

How Television Weakens the Presidency, by David R. Gergen

CDC 00415

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

1984 MARCH-APRIL \$2.50

THE CRITICAL REVIEW  
OF THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

## THE VIDEO DISC Shining in a New Light

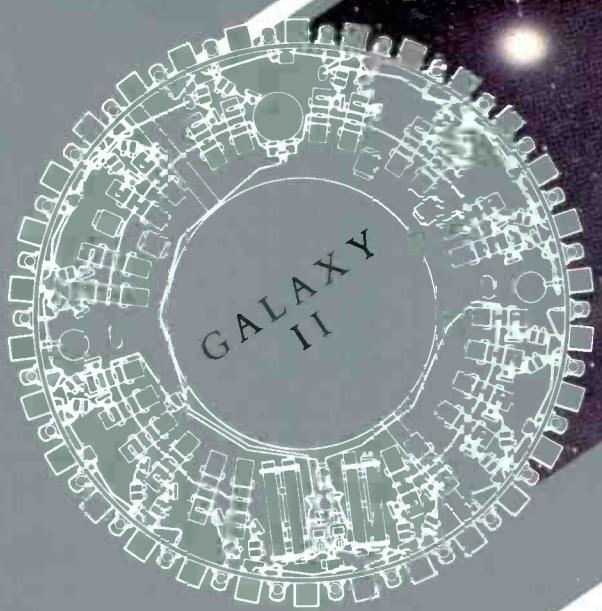
BY PAUL MARETH

- Scrambling for the Fourth Network
- Arabs—TV's Villains of Choice
- The New Impresarios of Politics
- Who Gets Hurt by Home Taping?
- KTTL's License to Malign

**SATURDAY MORNING**  
**WHERE THE DO-GOODERS**  
**WENT WRONG**

BY WALTER KARP

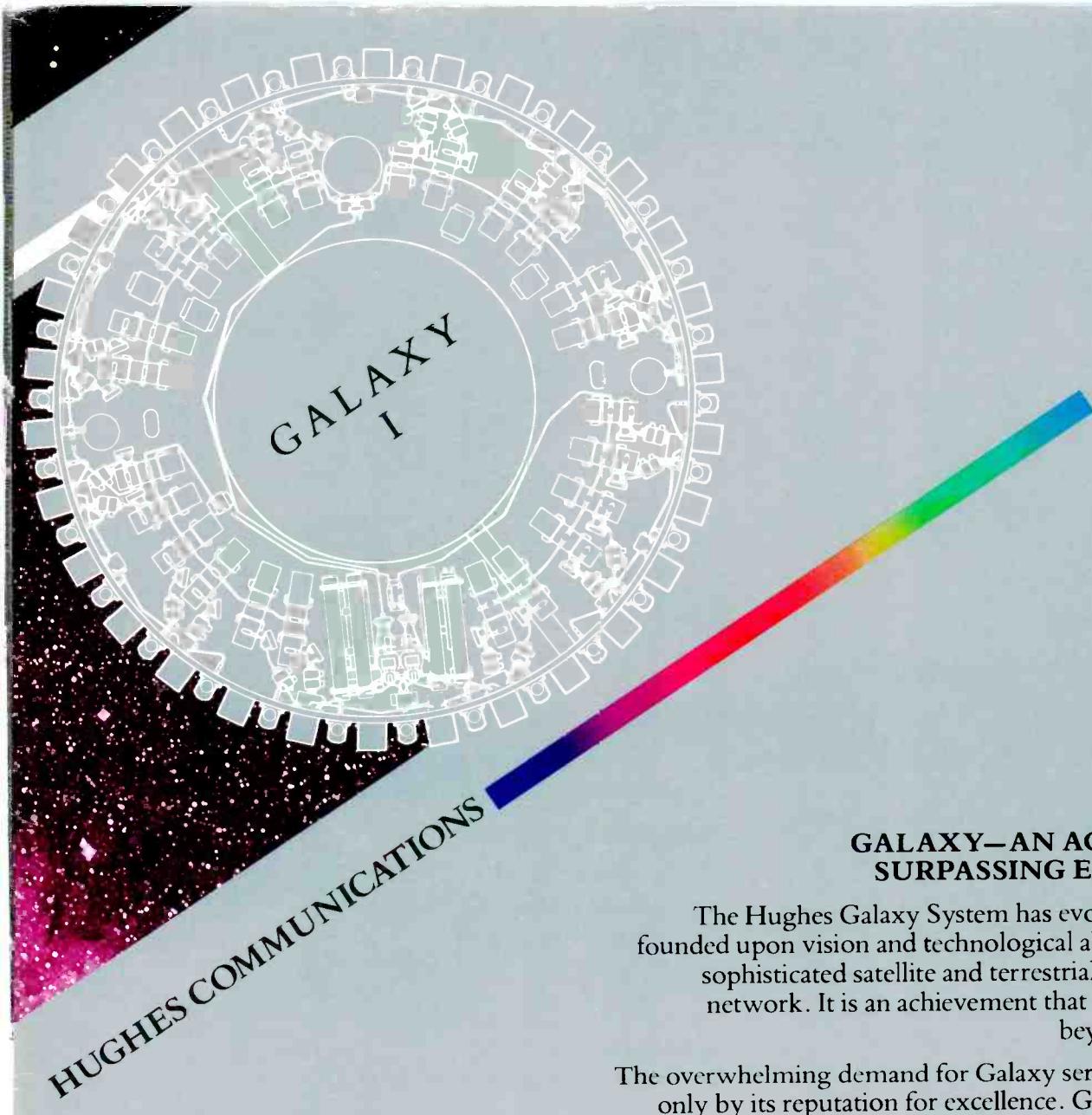




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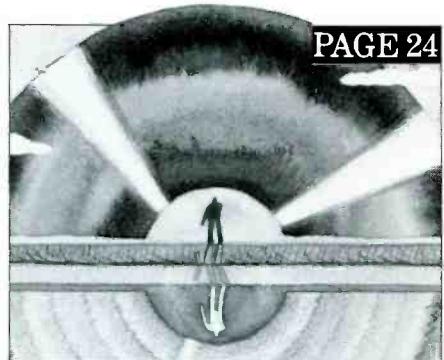
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THE VIDEO DISC:  
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This child of television and the computer, combining the powers of both, is an under-achiever no more.

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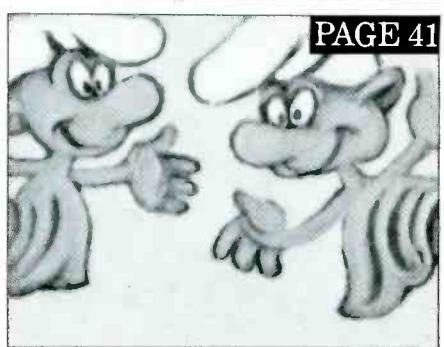
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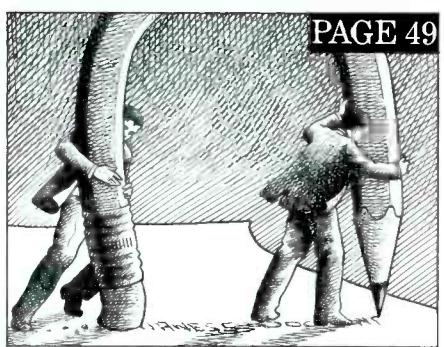
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Broadcasters still rail against it, but the Fairness Doctrine has long since been rendered toothless.

BY STUART F. SUCHERMAN

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Lazy scriptwriters portray them night after night as exotics and fanatics.

BY JACK G. SHAHEEN

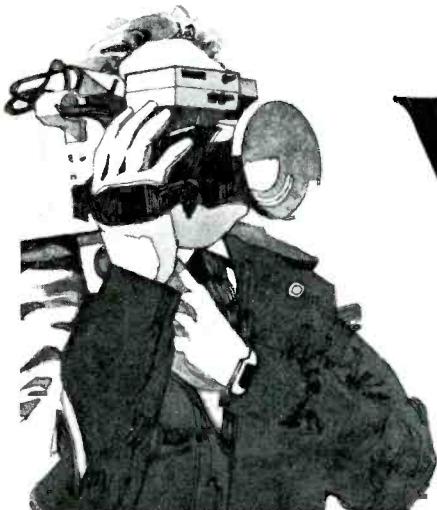
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## Guiding Light

I THOUGHT THE *CHANNELS 1984 FIELD Guide to the Electronic Media* was great, and I particularly liked the graphics. I'm planning to save my copy. The information is really a crutch for someone like me, who knows nothing about the electronic media. Every time I hear or read about C-Span, Galaxy I, or low-power TV, I'm going to grab my *Guide*.

JOSEPH BOYLE  
Washington, D.C.

## Required Reading

I HAVE JUST FINISHED READING YOUR *FIELD Guide* and wish to convey my congratulations to you on compiling this excellent document—it's even better than the 1983 version. Indeed, I could have used the *Guide* when I was a graduate student at the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Southern California. Today, I would make it required reading for those seeking a perceptive, concise road map to the communications environment of the 1980s.

A 60.3 rating and 77 share to all who worked on the *Field Guide*.

ALLAN COATES  
Cable & Broadcast Policy Office  
Ministry of Transportation and  
Communications  
Ottawa, Canada

## Fanning Flames

CONGRATULATIONS. *CHANNELS* HAS NOW earned the right to call itself the *People* magazine of broadcasting. Philip Weiss's puff piece on David—"he drives a silver sports car fast"—Fanning ["The Last, Best Hope for the TV Documentary," Nov/Dec] was so filled with self-serving inaccuracies and downright drivel that I suspect Weiss was paid by Fanning rather than by *Channels*.

