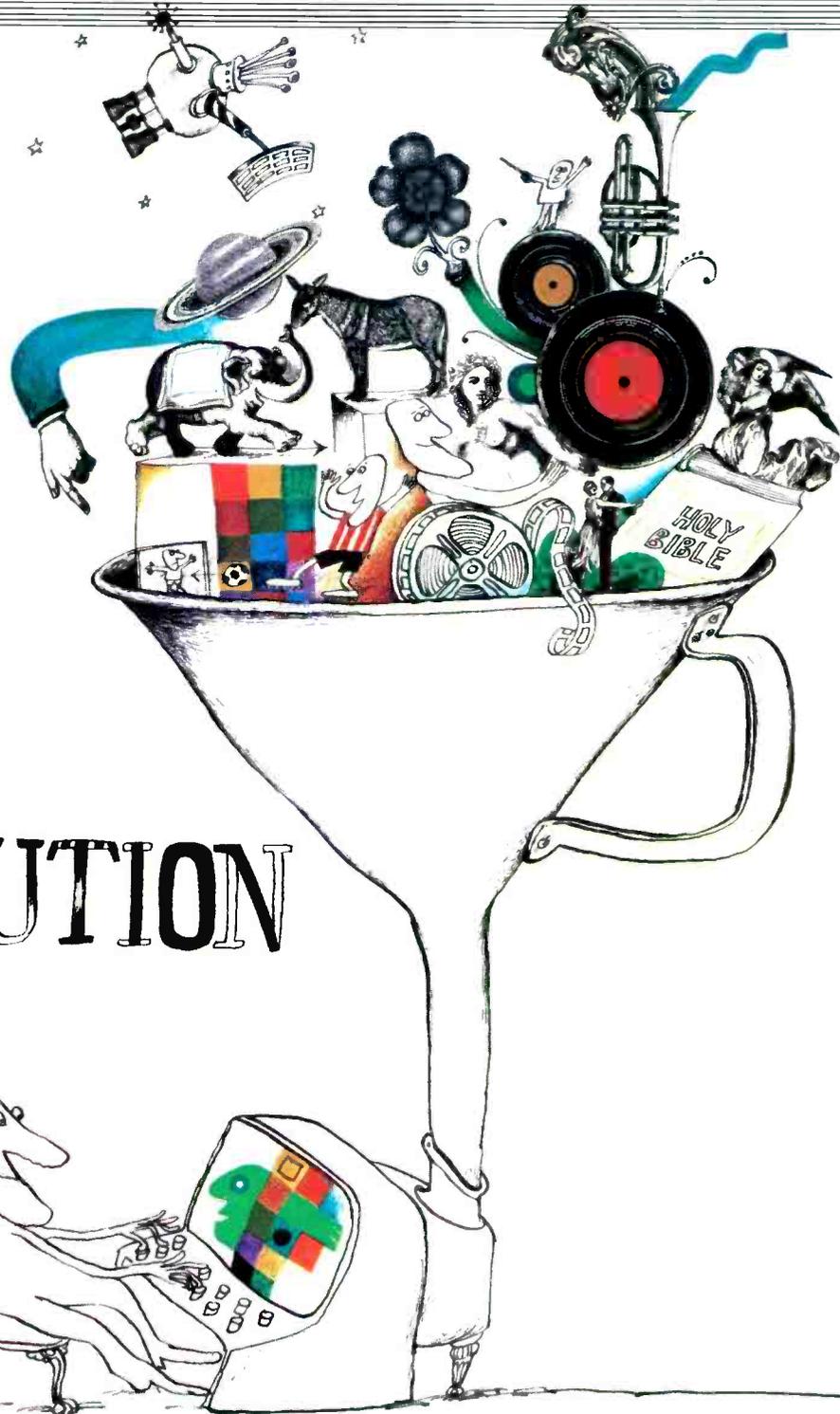
*Martin Koughan is a television news producer and a frequent contributor to Channels.*

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;

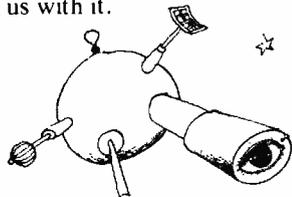
- the publication by Sears Roebuck of a merchandise catalogue in a new medium, the optical video disk;

- 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.



**P**IEDMONT 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."



**T**HE 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 superstation 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."



**S**EARS 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."

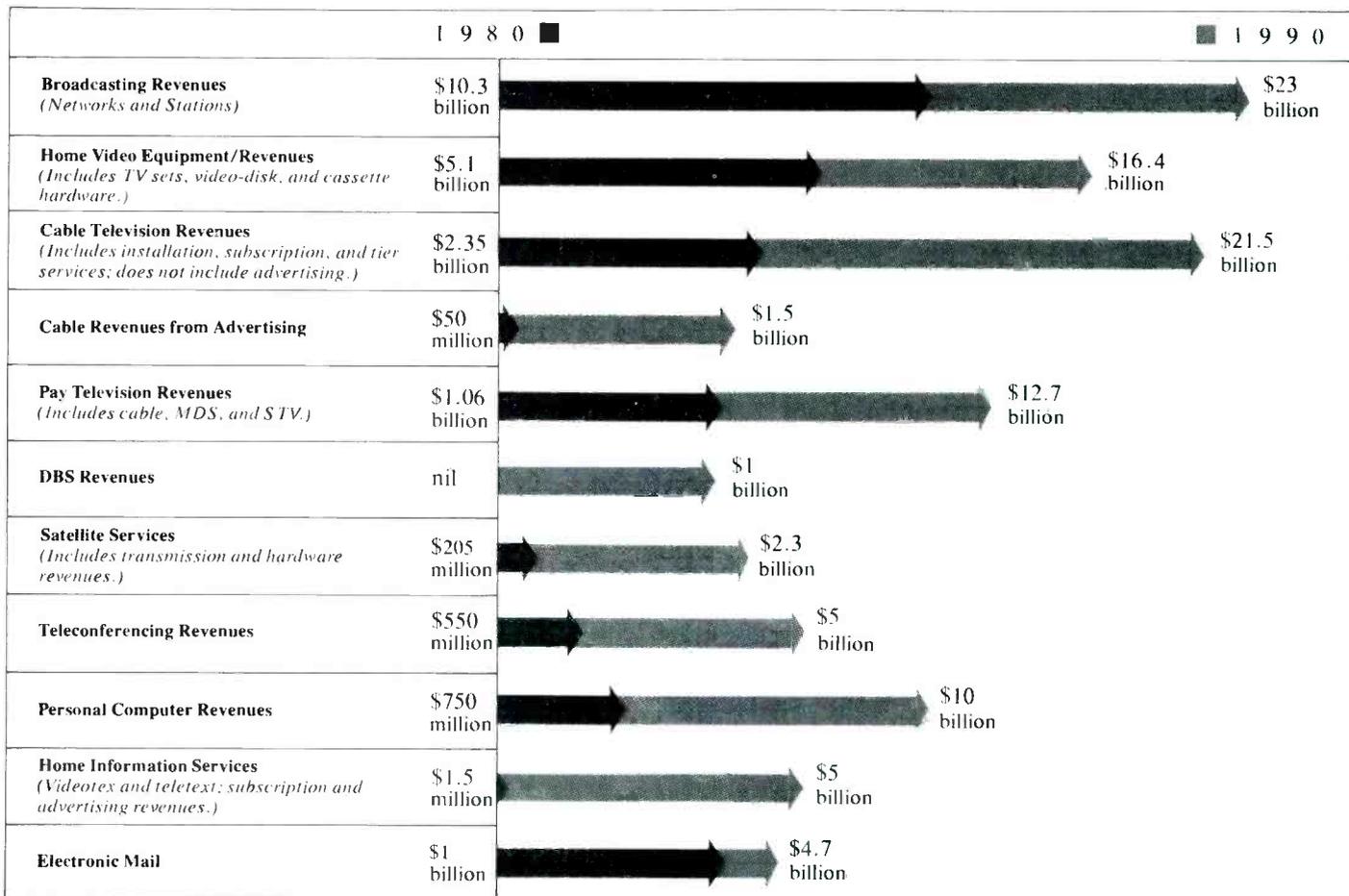


**I**NTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINES has always been something of a corporate snob. The \$26 billion colossus has cornered nearly half the world computer market with the business philosophy of building only the biggest and most powerful business computers and selling them exclusively through its own sales 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