If David Fanning is "the last, best hope for the TV documentary" then James Watt must have been the last, best hope for the national wilderness reserves. But Watt's gone—and Fanning remains, with

\$4 million of Corporation for Public Broadcasting money that, though earmarked for independent producers, is going to be spent on another season of trash.

JEFF KREINES  
DeMott/Kreines Films  
Millbrook, Alabama

## The Next Best Hope

AS AN INDEPENDENT FILMMAKER ATTEMPTING TO FUND AND PRODUCE SOCIAL-ISSUE DOCUMENTARIES OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM, I found the whitewash of the *Frontline* series truly disturbing.

Philip Weiss acknowledges the controversy surrounding *Frontline* and briefly illustrates the history of the CPB Program Fund and its conceptual mutilation by the station-consortium system. Yet it all appears to boil down to the fact that David Fanning, the series producer, is a jolly good chap who truly wishes to see documentary flourish.

However, the issue is not Fanning but the highly political choice made by the CPB in directing \$5 million to *Frontline* in its first season. Despite the mandate that a substantial part of Program Fund monies go to independent producers, and despite the contention that *Frontline* employs independents, *Frontline*, in effect, is a public television station project, not an independent series. Coming so soon after the cancellation of *Matters of Life and Death* and *Crisis to Crisis* and the defunding of *Non Fiction Television*, the funding of *Frontline* sent a signal to independents that, regardless of congressional intentions, their works were too hot to handle.

Even more upsetting was the absence of a request for proposals or peer-review policy, as the two canceled series had had. Weiss apparently did not question the fact that the CPB solution to these messy but necessary processes was elimination of any semblance of democratic process. CPB money is *public* money.

The solution to the future of TV documentary lies in more funding. The goals should be: to increase congressional appropriations to the CPB; to define "independent producer" so that such major

public television suppliers as CTW are not put in the same category as individual film- or video-makers; to create an agency to administer public television funding to the independent community, and to see that local stations reserve a substantial portion of programming money for independents.

ROBERT SPENCER  
Robert Spencer Productions  
New York City

## Nonfiction Facts

I GREATLY ENJOYED YOUR ARTICLE ON TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY. Nonfiction producers may disagree with David Fanning in many respects, but I hope they emulate his efforts to create pieces that people "will want to watch," not just "pieces we feel we ought to watch." There is a huge, hungry audience out there for nonfiction programming; Nielsen's numbers indicate that more than 180 million people watch some form of nonfiction television every week. For nonfiction producers to reach their huge potential audience, they need that dose of showmanship that American audiences require.

The problems that documentary film- and video-makers struggle with are how to reach their audience, and how to remove some of the formidable prejudices and barriers that broadcast and cable programmers put in their way. The path must be cleared between the nonfiction creators and the fascinated audience that awaits them.

LINDA BUZZELL  
International Documentary  
Association  
Los Angeles, California

## Correction

IN THE 1984 *FIELD GUIDE TO THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA* [Nov/Dec], the CBN Cable Network was inaccurately described as the Christian Broadcasting Network. The name of the network is CBN, and the name of its owner is the Christian Broadcasting Network.

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# THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

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*Financial Times*

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# CROSS CURRENTS

## The Free Way

In two different corners of the broadcasting business, the notion has dawned on marketers that they can make more money by annoying their audiences less.

Following the example of such marketing brainstorms as cling-free laundry and caffeine-free soda, "commercial-free" rock-music radio is now commonplace, and "pledge-free" public television has met with success on Boston's WGBH. Both stunts work only when the audience cooperates, and in both of these instances we have cooperated gratefully.

If we want rock music without commercials, large numbers of us must switch our allegiance to the station that offers "commercial-free" periods. In doing so, we bolster the radio industry's high regard for the "commercial-free" gimmick as a way to win new listeners.

One of the bigger successes with commercial-free radio was achieved by New York City rock station WAPP-FM in the summer of 1982. The previous station on WAPP's frequency had had a 1.5 percent share of the city's radio audience. By airing no commercials for almost three months and promoting the fact widely, WAPP increased that share to 4.9 percent, according to Pat McNally, the station's general manager. In the year since, WAPP's share has slipped back to 3.2, but McNally still proudly claims the city's largest audience among young adult men. Although WAPP probably passed up a million dollars in advertising, McNally estimates, the audience growth now allows his station to charge advertising rates three times higher than before.

More often, however, a station that follows the technique takes little or no loss in advertising time. Deejays bark about "five songs in a row" and an "uninterrupted music sweep," but even after a commercial-free hour, the listener risks encountering a batch of commercials that make up for lost time.

Audience cooperation has also made possible an even more astounding development:



STEVE BEHRENS

opment—pledge-free public television. At WGBH Boston, the deal was: If viewers wanted to watch all through August without falling prey to a tedious pledge break, they had to send in checks ahead of time. For every \$60,000 or so the viewers surrendered by mail, the public television station would thwack off one of its planned gauntlet of 16 pledge nights.

WGBH still ran fund-raising pleas last summer, but they were short, seductive reminders rather than the usual interminable harangues. "The fact is, we don't like pledging any more than you do," went one intimately confessional reminder. In a giddier spot, WGBH spokesman Will Lyman pretended to be a newsman reporting on the drastic declines of the pie-chart and tote-board industries, which normally would be working over-

time to provide props for pledge drives.

The spots were droll but, according to station manager David Liroff, they were not made according to the conventional wisdom about pledging: "The more entertaining you become, the less money you are likely to raise." Nevertheless, by the end of summer, the station figured that it earned 18 percent more with its pledge-free August than with its normal pledging the previous summer.

August may be pledge-free again this year, but WGBH returned to pledging as usual in December and will again in March. The traditional pledge nights are expected to flush out more new donors. Besides, says Liroff, he wants viewers to be psyched for next August with memories of "how terrible March was." (In a humane gesture, the station will ease regular donors' aggravation in March by alerting them to the secret *actual* starting times for programs, so they can tune in late and skip the pledge breaks.) But both pledge-free television and commercial-free radio are good business ploys masquerading as humane gestures. Media executives are recognizing that it pays to keep their audiences from reaching the dreaded state of saturation aggravation.

Since imitation is standard operating procedure in television, you'd think the networks and their advertisers would pick up on this new kind of self-serving self-restraint. So far they haven't. In fact, under pressure from advertisers, they have begun allowing two unrelated products to be advertised in a single 30-second commercial—the "split 30," they call it.

## Absence of Dallas

**Hungary has the most unusual Monday nights.** The streets teem with people, the shops and bars stay open late, the movie houses are packed. Monday is the big night for theater, ballet, art exhibitions, and concerts. It is also the night for socializing, for having friends come to dinner, for postprandial conversation. This is because Monday is

the night television goes dark in Hungary, by government fiat.

Much has been written about television's influence on our lifestyles. But Hungary presents the case for the influence of no television. It couldn't happen here, of course, because people would complain of being deprived.

L.B.

A leading advertising executive, Paul Harper Jr., has warned that this new policy, along with a general proliferation of commercials, could boost the total number of ads on the networks. There were 210,000 back in 1975, and 325,000 are projected this year. Harper calls it "smog," which not only irritates the eyes of viewers but makes it hard to see the ads.

There's an open invitation in this situation for sharp marketing folks to serve themselves and the viewers by inventing smog-free station breaks. S.B.

## Child Support

**Hand a transistor radio to a six-year-old, and she will twirl the dial for a time to create a babble of sounds, then put it aside for a better toy.** Radio doesn't hold much interest for children nowadays because it has little to say to them. Yet, when you think about it, radios are so



Newman

Berkley

cheap, portable, and safe that they ought to be the perfect electronic companions for the very young—eloquent providers of the bedtime story.

But radio stopped speaking to children during the late '60s, when the Federal Communications Commission began its deregulation of the medium. Radio in those days was being battered by television. The industry argued that its survival depended on the FCC changing the rules and allowing each station to direct its programming to a particular audience, instead of forcing it to provide for all elements of the public.

The FCC granted the industry's wish, figuring that market forces would serve every need; in metropolitan areas with 50 or 60 broadcast signals, surely they would sort themselves out so that some stations would go after the parts of the public least served. It never dawned on the FCC that virtually every station would develop a 24-hour, monochrome format in pursuit of the same lucrative

market, adults in the age range of 18 to 49.

Every station in America got out of programming for children. There wasn't much of a market there, and it would only disrupt the format. So when radio lost interest in children, children lost their interest in radio.

Now there are at least three separate initiatives to correct that problem, and naturally they originate in the nonprofit sector. WNYC-AM, the station owned by New York City, has started a three-hour nightly show for children, with album music, stories, jokes, news, call-in segments—and even a contest to name the show. Meanwhile, public radio is developing a 90-minute omnibus series for children to be produced by the Southern Educational Communications Association in cooperation with station WUNC, Chapel Hill, N.C. The project received a \$125,000 planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and will make its NPR debut this fall with a 90-minute special that is likely to be the pilot show.

Perhaps the most significant project is one already on scores of commercial radio stations via a nonprofit company called Family Radio Programming Inc. Entitled *New Waves*, the program is aimed at the 9-to-14-year-old age group and has staked out the modest time period of Sunday mornings on radio stations specializing in contemporary music. Two hours in length, the weekly magazine-format program is co-hosted by Fred Newman, who made his mark as emcee of the *Livewire* series on cable's Nickelodeon network, and New York disc jockey Susan Berkley. The project is

funded by the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation, one of the original funders of *Sesame Street*, but it carries advertising.

Sunday morning is one of the least attractive times in radio, because it is in low demand by advertisers. So it is opportune for *New Waves* because commercial stations needn't fear they'll lose their following if they carry it.

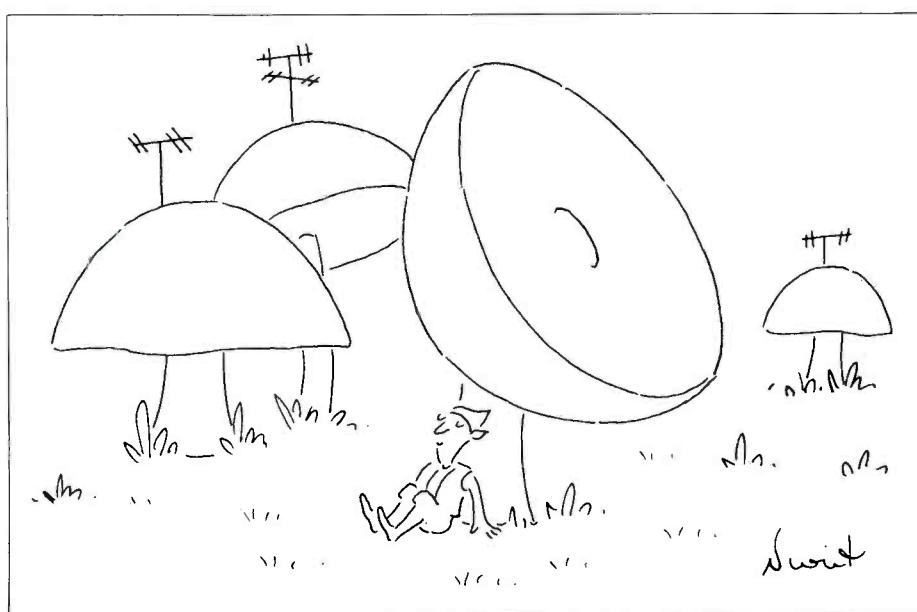
If any of the new children's radio ventures should prove to be a hit, radio could change, right to the core. Nonprofit companies will determine whether a market exists for children's fare; if they should find that it does, there may be a scramble on the dial to make young kids love radio again.

L.B.

## The Big Turn-On in India

**We lucky Americans, surfeited by television in the age of abundance, scarcely know what to do with our video-cassette recorders.** But the citizens of India, who must limp along with a single channel, if they can even afford a set, have adapted the VCR to local conditions all over the country. No other aspect of the communications revolution has touched India so deeply, if so ambiguously.

Walk into any of thousands of small towns, where sacred cows wander the streets and temples stand at every corner, and you'll find that, say, the Santosh Cold Drinks House is showing a popular Hindi film. Or perhaps it's showing an English or American B-film, like *Big*



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## CROSS

### CURRENTS

*Boss* or *Enter the Dragon* or, likelier still, a suspiciously titled bonbon like *I Feel It Rising*. The proprietor owns, not a projector, but a VCR hooked to a TV set, which he charges eager villagers 30 or 40 cents a head to squint at from a rickety chair beneath a makeshift roof. An enterprising owner can clear \$30 a day—a fabulous sum in small-town India.

Then there are the buses. India has advanced a claim that perhaps no other nation would have thought to make—that it has the largest fleet of video-equipped buses in the world. Most tour buses now offer films on cassette to help passengers while away the endless hours. Many restaurants offer the same amenity, though the food is usually a pretext for the film.

The video library has also become a fixture in all of India's big cities. Palika Bazaar in New Delhi has an entire row of shops renting out films in Hindi, English, and a few of the regional languages. VCRs cost at least \$1,500, yet any Indian who can remotely afford this sum will have bought one by now. It is often pointed out, especially by those who don't want to coddle the poor, that in Bombay's worst slum—indeed, Asia's worst slum—one may glimpse the wretched citizenry, clad in rags, surrounding the VCR of an evening. In these cases the machine will be owned jointly by as many as 50 people.

VCRs have already made a discernible change in Indian film-going habits. Wealthy Indians simply do not go to the movie theaters at all, since cassettes are available as soon as a new film appears. And in small towns, video parlors constitute an important alternative to movie halls. According to G. Atmaram, a producer/director and official of the All-India Film Producers Council, box-office receipts rose only 4 percent in 1982, the smallest increase in 50 years. Figures for 1983, he said, promise to be even worse.

Virtually every tape, foreign and domestic, has been pirated—copied in the Middle East and clandestinely sent into India. Video-parlor owners, bus-tour operators, and hoteliers claim that they need not pay royalties to the producers, since they are merely providing an amenity for buyers of cold drinks, bus tickets, and hotel rooms. Library owners claim that no copyright act governs rentals for private viewing. Only two states, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, have agreed to

license video parlors. Pornographic parlors in both these states have been raided, but to very little avail.

Producers, meanwhile, are trying to close ranks—though a few renegades have signed contracts with cassette manufacturers—and cinema owners are threatening to close their doors until the central government takes action against video piracy. If nothing is done, warns Atmaram, the \$500 million film industry will face "a severe crisis."

This is not of much significance to the nation's thousands of VCR fanatics, however—as long as they keep getting their diurnal doses of video.

J.T.

## Home Movies Made Easier

By the wading pools and around the Christmas trees of America, there burns a desire to make home movies, but it's usually bridled by the cost and petty inconveniences of 8mm movie equipment. Though popular, home movies have never been as successful as they



**Rock-a-bye:** the Kodak video camera-recorder in its "cradle." Its built-in recorder also serves double duty as the working mechanism of the table-top player.

could have been, says Bill Relyea, an industry analyst for Wall Street's F. Eberstadt & Co.

More and more families are turning to home video cameras, used with their video-cassette recorders—although not nearly as many as once used 8mm film. In the 1970s, more than a million 8mm movie cameras were sold annually. By

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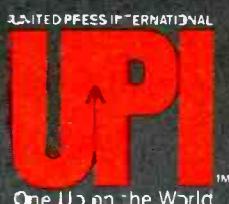
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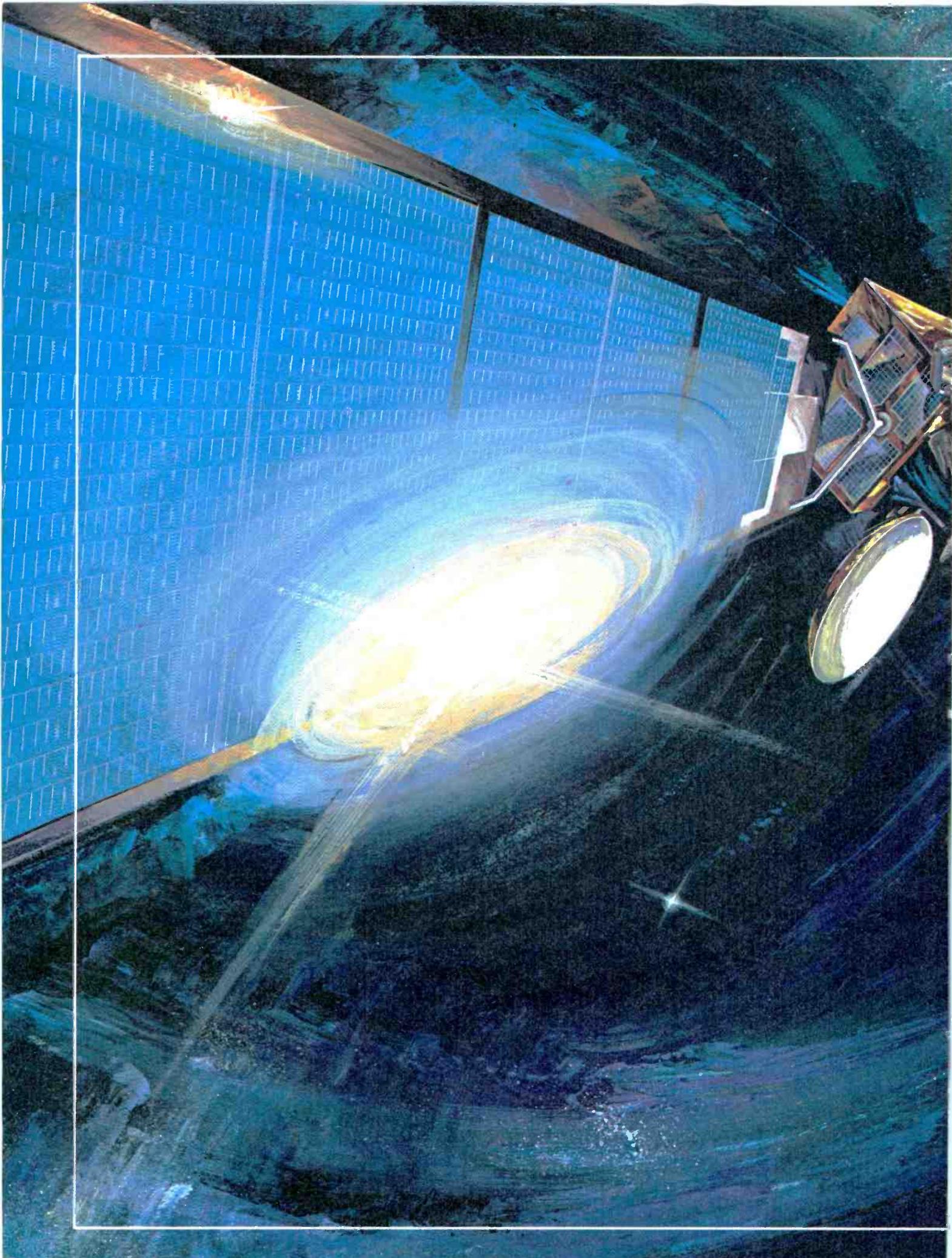
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1981, the number had dropped to 180,000 and was surpassed for the first time by video camera sales—190,000. Last year, more than 400,000 home video cameras were sold, outpacing home movie-camera sales by four to one.