**T**ELECOMMUNICATIONS 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.

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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

**H**UNDREDS 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.

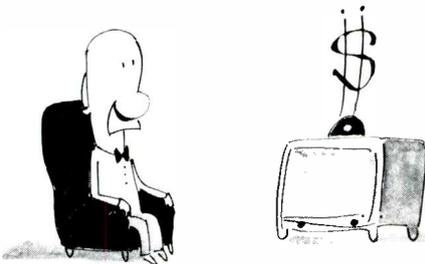
"What's the *current* price?" shouted a confused American network correspondent covering his first OPEC meeting. "Thirty-four," came back the chorus from his colleagues. The correspondent raced to the phone to tell New York the remarkable news that OPEC was lowering its oil prices. For hours his network 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.

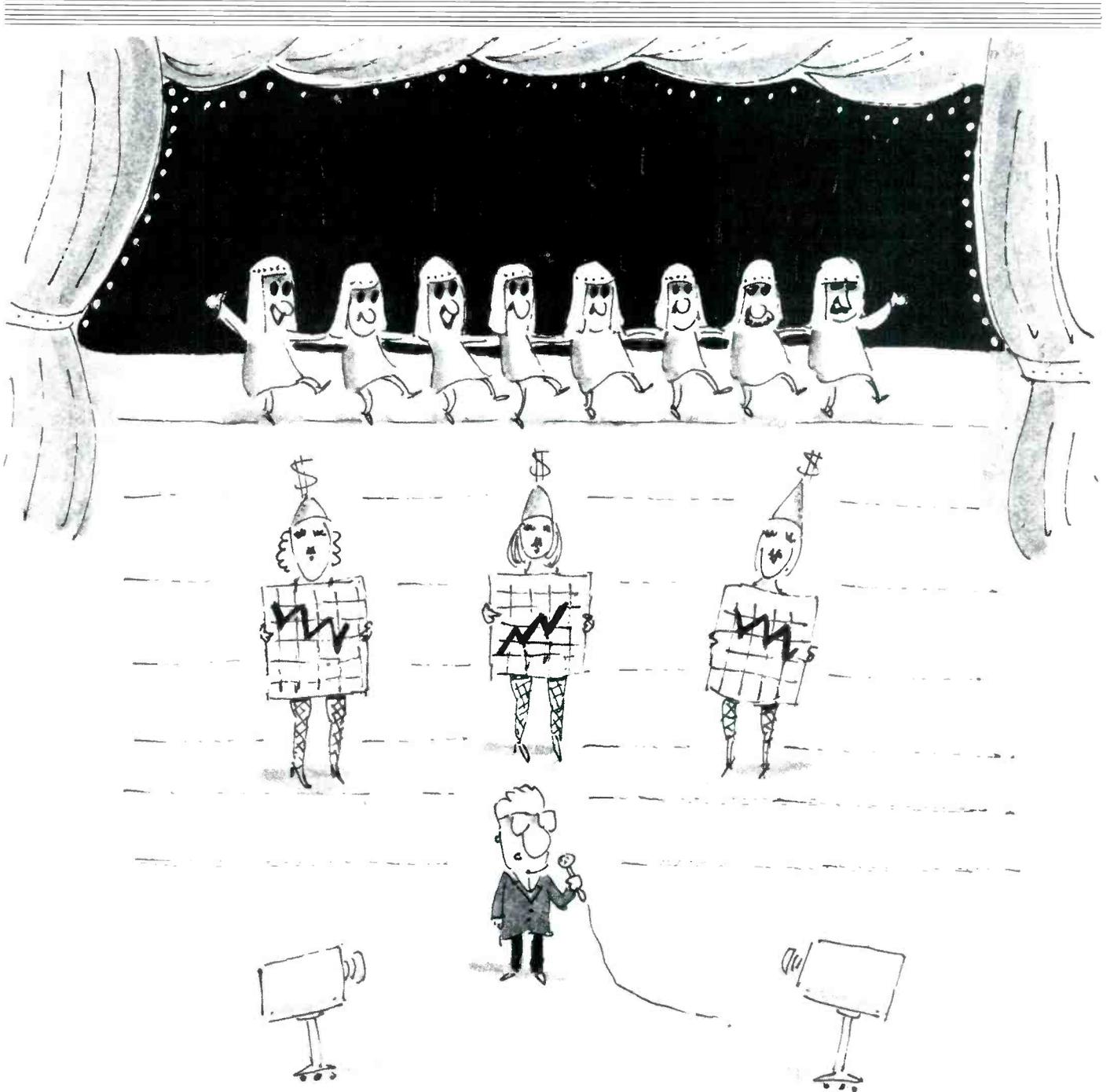
The surprising fact is that the networks perform as well as they do. The story topics—budgets, taxes, money supply, and trade—are complex and abstract, even if their effects on paychecks and prices are immediate. Many professional economists make the subject more baffling, disguising in layers of jargon 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.

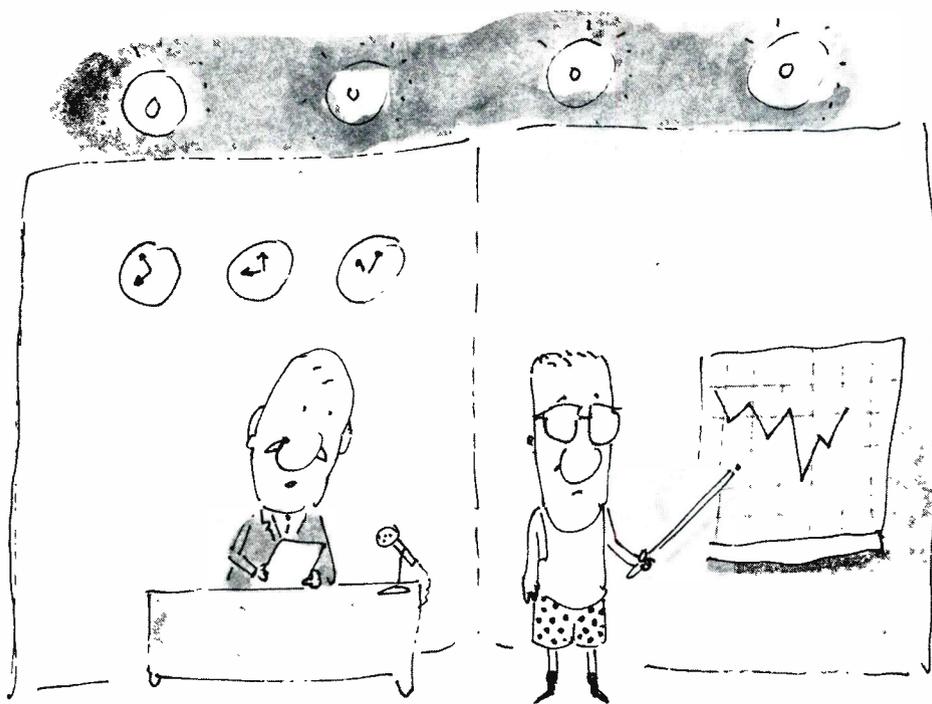
**F**OR twenty years, Irving R. Levine had been among the most familiar sights on NBC News, reporting on commissars and popes. In January 1971, NBC reassigned Levine to a newly created beat in Washington called economics. Many at NBC News wondered if the viewing public would ever see Levine again. For 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.