Acknowledging the video boom, both Kodak and Polaroid recently announced they will put their brand names on blank video cassettes made by Japanese companies. The bigger news, however, was Kodak's decision to sell a new kind of 8mm camera—a combination video camera and recorder using a new 8mm tape—to be available in stores this fall.

When consumers learn that the Kodak "camcorder" uses yet another incompatible video format, many will howl, but the machine is actually the offspring of a broad standardization effort intended to yield compact, compatible equipment from many companies. Matsushita is making Kodak's hardware and will make versions for other companies. RCA, Sony, and others are planning their own models. With a video cassette the size of a standard audio cassette, the first Kodak models will weigh in at 5.3 pounds and operate for an hour before needing to be re-charged. Even smaller camcorders are coming.

The miniaturized home video camera-recorders are still heavier and bigger than a home movie camera, but most have other advantages over 8mm film that should greatly facilitate the recording of school plays and weddings: one hour or more of uninterrupted shooting instead of three minutes of film; instant playback on the home TV set; no projection screen to set up. While the video camcorders will cost \$1,500 or more—far more than a movie outfit—a minute of video tape costs perhaps 5 percent as much as a minute of processed 8mm film, and some models, like Kodak's, will have the additional capability of recording broadcasts—which would make the purchase more valuable to many families.

Even the models with the shortest recording time (for example, the JVC Videomovie gear, which uses a 20-minute cassette) provide more than enough time to immortalize a family event, says Leendert Drukker, the longtime home-movie columnist for *Popular Photography* magazine. In fact, he observes, "In 20 minutes, you can bore people to death." If home TV producers are rendered prolific by cheap video-tape prices, they could bring about the downfall of the new gadgetry, Drukker speculates. "The only thing that will save it is the fast-forward button."

S.B.

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## TV—Lit. 101

**For 35 years, most high-school teachers have treated television as the enemy of education.** That attitude is changing, however, following a report issued by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), an organization representing 12,000 academic institutions across the country. "We are recognizing a need to integrate all media into the teaching of English," reads a statement from the council's media commission.

Media other than the printed word should be integrated into the English curriculum, the commission's report says, because "communication today demands the ability to understand, use, and control more complex symbol systems." Schools must teach "through" the new media in order to impart a complete understanding of how they function.

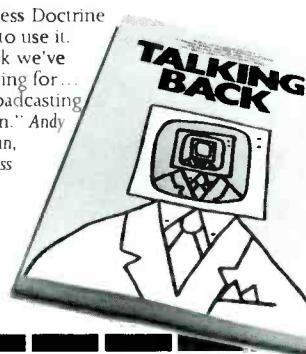
Underlying the NCTE's finding is a practical consideration: "The growing number of jobs in information processing make teaching toward a more broadly based literacy absolutely essential."

R.B.

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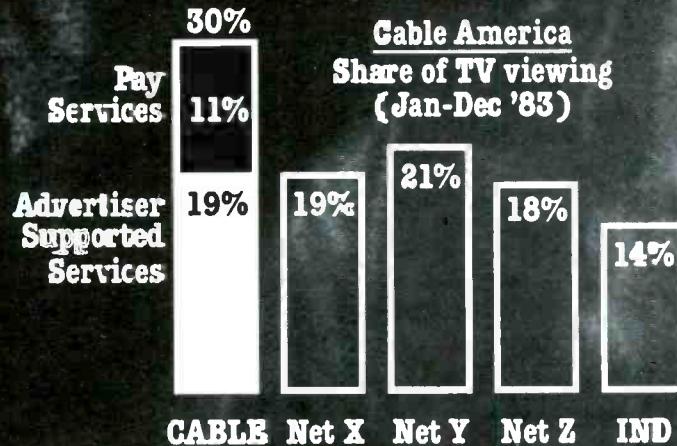
In Cable America (a growing 41% of the country) only 59% of all viewing is to network affiliates—compared to 80% in non-cable homes. Quite simply given the choice, viewers are switching to cable in dramatic numbers.

## In Cable America

**Net X affiliates' share drops from 26 to 19.  
Net Y affiliates' share drops from 29 to 21.  
Net Z affiliates' share drops from 24 to 18.  
The indies' share drops from 18 to 14.**

In cable homes, total cable viewing overwhelms each of the conventional networks, and nearly two-thirds of that viewing goes to advertiser-supported cable, not pay. In fact, ad-supported cable is growing faster than any other segment of television programming.

Source: NTI Cable TV Status Report Jan.-Dec. 1983. TV Usage Estimates. Super stations included with cable programming, not with free-to-air stations. Public stations not included. Data subject to qualification criteria available on request.



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## Post-Fight Post-Mortem

**There are about 40 murders a year connected with heavyweight boxing title matches, a sociologist has found.** They're not occurring in the ring; the fatal connection is with boxing's media audience.

David P. Phillips of the University of California at San Diego examined U.S. homicide numbers from the days after each of the heavyweight title fights between 1973 and '78. He found that murders increased more than 12 percent over the expected rate on the third day after a title bout, and more than 6 percent on the fourth day. That increase amounts to about 40 deaths a year.

Why the third day? Phillips is baffled but says the three-day lag also turns up in his studies connecting the incidence of suicides and single-driver auto fatalities with publicity about other people's suicides.

One might suppose that the violence after prizefights is prompted by gambling, rather than the boxing itself. But Phillips offers contradicting evidence in a recent article in the *American Sociological Review*. He doesn't think gambling-related anger is to blame because his examination of homicide rates after perhaps the heaviest gambling event of all, the Super Bowl, revealed no significant increase in the number of murders.

The homicides were apparently not connected with actual attendance at prizefights. When the fights were held in other countries, the subsequent murder rate was six times higher than it normally is after domestic fights. The greatest effect came after the widely promoted overseas "Thrilla in Manila" match between Muhammad Ali and George Frazier in 1975, linked with 26 domestic homicides.

Phillips's study reveals another connection between the boxers and the fans who evidently identify very closely with them: When a black boxer is beaten, there are significantly more murders of

young black men, but no increase in the number of white victims. When a white boxer is beaten, there's an increase, though smaller, of white murder victims. Only New Year's Day and Thanksgiving are followed by larger sudden increases in murders of black men. In his study of suicides, Phillips also found that the increase in suicides was most noticeable among people who resembled the victims in widely publicized suicide stories.

Boxing is a prime focus for research on media and behavior because it has the characteristics most likely to elicit aggression in viewers. In a thorough review of research, George Comstock concluded that violent acts seen in the laboratory led to aggression when the fictional violence was portrayed as being real, intended, justified, uncriticized, and rewarding. The description fits boxing.

Among some 120 laboratory experiments, 94 percent showed an increase in aggression—walloping a plastic doll or inflicting electric shocks on strangers—after the subjects watched violent programs. But critics argue that the setting and the violence in the lab are bogus and unrelated to real-life crime. So Phillips's study, based on crime in the real world, helps bolster these controversial lab findings.

The television networks however, dismiss Phillips as an unreliable if imaginative researcher. His boxing study hasn't been refuted yet, but NBC's staff of social scientists (whose job it is to rebut published grievances about TV) invalidated an earlier Phillips study purporting to show that soap-opera suicides lead to actual suicides among viewers. Phillips used weekly soap-opera plot summaries to determine which episodes featured suicides, but failed to realize that the synopses retold the previous weeks' shows, rather than those seen in the current week. Score one for the networks and an embarrassment for social science.

BEN SINGER

## KTTL's License to Malign

by Merrill Brown

**T**HERE IS A CERTAIN numbing sensation that comes from listening to Dodge City, Kansas radio station KTTL-FM. Undoubtedly, tapes from the station had a similarly stupefying effect on members of the House telecommunications subcommittee, called together to discuss a proposal to deregulate radio.

The broadcasts over the past two summers by two self-styled preachers, the Reverends William P. Gale and James P. Wickstrom, set off a storm of criticism in Kansas and around the country. There was nothing subtle in the approach of these "paramilitary tax resisters," as they call themselves.

"If the Jews even fool around with us or try to harm us in any way," Gale said in one broadcast, "every rabbi in Los Angeles will die within 24 hours."

"Blacks and browns are the enemy," Gale said at another point.

Tapes from similar programs played at the congressional hearing last fall were no less offensive. "Who's the president of the NAACP? Ask the average Christian. They think it's a black organization. It's not. It's Jew."

According to Charlie Babbs, co-owner of the station, his estranged wife Nellie was the cause of all the trouble. Since she left, he claims, the country-music station has stopped airing broadcasts by the Posse Comitatus extremist group, and a court order bars her from the station's studios. But a fight over the KTTL license is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon.

It's Nellie Babbs's view, according to her testimony before the House panel, that the broadcasts stimulated public discussion. "I do not consider them attacks," she said, noting that only two people chose to go on the air to rebut the



Nellie Babbs, KTTL co-owner under siege in Dodge City.

Gale remarks. "No one really is ready to jump into the water with a truly controversial issue or they will be attacked as surely as I have been attacked." But challengers of the KTTL license point out that the station aired 264 hours of programs like Gale's and only about 10 minutes of rebuttals.

The State of Kansas, Dodge City officials, the Jewish War Veterans, B'nai B'rith's Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the National Black Media Coalition, and others have protested KTTL's programming to the Federal Communications Commission. And a Dodge City group, Community Service Broadcasting Inc., now represented by former FCC chairman Newton N. Minow, has petitioned for the Babbs's license. Like all controversial FCC licensing skirmishes, this one is almost certain to go on for years. "It is," an FCC official acknowledged, "an example of the worst kind of situation we could find ourselves in."

Last fall, the FCC conducted a "routine" technical inspection of the 100,000-watt station to determine whether it was violating engineering standards. Next, the commission may hold hearings on

competing bids for the license, which came up for renewal last June; FCC staffers are drawing up a list of "questions of fact" to be used in setting out the issues.

But in fact, it is very unlikely that anyone can do anything about the broadcasts on the Babbs's station. Some legislative proposals floating around Congress would even eliminate the comparative renewal process, which is probably the most powerful tool opponents can use to challenge KTTL's license. Ironically, even those who don't buy all of the deregulation efforts of FCC chairman Mark Fowler think there is little else that can be done about cases such as Dodge City's.

"You can't take the license away because of what they said," insisted Charles Ferris, Fowler's predecessor as FCC chairman. "Some things are very distasteful or offensive, but you have to be patient with the remedy. It's the price you have to pay to protect First Amendment rights."

In Ferris's view, the strength of the comparative renewal process is in its protection of First Amendment rights. "It's like a private antitrust suit," he said. The challengers, not the government, initiate the case against a license holder. They offer themselves as alternative candidates to broadcast on the frequency. "It's much easier to pick a candidate from a community, who promises to serve that community, rather than just deny a license . . . rather than just having the government make the judgment."

On the other hand, some station opponents point out, the KTTL programs irresponsibly call for violence—in the manner of a person shouting "Fire!" in a crowded theater—and thus are unprotected by the First Amendment. According to the ADL, many of the broadcasts should be considered violations of the Communications Act's "public-interest standard," reason enough to deny KTTL's license outright. "To allow such

(Continued on page 60)

Merrill Brown is the New York financial correspondent for The Washington Post.

# The VCR Is Changing the Whole TV Picture

by David Lachenbruch

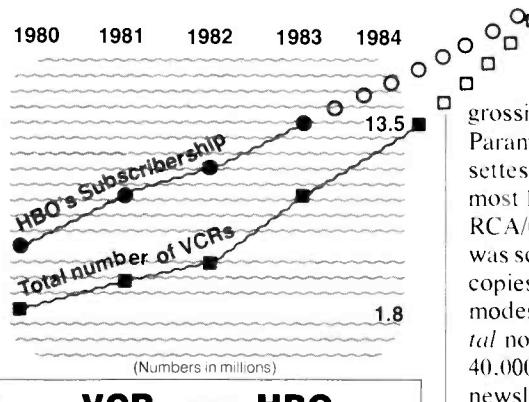
**U**NQUESTIONABLY the most surprising media development of 1983—and the one that has received the least public attention and analysis—was the amazing growth in sales of home video-cassette recorders (VCRs). As 1984 began, 10 percent of American homes, or about 8.3 million, were equipped with VCRs—a number sufficient to make the market for recorded programs begin to look more profitable than pay cable is for movie producers.

In 1982, VCR sales of two million units almost doubled the preceding year's sales, and manufacturers and marketers had forecast sales of perhaps 2.5 million units in 1983. As it turned out, the public snapped up more than four million of what must be the hottest electronic gadget on the market.

For all the publicity given home computers, their unit sales last year probably were a good bit lower than those of the VCR, and various estimates put the population of home computers (as distinguished from personal business computers) at anywhere from three million to five million units—probably less than one-third the number of VCRs.

Since the introduction of home VCRs in late 1975, their sales have almost exactly paralleled the takeoff years of color TV sales, 1959 through 1966. Annual color set sales grew from 90,000 to 4.7 million during that period. Aided by almost continual price reductions in 1983, the spread of VCRs reached the "contagion" stage that seems to occur when a product reaches a penetration of about 7 percent of American homes. In 1966, color television reached a similar point—at which almost everybody knows *somebody* who owns the new product.

January's Supreme Court decision upholding the legality of taping copyrighted material off the air removes any cloud of uncertainty about whether consumers will be permitted to use VCRs as time-shift devices. Perhaps even more significantly, it virtually eliminates any short-term possibility of congressional passage



of a tax or fee on VCRs and video cassettes to compensate copyright owners—which would have been almost certain had the decision gone the other way.

Although VCR marketers expect a more modest sales increase, to about five million units, in 1984, the current sales momentum and a reasonably good economy could push the year's sales to six million or more. The prognosis for sales is particularly good because of the continued decline in prices. Virtually all VCRs come from Japan, and the units currently being shipped are averaging about \$85 less than those imported just a year ago.

The price drop could accelerate this year because of a pending flood of VCRs from Korea. The floodgates are due to open in January 1985, when Korean manufacturers will be granted licenses to export VCRs by the Japanese firms controlling the patents. Korea, which brought us 19-inch color TV sets at \$198, is expected to accomplish a similar production miracle with VCRs.

The Japanese have a year to bring their prices down to a level competitive with those anticipated for Korean exports, and they're now re-engineering their products, simplifying and integrating them. In 1983, VCRs were advertised at below \$300, but only occasionally. Before this year ends that could be the established price for low-end machines.

Thus 1984 could end with a VCR home population of at least 13 million—about the size of the subscribership that HBO has today. Already in 1983, movie producers were finding recorded cassettes an extremely profitable market. Blockbuster movie titles on cassette today are

grossing in the multimillions of dollars. Paramount delivered nearly 550,000 cassettes of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* plus almost 100,000 video discs of the same title. RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Video was scheduled to ship as many as 100,000 copies of *Tootsie* in early 1984. Even such modest titles as *Bad Boys* and *Dark Crystal* now are released in lots of 30,000 to 40,000 or more cassettes. *Video Week* newsletter estimates that CBS/Fox Video and Paramount Home Video each shipped more than 1.6 million recorded cassettes last year.

Twenty percent of the wholesale price of a video cassette or disc goes to the copyright owner—a higher share than they get from pay-cable showings. Paramount is even considering skipping the HBO release of *Raiders*, and going directly from cassette to network broadcast to give the cassette version a longer period of primacy.

The horizon in home video is bright for producers, who have succeeded so far without revenue from cassette rentals, which outpace sales by about 10 to one. But in this session of Congress, Administration-backed legislation to give copyright owners a piece of the rental action is likely to pass.

Still unfathomed is the potential of the video disc in the consumer market. About 700,000 to 800,000 video-disc player owners supplement the cassette audience today. RCA this year is force-feeding its video-disc system to the public with player prices starting below \$200 and, in cooperation with producers, top movie discs at less than \$20. Any real takeoff in video discs could frost the profit cake for the movie companies.

Major producers could bring in more money this year from see-what-you-want-when-you-want-it devices than from pay cable. With this little-charted growth, home video has become a formidable competitor of pay TV. Despite Hollywood's bitter words in the Betamax case about how the VCR is stealing the copyrighted bread from its mouth, the home tape machine could turn out to be the best thing to happen to the movie business since television.

David Lachenbruch is editorial director of Television Digest.

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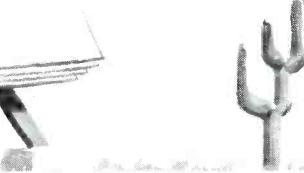
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MAH

**En Español.** A major Hollywood film studio is looking to tap the growing Hispanic population in the U.S., which now numbers 22 million. Beginning this spring Paramount's Home Video Division will follow up each major movie release with a subtitled Spanish version.

**Lone survivors.** In 10 years there will still be a demand for pay-TV movie services—but only for two of them, according to a report by Frost & Sullivan, a marketing research firm. The two will be Home Box Office and one competitor.

**Talk is cheap?** The Defense Department has budgeted \$1.3 billion to pay its phone bill in 1984, and will add another \$100 million to pay its 1985 bill. This is the most ever for Defense, which has the biggest phone bill in the country. It cites the AT&T divestiture as the cause of the increase.

**Commercial kids.** Nickelodeon, which never carried commercials until last fall, is now selling seven minutes of national advertising each hour. The five-year-old cable channel for kids has so far signed more than a dozen national accounts.

**Hard rock.** Rock-music videos are more violent than prime-time television. A recent survey by the Canadian Coalition Against Violent Entertainment counted, on average, 18 violent acts per hour's worth of videos. Thirty-five percent of the videos contain sexual violence.

**Cable computer.** A \$30 million cable-delivered home computer service has been developed by the NABU Manufacturing Corp. For \$20 a month subscribers to Ottawa Cablevision in Canada will be able to rent computer terminals and use software sent over cable-TV wires.

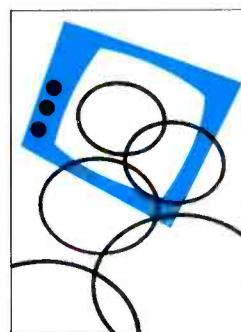
**Making it big.** The Bell system's seven regional companies will list a new category, "Electronic Mail," in the next edition of its yellow pages.