**T**HE 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.

**F**URTHERMORE, 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.

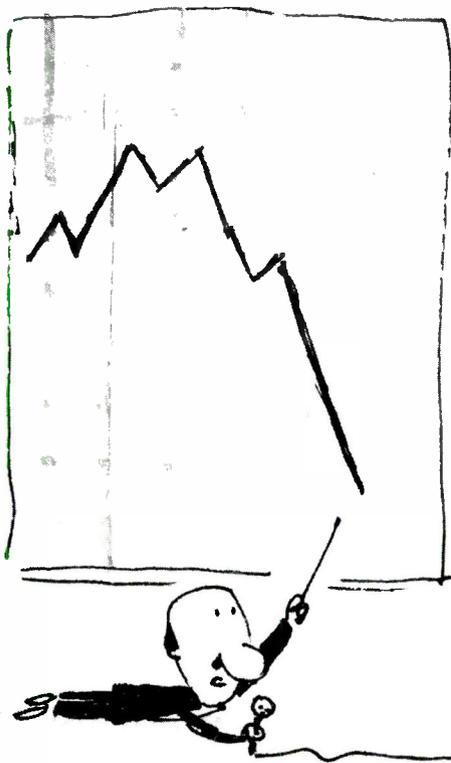
Robert Lekachman of the City University of New York complains that even on hour-long specials the networks reach out only for conventional opinions. "You won't find anyone really on the left or even the far right," he says. "A contrast between Milton Friedman and an orthodox Keynesian really adds little 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. ■

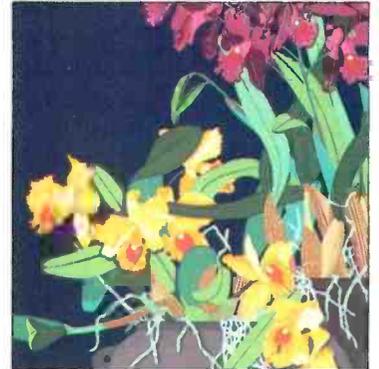
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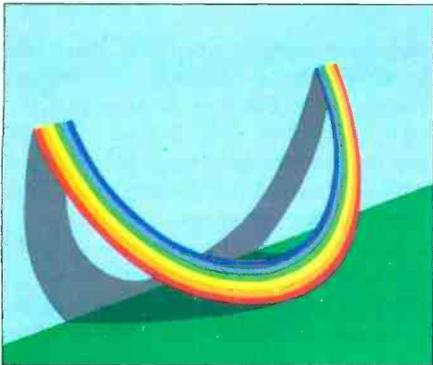
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# The Man Who Started Television II

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.

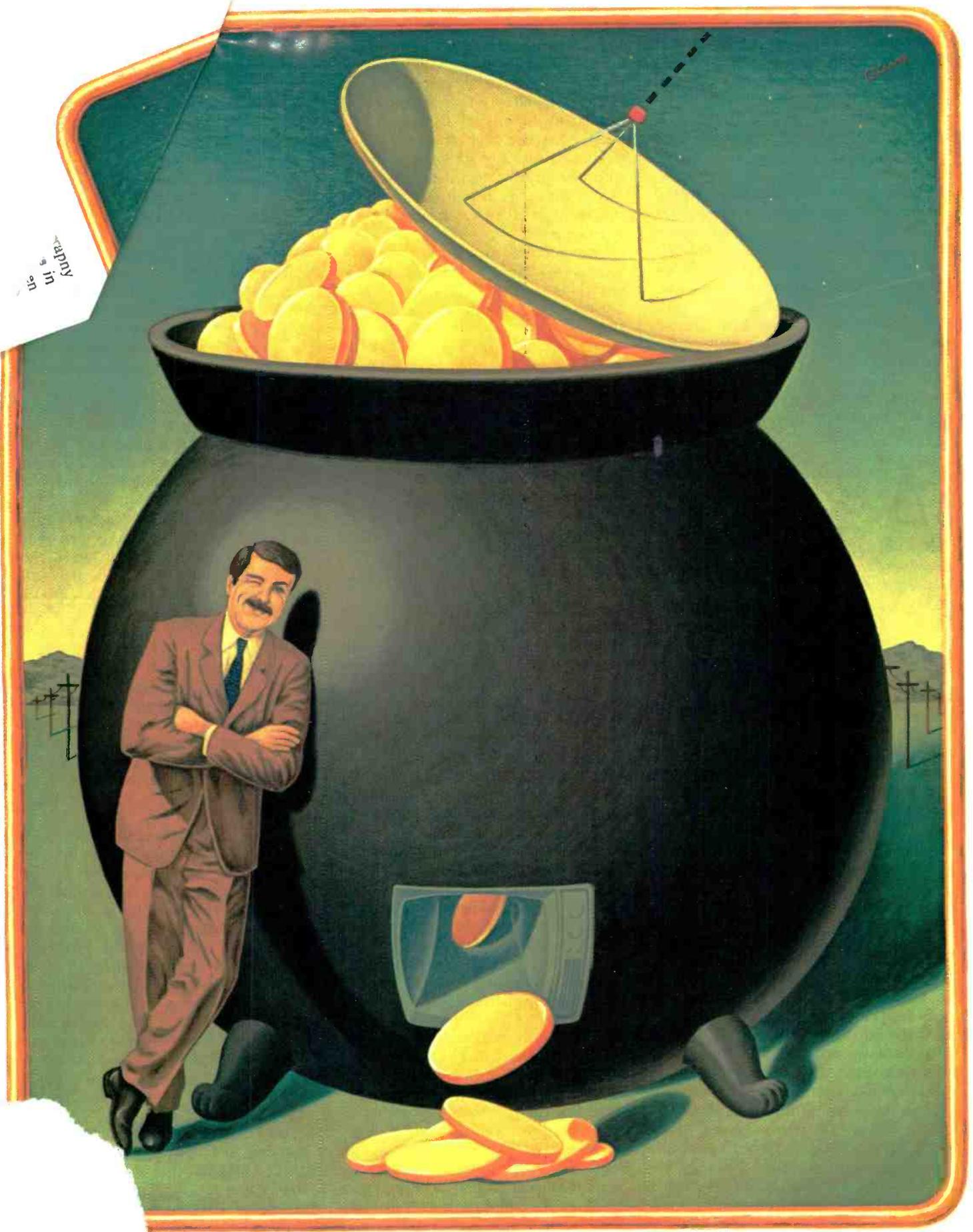
"I was trying to simulate a living room, I wanted to know how it felt." And living-room viewing felt, well, remarkable. "It wasn't just the lack of commercials or the first curse word. It was a new dynamic of the medium. That night I knew we had something significant. Something powerful."