**Slow fade.** The networks' share of the prime-time audience, which only a few years ago stood at 90 percent of all viewership, will decline to 65 percent by 1990—or 13 percent below the present level—according to projections by a major ad agency, BBDO. The erosion is expected to be caused by inroads from cable, other new technologies, and independent stations, and will be helped along by rising program costs.

**Report card.** In its third year, PBS's Adult Learning division offers 20 telecourses a year for college credit. More than 75,000 students are enrolled.

**Paper chase.** Connecticut has barred the Southern New England Telephone Company from starting any electronic publishing ventures until 1989. A collective sigh of relief came from 13 area newspapers, which had complained that the phone company's ownership of the phone lines constituted an unfair advantage.

**Highest tech.** President Reagan spoke from the Oval Office to a diplomat in Greece, journalists in seven European cities, and astronauts in a space shuttle during a videoconference that helped launch Euronet for the U.S. Information Agency in December. Euronet, a network of satellites and land lines with two-way audio and one-way video capabilities, is the European portion of USIA's global system, Omnitel.



**Olympic gold.** The 1984 Summer Olympics will give Metromedia's KTTV a golden opportunity to introduce its teletext magazine to Los Angeles. It will supply scores, stadium maps, traffic reports, and other Olympics information. Companies anxious to promote teletext will provide terminals, decoders, and technical assistance.

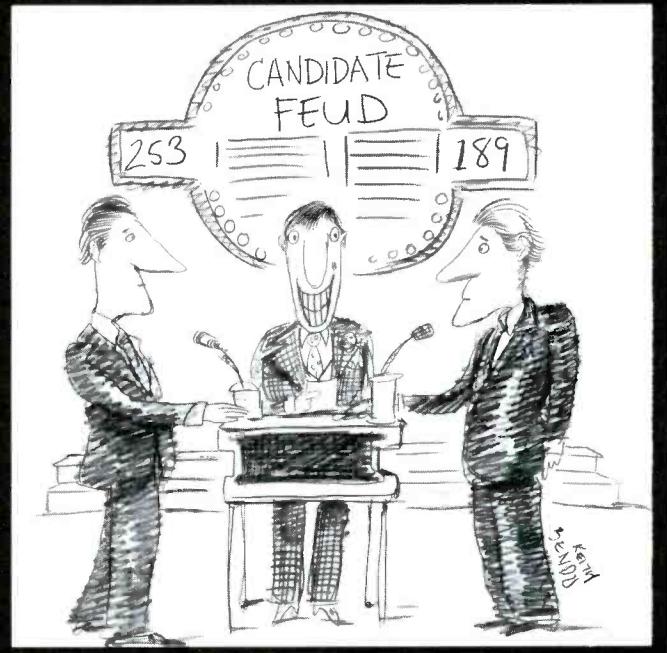
**Videotex at Bay.** To aid tourism, San Francisco is installing hundreds of videotex terminals around the city for a system called the Bay Area Teleguide. It will provide sightseers with 1,000 pages of information on points of interests, shops, and public transportation.

**The lust picture show.** Two amateur movies that starred adults acting out their erotic fantasies were released recently on video cassette by a California distributor of X-rated movies. For more than a year, Essex Video Inc. has been receiving audition films and tapes, usually recorded on home equipment, from aspiring porn stars. For its January releases it simply packaged the best of these auditions. Now it is developing a line of homemade porn and is soliciting the films and videos.

**Narrowcast.** More than a year after PBS applied for them, the FCC has granted permits to build 82 stations using the Instructional Television Fixed Service (ITFS) frequencies. Each station would broadcast on four channels that require special receiving equipment. PBS won't *broadcast*, actually; it plans to *narrowcast* seminars for lawyers, training for nurses, and other special-interest programs. Twenty other PBS license applications are still pending. Now public television has a year to raise the millions of dollars to build the network, which it's calling the National Narrowcast Service.

# The New Impresarios of Politics

by Les Brown



**A**FEW WEEKS AGO a press release arrived from the National Association of Broadcasters celebrating a change in the regulations for political broadcasting. The release was headlined, "Public Wins with Aspen Rule Revision." I shuddered. Another blasted victory for the people. When will it end?

We have been on a winning streak, if you believe the bureaucrats and industry lobbyists out there on the deregulation front.

Last August, when the Federal Communications Commission said it was going to drop the rule that kept the networks from cutting themselves in on the ownership of prime-time programs, the networks hailed it as a victory for the viewers.

When the Senate, last June, passed a bill that would allow the cable industry to renege on many of its promises to the cities, John V. Saeman, chairman of the National Cable Television Association, called it "a tremendous victory for the people."

When the courts last spring upheld the FCC's deregulation of radio, Mark S. Fowler, chairman of the commission, saluted the decision as "a major victory for the public."

And when the FCC, building on this success, began the process of deregulating television, Edward Fritts, president of the National Association of Broadcasters, congratulated the public.

If there was no demonstration of jubilation across the land, I think it was because we're not too clear on what it is we've won. Now run that by us again, Mr. Fritts: Why is it such a terrific deal for the public that the FCC wants to deregulate television? Because, Fritts explained in a statement, the regulations and paperwork "drain stations of time and resources that could otherwise be spent improving the quality of service to the community."

In other words, it was those lousy regulations that were responsible all these years for the lousy programming. And now that these regulations are going to be dumped, the broadcaster at last will have the time and energy to do right by the public, since this has always been his sincerest wish.

Perhaps there is someone in America who will believe that. But anyone who has been in touch with the broadcast industry for even a few years knows what this freedom from regulation will mean. At the typical station, three or four people who handle the FCC paperwork will get fired, and the general manager will get to spend a few more days on the golf course entertaining

important advertising clients. Maybe that has something to do with better programming, but it's a stretch.

This talk of "tremendous victories" for the people has the ring of Orwellian doublespeak, like referring to war-making as "peace-keeping."

So when a press release arrived on my desk declaring, "Public Wins with Aspen Rule Revision," I took it as something new to worry about. Another victory—how bad this time?

What the public won in this instance was the broadcasters'

## The Aspen Rule was a charade, but the new rule openly evades the law.

right to stage political debates themselves, without having to work through an outside organization like the League of Women Voters. That doesn't sound too serious on its face. More direct exposure to the candidates is surely desirable for the public, if that's what this change in the rule should encourage. But the immediate downside is a weakening of the Equal Time Rule—which exists to make television and radio more democratic—because it will be left to the broadcasters' discretion to include third-party and fringe-party candidates in the debates. That is, if the courts uphold the FCC action; it's under challenge by the League of Women Voters.

The Equal Time Rule holds that every qualified candidate for a public office must be accorded equal opportunities for air-time with every other qualified candidate for the same office. In theory, this gives each minority candidate as much right to be heard as the Democrat and Republican, but in practice it has inhibited television coverage, because there are often a dozen obscure people in the race along with the main contenders.

In a democracy it is decidedly in the public interest for everyone running for office to be allowed to state his or her case in the mass media, but the broadcasters' view is that if they all may

Keith Bendis

claim commercially valuable air-time, then none will get it. That's mainly what has made political debates so rare on television in the years between the Kennedy-Nixon debates of 1960 (when Congress suspended the law for the Presidential race that year) and the FCC's adoption in 1975 of the Aspen Rule.

The Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies came up with a scheme that would place Presidential debates outside the Equal Time Rule by taking advantage of a loophole. Equal Time obligations do not apply when candidates are part of the on-the-spot coverage of news events. Aspen pointed out that if an independent organization such as the League of Women Voters were to present a debate between candidates in an auditorium, television could bring in its cameras to cover it as a genuine on-the-spot news event. Fringe-party candidates then would have no proper claim to equivalent time. The FCC bought the scheme, even though it subverted the spirit of the law. The thinking was that it's not as important to be democratic as it is to be practical. The major-party candidates are the only ones really in the race, so why keep them off television just to play fair with the dissenters?

The Aspen Rule made possible the Carter-Ford debate in 1976 and the Reagan-Carter debate in 1980. Of course, the device of sponsorship by the League of Women Voters was a bit of a sham; television was the true reason for the debates. If there was any doubt about that, it was dispelled in 1976 when the television mikes went dead, and for 20 minutes Carter and Ford stood mute before their live audience in the auditorium until ABC engineers handling the pool coverage could get the national audience plugged in again.

With an ends-justifying-the-means rationale, the Aspen Rule achieved its objective of getting the principal candidates on television in face-to-face debate. It fostered a charade that skirted the Equal Time Rule without doing direct damage to the law. The commission now has decided to do away with the charade and let the networks and local stations run the political show themselves. This, however, does directly damage the law, because it effectively exempts political debates from Equal Time considerations and lets the broadcasters decide who may participate.

The importance of the charade was that it provided a margin of separation between television and state. Under the altered FCC rule the margin vanishes. Not only does this invest broadcasters with exceptional power in the electoral process, it also erases the Equal Time Rule's guarantees for third-party and independent candidates, except in matters of political advertising.

To enlarge broadcasting's role in politics, by putting the main public events for the candidates into the hands of television operators, would have been dangerous at any time. But it is especially dangerous today, when deregulation is relieving broadcasters of their 50-year role as public trustees. With their public-service obligations gradually being eliminated and their licenses growing ever more secure, they are less likely than ever to treat politics with reverence. The danger is implicit in the broadcast association's statement under that questionable "Public Wins" headline. The statement says, in part:

"The FCC's action proffers the best of all possible worlds for both the broadcast industry and the American electorate. For years, radio and television, the entities with the obvious expertise and the public's prime source of news and information, have been denied the right to conduct candidate debates. As a result, the public has been selectively precluded from in-depth exposure to candidates and issue forums. Those that did occur had to be sponsored by outside organizations and necessarily reached a limited audience [emphasis added]."