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.

**A**ND 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."

**A**FTER 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."

**M**AYBE 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."

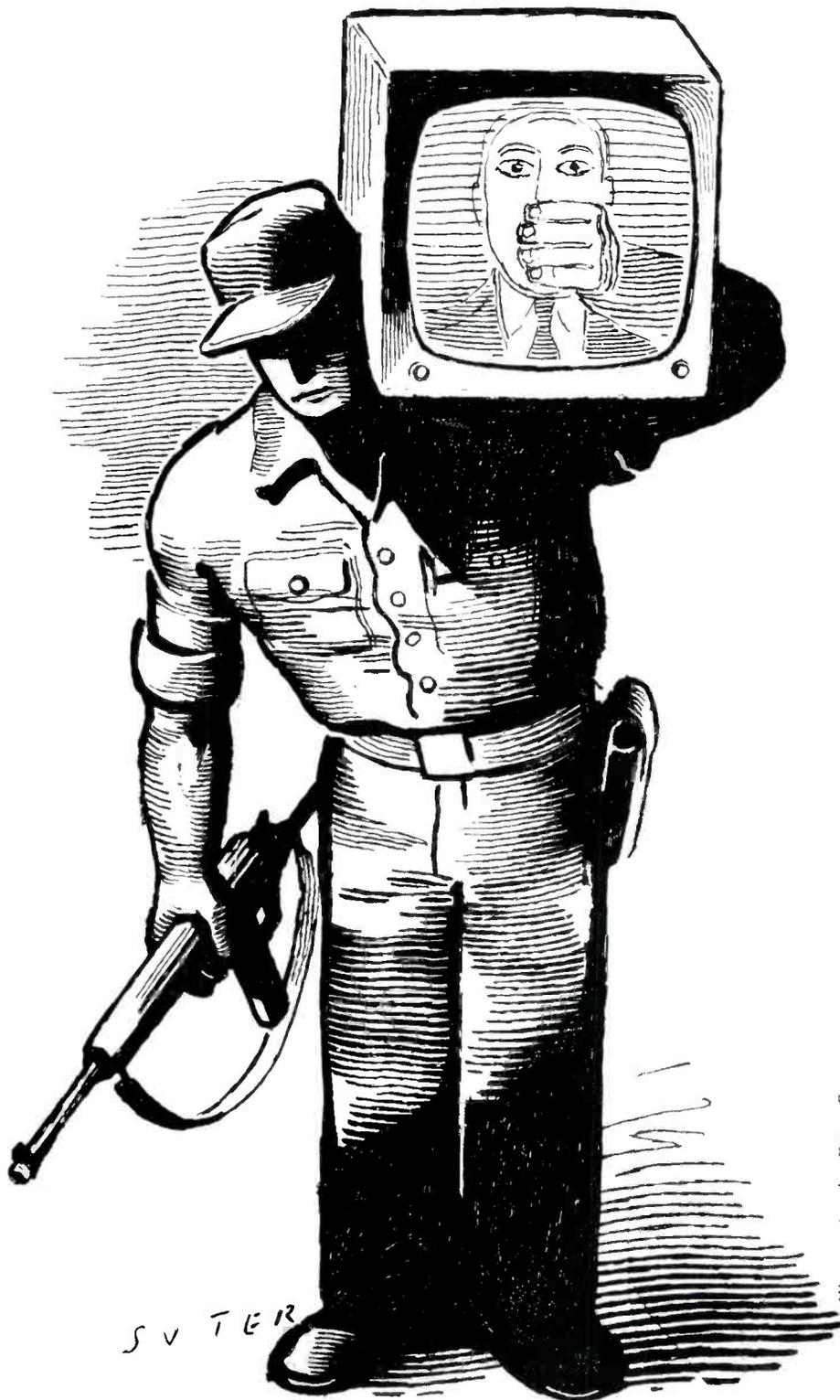
Quick was an understatement. Levin called Rosencrans Friday. On Monday morning Rosencrans called him back. Two weeks later, Levin was able to walk into the 1975 NCTA convention and announce that HBO had a cable operator to take the service and would be up on the satellite September 30. Remembering that 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

Milton Viorst is a Washington-based writer who frequently reports from the Middle East.

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."

**T**HE 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.

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'Our TV is not like an umpire in a soccer game. We play on the Israeli team.'

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"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.

**Y**AVIN 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

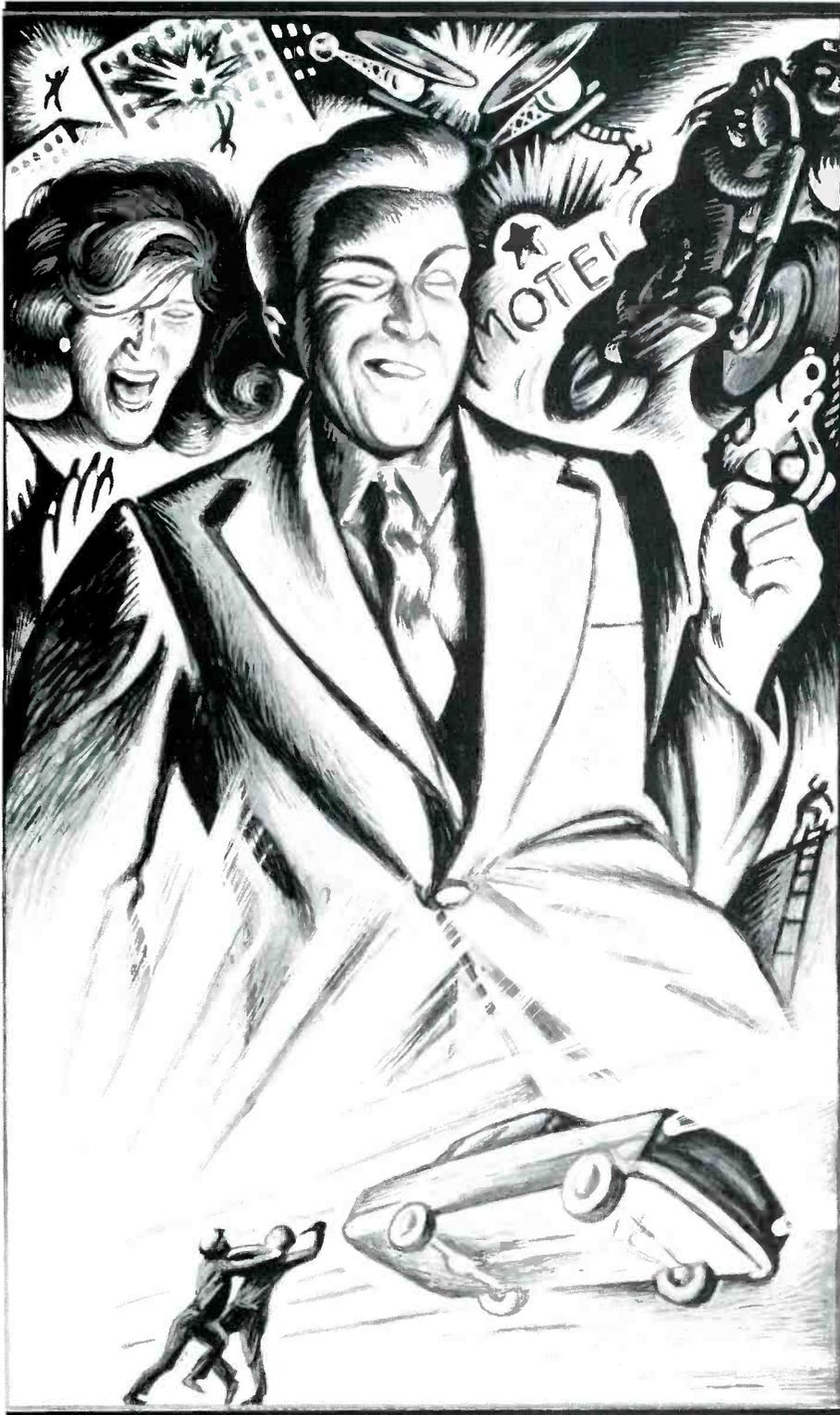


Illustration by John O'Leary

**T**HEY 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

*Michael Wood is the author of America in the Movies and of a forthcoming book on Luis Bunuel.*