Hold on. *Necessarily* reached a limited audience? The League of Women Voters debates were made expressly for television, with television's full logistical involvement. They were con-

ducted with dignity and were only as interesting to viewers as the candidates themselves. What the NAB is saying is that when television takes over the production you're going to see some really big audiences out there. Television knows how to bang out those Nielsen numbers.

So that's how the public wins. The prize for the viewer is bigger, livelier, and more entertaining political debates—perhaps like the one in January when the eight Democratic aspirants submitted to the Phil Donahue talk-show treatment. That show was presented on public television under the old Aspen Rule, with sponsorship by the House Democratic Caucus. But in mixing show business and politics—and providing more flash than content—it barely hints of what's ahead when commercial broadcasters become the impresarios of political debates.

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## Television would rather have a Ted Turner on the screen than a John Glenn.

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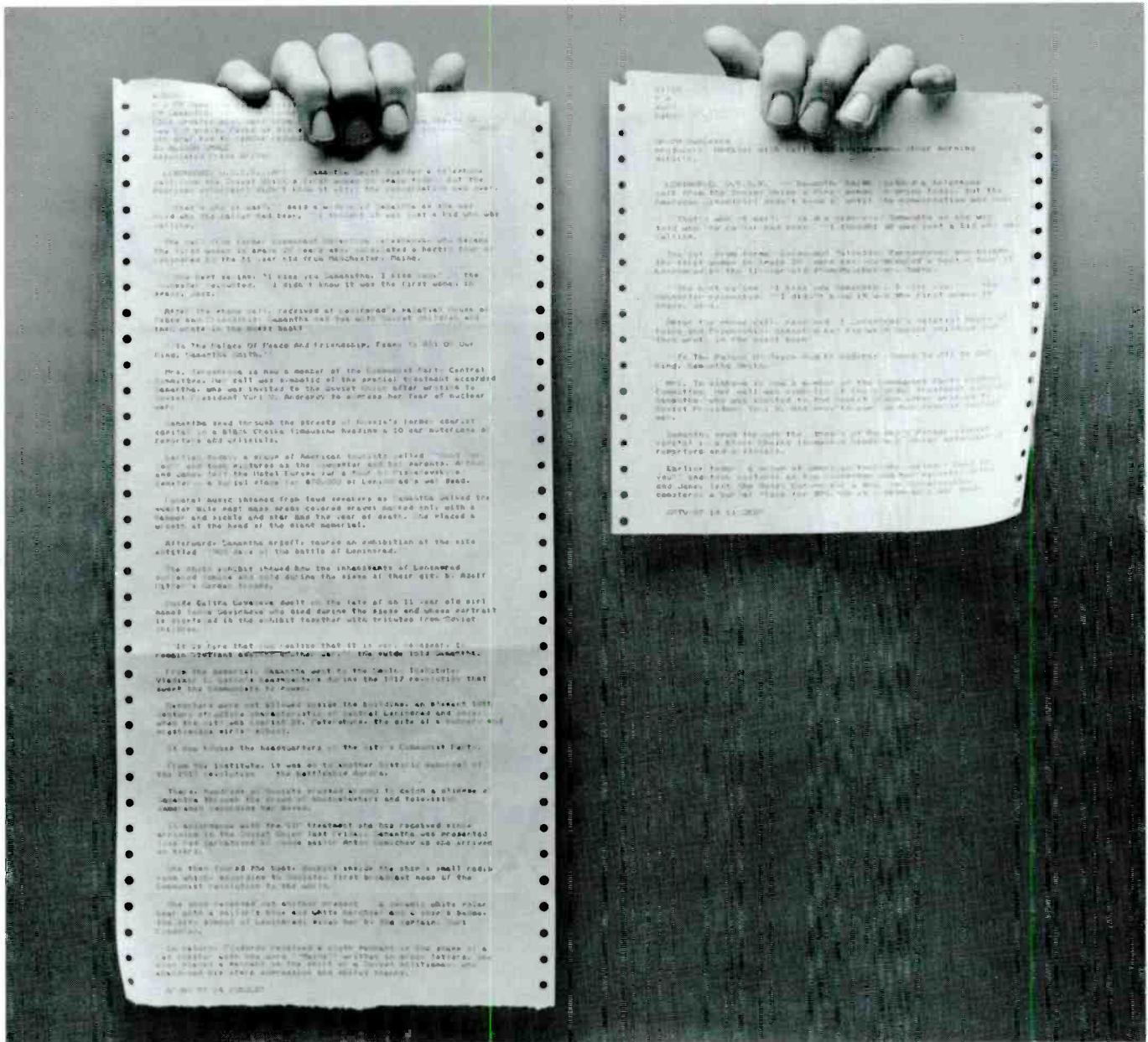
Any institution that gives itself over to television mortgages its soul. Everything must adapt to television's value system. Football and tennis changed their rules, and baseball invented the designated hitter to add star power and action for television's benefit. Meanwhile, the news craft continually refines itself with a view to becoming better television rather than better journalism. Politics too will have to meet television's standard for mass appeal, if television is to remain interested.

The broadening of the Aspen Rule to let television run the political show carries no guarantee that there will be any debates at all. Politics are no more sacred than anything else; profit goals will always come first in television, especially when there is no urgency to perform a public service for the sake of the broadcast licenses. None of the networks, for example, wants to cover this year's political conventions in their entirety, although NBC and CBS had always done so in the past. The quadrennial events may be a great national civics lesson, but they cost the networks a ton of money and don't draw huge audiences. The networks are begging off this year with the argument that both conventions promise to be cut-and-dried affairs not richly productive of news. That would seem the measure of television's earnest commitment to electoral politics and to improving the quality of the vote.

When television runs the show, there will have to be charismatic candidates and hot issues, in any election, if broadcasters are to go all out with a series of debates. Thoughtful, untelegenic, or wordy candidates aren't worth the time and trouble. It's not inconceivable that political candidates will be judged, like television performers, by *TvQ* (popularity) scores for their worthiness to be televised. Even now, television would rather have Ted Turner on the screen than John Glenn.

With the right people in the race, television can be depended on to make public affairs fast-paced, entertaining, and not too demanding. Otherwise, with no revenues involved, who needs it? The rules for television news are bound to extend to politics: Everyone running for office should be young, trim, fast with the quip, slightly offbeat, and (wink) sincere. Eventually television will find a way to eliminate talking heads in a Presidential debate.

That victory with the Aspen Rule decision—run that by us again, please. ■



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# THE VIDEO DISC

## *Shining in a New Light*

**This prodigious child of television and the computer is an under-achiever no longer.**

by Paul Mareth

**F**ROM THE LOOK of the video disc itself, you could easily imagine that it's something of greater consequence than an also-ran in the derby of the new television technologies. The kind of disc played with a laser, in particular, suggests a futuristic talisman, its polished surface refracting rainbow colors. Below that surface the images and sounds of life are trapped in seemingly inert plastic.

The disc wears the sheen of a winner, but early sales disappointed its promoters, who tried to sell it chiefly as a playback device for movies. Now it appears their expectations were misguided and the disc's abilities underestimated. Teamed with the microcomputer, the interactive disc is proving itself an entertainment and educational device of entralling power.

You may have glimpsed the disc in an appliance shop, perhaps when you went in to buy a video-cassette recorder instead. It was there on the shelf, spinning

out vivid video recordings of movies or rock concerts. You may have seen it in a General Motors or Ford showroom, providing pictures and specifications for every model available. But you haven't really seen the video disc until you've seen it branch like a tree.

When the disc's interactive abilities are used, you can "climb" it, from one branch to the next. Whether the content is a sales pitch, lesson, concert, catalogue, game, or story, the disc branches out where you choose to go. It's a trick, of course, but the plastic disc appears to be possessed of the intelligence to respond to you.

Along with the video game, the interactive disc is ending the age of passive television-watching. "There are *some* people who can't remember not having radio," observes Jeffrey Silverstein, a young disc designer. "My generation can't remember not having television. The kids now can't remember not controlling television."