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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

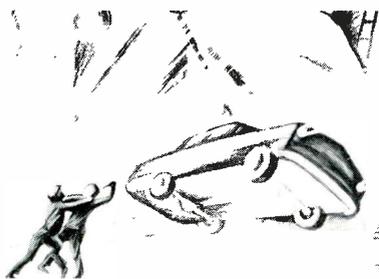
Texan in New York—a simple device, but one that works. Columbo is a policeman who makes like a private eye—shuffling gait, downcast look, scruffy raincoat and all. Quincy is a doctor, interrogating not criminals but corpses—or rather interrogating corpses that lead him to criminals. There have, of course, 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.

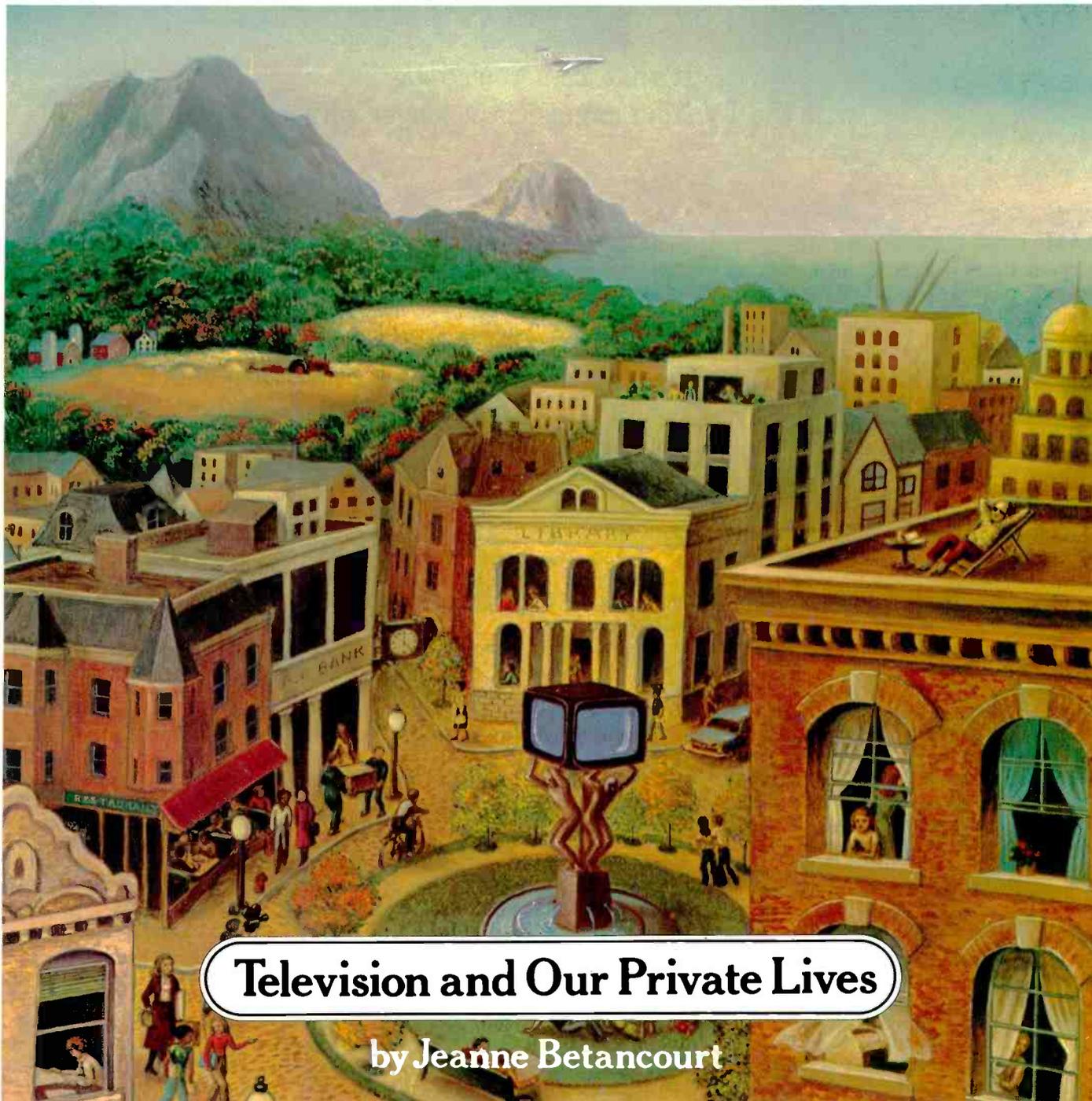
There is a serious difference between American detective shows (and films and novels) and English or French mystery writing. A mystery is a puzzle, a riddle to be solved by the sleuth and the reader, and its ultimate implication is a promise about the orderliness and intelligibility of the world. Among 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

**T**HE 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.

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*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.**

**W**HEN 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.

**T**ELEVISION 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.

**O**N 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.

**D**ENNIS 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.

**I**WATCH 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.

**W**ATCHING 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.**

**I**SERVED 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.**

**W**HEN 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

**T**HE 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.*

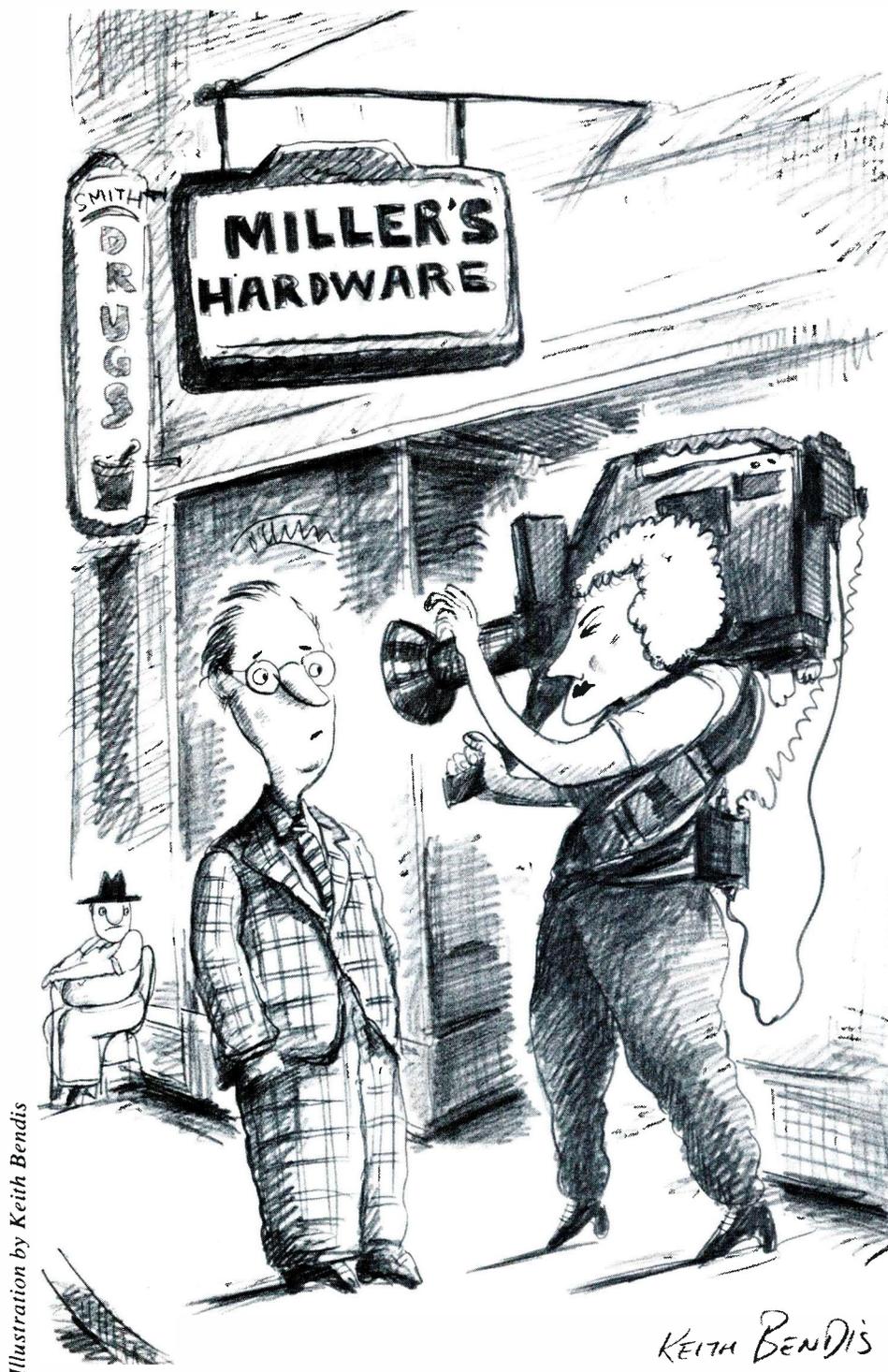


Illustration by Keith Bendis

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

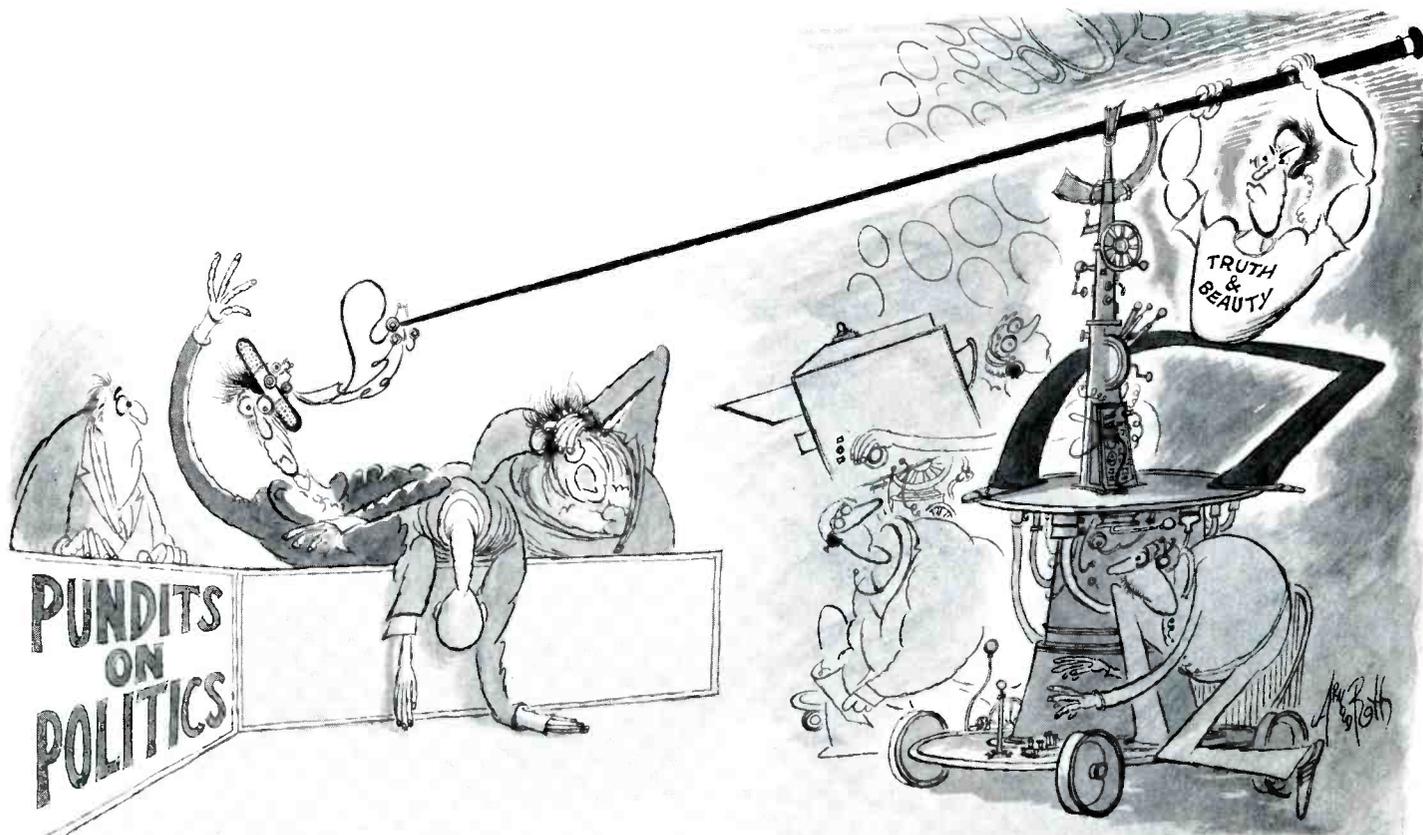
sponsors: The local Army recruiter offers *National Army Guard Presents*; there is *Hospivision* from the hospital, and every week the Downtown Retail Association presents *In Touch—Downtown Hutch*.

“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."

**N**OT 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."

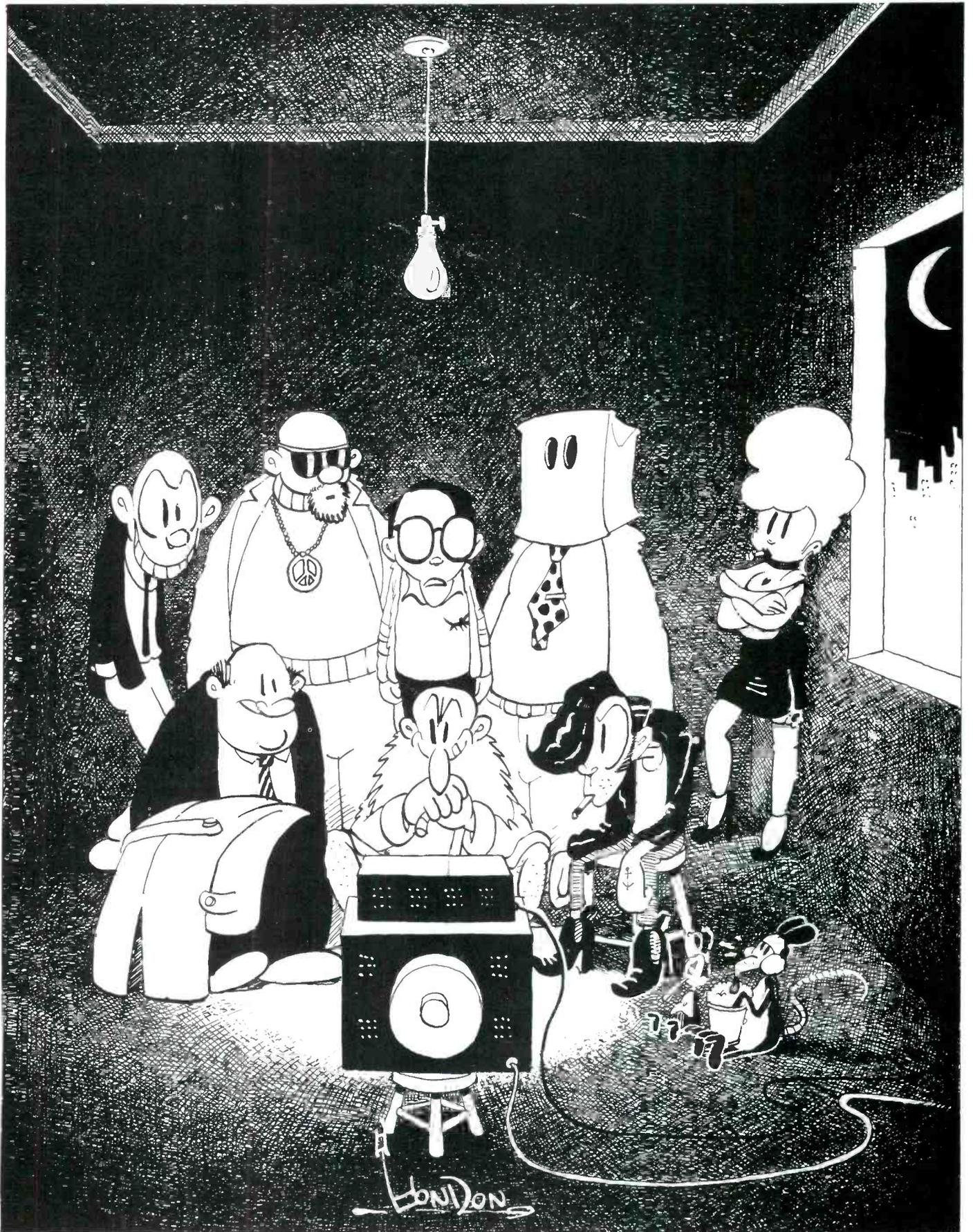
Is America really ready for sex materials? And beyond its impact on cable, what will be the effect of all this commonplace sex on our lives?

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.

**P**ROSPEROUS 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."

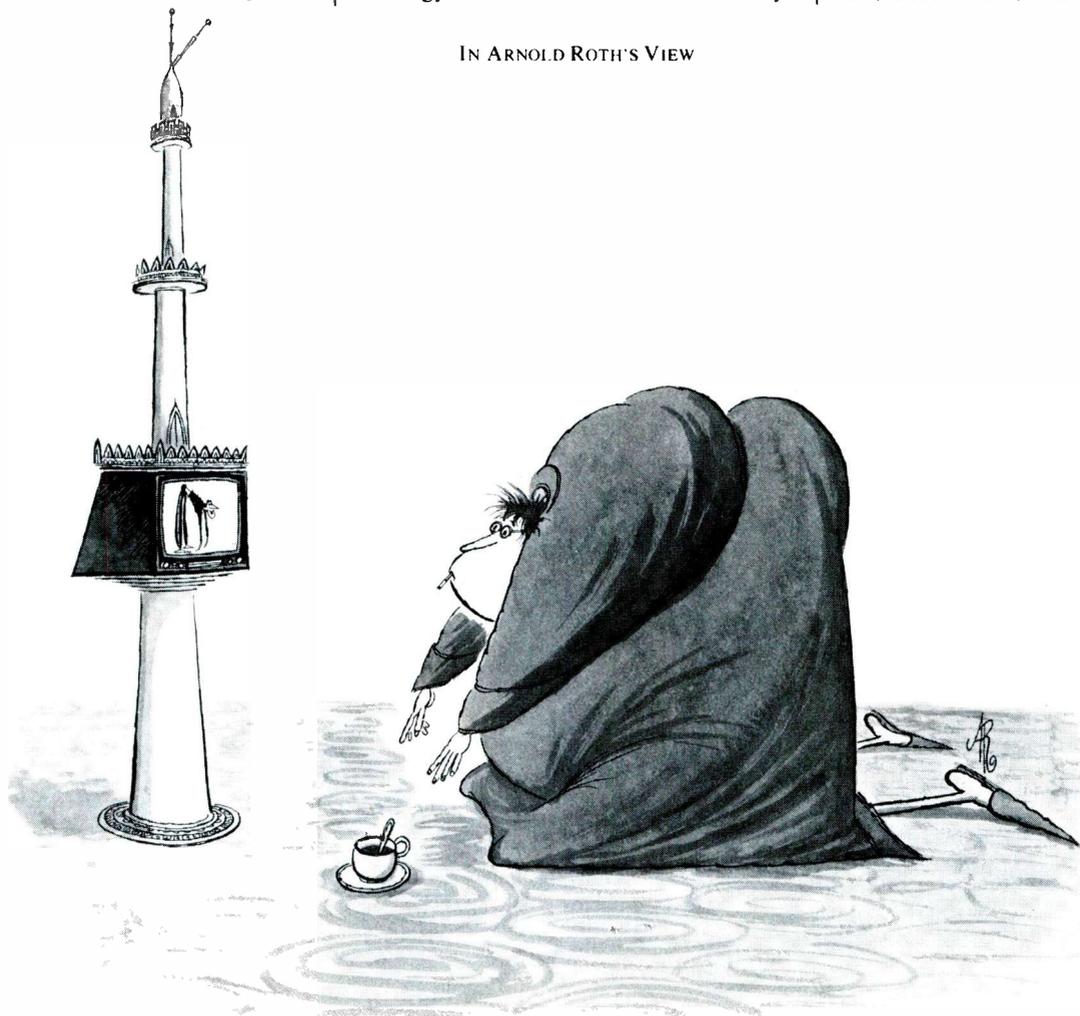
It seems no accident to Likoudis that Dave Kelly is the head of the school board. The same "subjectivism" that he feels now dominates and undermines the public schools has become the prevailing ideology in the entertainment industry.

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."

**N**OW, 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.

**B**UT 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

**W**ITH 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.

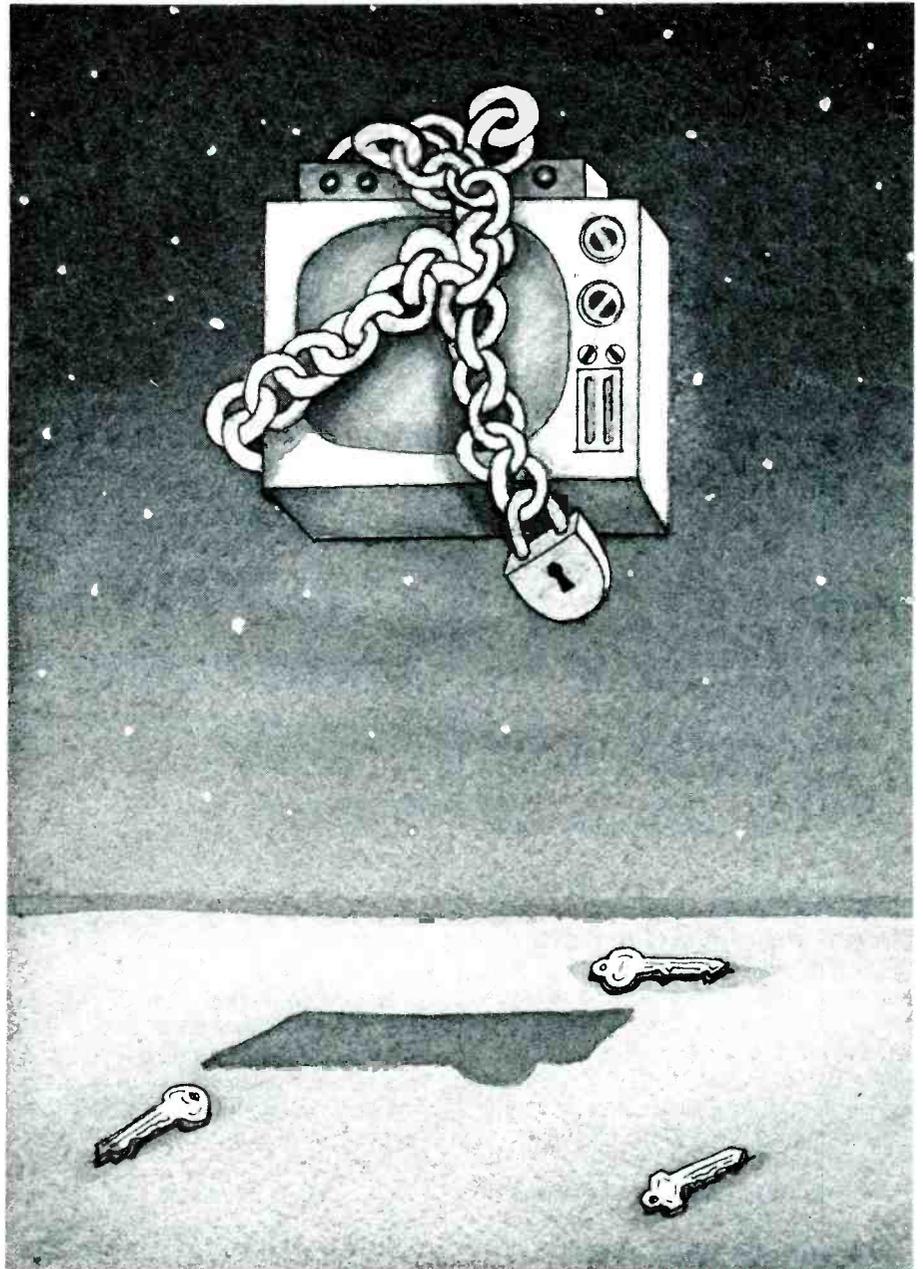
Though federal regulation prohibits one person from owning two television stations in the same community, no regulation now precludes a cable operator's control over as many as 140 channels. In 1978, the cable industry fought successfully in the Supreme Court to knock out federal regulations requiring 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

Henry Geller is director of the Washington Center for Public Policy Research.



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

**P**UBLISH 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.

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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."

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## Zimbabwe Report: A New Nation Rebuilds Its Media

by Jill Severn

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**W**HEN 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

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*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."

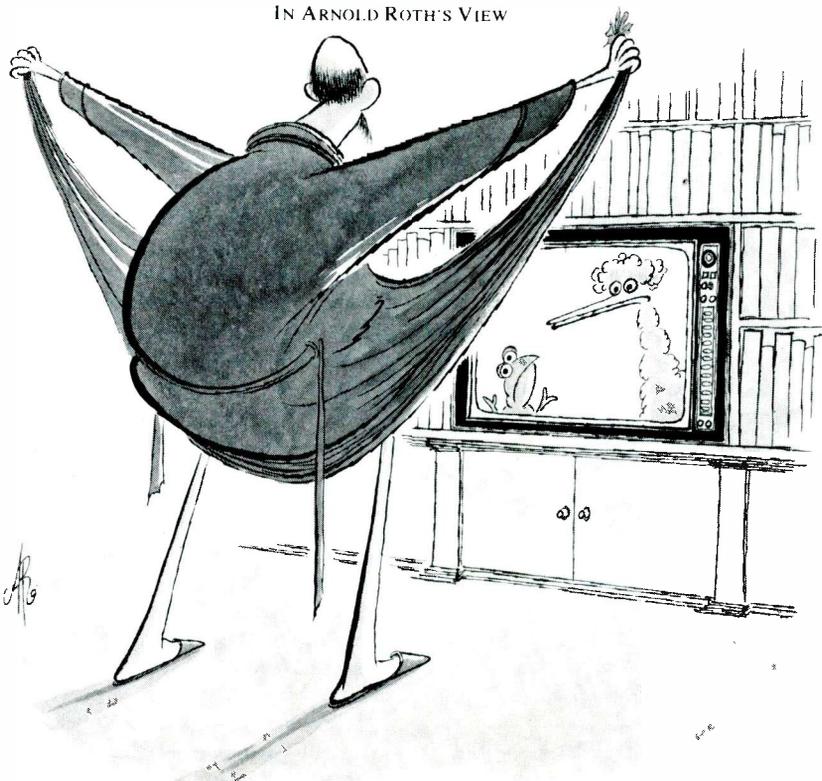
The impact of these policies is limited, in television at least, by the fact that only 30 percent of the 150,000 television sets in the country are owned by blacks. This percentage is expanding as rapidly as the blacks prosper, but radio is still the more popular medium. There are an estimated 250,000 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



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The great gold rush may not pan out  
if the new networks must provide Canadian culture  
to audiences craving Hollywood fare.

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## Canadian Pay Television: 'Biggest Crap Game Around'

by Hester Riches

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**D**REAM WEAVERS" 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-

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*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

**V**IRTUG 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."

**F**OR 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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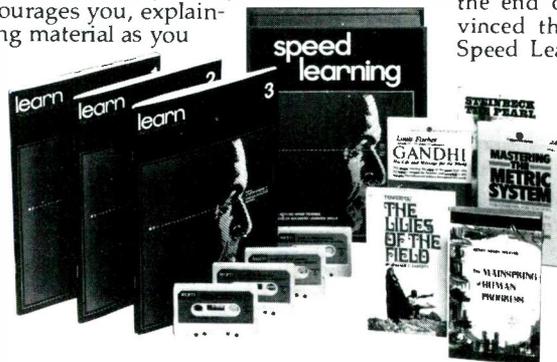
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## Is Television Good for You?

by David Finkle

**A**LTHOUGH 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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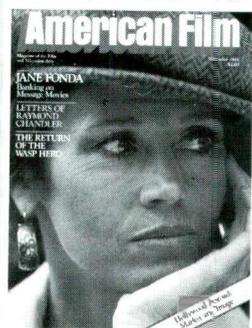
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