The fullest uses of the interactive video disc have been funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, and most are not for public consumption. The closer a disc gets to performing magic, the more ex-

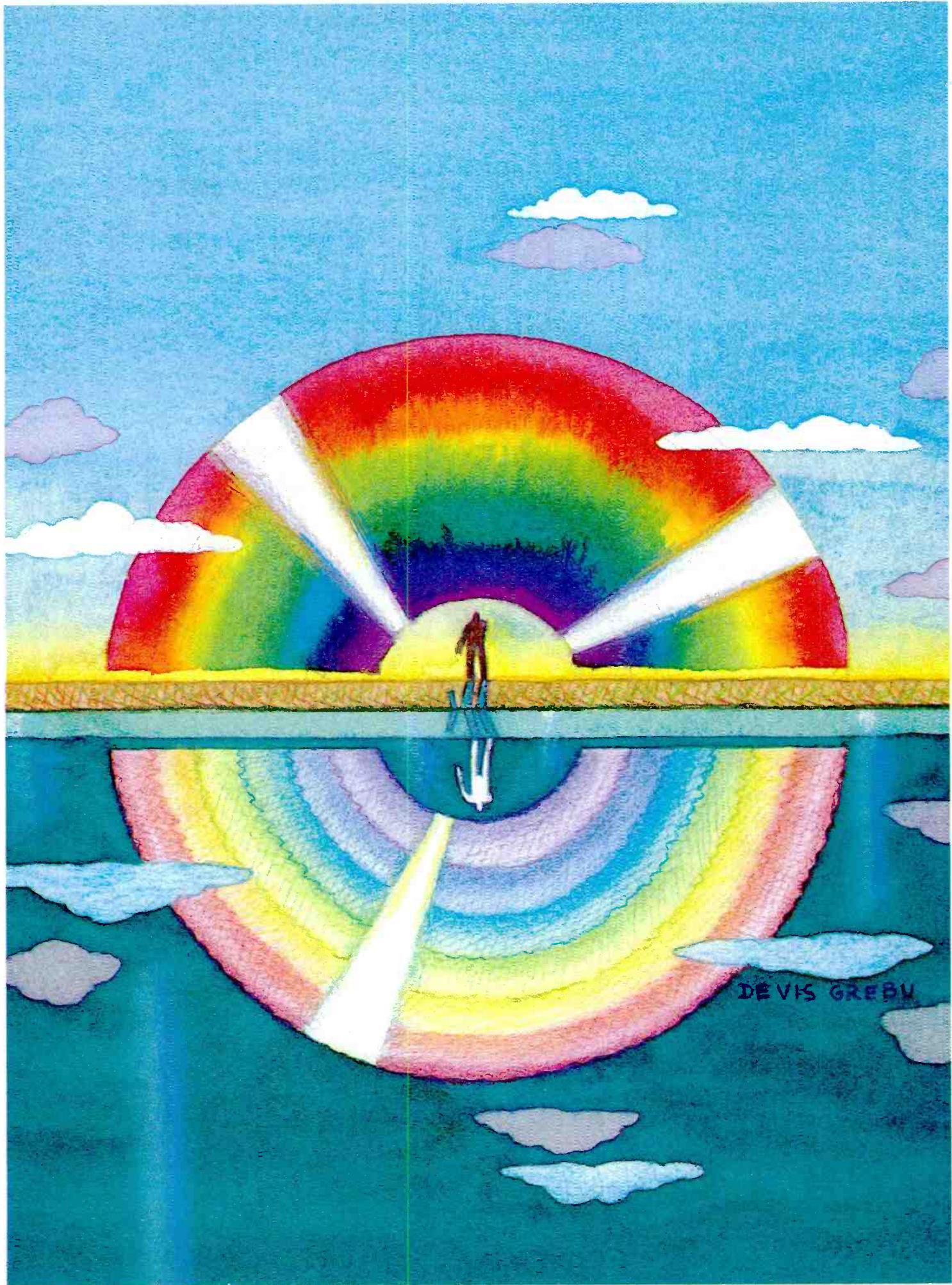
pensive it is to produce. Only the Pentagon could afford to finance the marvelous, experimental Aspen Movie Map, a demonstration of "surrogate travel" produced between 1978 and '79 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The disc takes its viewer on a video driving tour of Aspen, Colo., letting the surrogate traveler choose at each street corner the direction he wants to turn.

Simpler but effective interactive discs can be found closer to home. If you've visited an Army recruiting station lately, you may have watched the disc sprout its branches. You sit in front of the screen of a JOIN console, as the Army calls the big contraption. The screen asks you to choose what you want out of your career from a diverse list of blessings. Each desire is like a branch on the disc's tree. Do you want high adventure, service to country, or a steady paycheck?

You push the button for a steady paycheck. The Sony disc player putters briefly and then branches off into an energetic video sales talk promising monthly wages, funded by the Congress of the United States, and guaranteeing food and housing. Or you push the button for adventure, and the disc recites the Army

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*Paul Mareth is a communications consultant specializing in visual-media technologies.*



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**C**omputer and interactive video disc team up to show performances of Franz Schubert's "The Elf King," and then guide this University of Delaware student through an analysis of the song.



**U**sing the Aspen Movie Map developed by the MIT Architecture Machine Group, the "surrogate traveller" can see what it looks like to turn the corner in Aspen, Colorado, by pressing the touch-sensitive screen.

Travel Guarantee: "Army travel, go for it!" Not only are you shown soldiers enjoying their enlistments in Hawaii, but the disc player also doggedly pursues, as only a machine could, every stock sales point fitting your admitted ambitions. In partnership, the disc and computer ask or answer questions; you react, and they branch to the next appropriate full-color pitch. The disc goes on—branching, budding, sprouting, twiggling.

Or maybe you've seen the disc at a kiosk in a department store, where it tries to sell designer sheets. Not interested in sheets? The disc switches to towels.

You may also have learned cardiopulmonary resuscitation from a video disc. The American Heart Association has found that the disc teaches CPR better, faster, and with more lasting effect than "live" instructors generally could. Wired to electronic sensors in a manikin, the computer can tell how well you work at resuscitation. To save the dummy, you team up with the teacher on the screen before you. If you breathe into the dummy's mouth at the right time, the teacher keeps up his rhythmic compression of the victim's chest. If your timing is off, the disc branches to another sequence in which the teacher says, "You were a little late that time. Could you try again?"

The video disc can branch to one or another scene with hardly a moment's delay, even if scenes are physically encoded some distance apart, because the disc is a radial medium, unlike magnetic tape. (Recall the ease of finding a particular

song on a record album, compared to searching for it through an audio tape.) The video disc gives television the same random-access capability that the floppy disc gives the computer.

In the laser-disc players sold by Pioneer, Magnavox, and Sony, a laser beam shining up at the whirring disc is precisely redirected by a tiny swinging mirror, cocked at the proper angle to "read" the desired picture-making data off the disc. Some 15 billion microscopic pits tell the player how to reconstruct up to 54,000 television frames per side. (Somewhat slower at searching for the next scene is the RCA video-disc system, which uses a stylus to sense impressions in a grooved disc.)

The searching, branching, and other interactive capabilities of the video disc held little interest for the companies that worked at developing disc systems in the beginning. MCA (which owns Universal Studios) and RCA (which owns NBC) were among the show-business companies trying to create a movie machine for which consumers would buy their programs, packaged and sold like records. MCA was united with IBM in a joint venture, DiscoVision Associates, but the two companies had conflicting plans for the disc. When the operating partnership dissolved two years ago, Wall Street was ready to write the disc off. Rockley Miller, who edits *Videodisc Monitor*, says observers were then passing the word that "if IBM and MCA couldn't

make a go of the disc, there must be something wrong with it." Failing to live up to overambitious sales projections, the disc was declared dead—prematurely, it turned out.

No wonder the new medium was disappointing. "The industry tried to make a new technology do an old job," says John Hartigan, a Sony marketing executive. For several companies selling disc players, including Sony and Philips, the disc's big selling point today is its ability to do new jobs with its interactivity.

Hartigan recalls the bewilderment of experienced film and television producers when faced with the disc's ability to branch like a tree. "They'd ask me, 'Why do you want to keep stopping the movie? Movies are supposed to move!' Hollywood couldn't figure out why we wanted the movie to stop. It damn near killed the disc."

Ironically, the pioneers of radio and television envisioned their media as magnificent tools of public enlightenment—only to see them become sources of escapism and diversion. The disc, on the other hand, was invented by huge multinational companies as a mass-entertainment medium, but instead has found its true vocation in education and training.

Devices to put pictures on a record have a long history, almost as long as that of broadcasting itself. The earliest disc, called Phonovision, was marketed briefly in Britain during the 1920s. Today's two major video-disc systems came on the U.S. market quite recently—the laser



**T**hrough sensors in the manikin, a computer detects how well the student is learning resuscitation, and uses the video disc to show how it's done.

system (Philips/MCA) in 1978 and the stylus system (RCA) in 1981. To develop its disc, RCA reportedly pumped half a billion dollars into what many financial analysts considered a bottomless pit. What rescued the disc, however, was not private industry's generous investment, but the explosive growth of a previously ignored market.

A set of unanticipated needs had arisen, centering not on home entertainment but on armed forces training camps. After the abolition of the draft in 1971, the armed forces had to recruit and train large numbers of people, many of them unschooled, to perform highly complex and precise technical tasks. The solution was to team up television and computers, two previously separate technologies.

The resulting hybrid—the interactive video disc—was born because the military recognized that even illiterate recruits could be taught to perform exacting technical work if the instructional design was sufficiently clear and comprehensive. Increasingly complex weapons demanded more training of personnel, but the weapons were too expensive to use for practice. The military developed simulation devices, some with several disc players standing by to serve up different video versions of battlefield action.

This amounted to more than mere "transfer of information." In the phrase of David Hon, the designer of the disc teaching cardiopulmonary resuscitation, it was "transfer of experience."

Interactive uses of the video disc were also developed for the civilian branches of government. In the 1960s, when the Johnson Administration was supporting ambitious educational research and development, computers were brought into the classroom as "programmed instruction" teaching machines. The idea behind these computer-aided instruction machines was exemplary, but the machines themselves didn't work. They could ask a question, take a student's answer (which would determine the subsequent question), reward correct answers, and give remedial information for wrong answers. But they were unreliable, expensive and, worst of all, could address only a very narrow range of "objective" skills—certainly not the application of those skills or the judgment needed to use them well. In short, the teaching methodology used in the early programmed-instruction machines was antithetical to critical thinking. The machines were thus resisted by teacher and student alike.

Today's interactive video-disc player is simply a lineal descendant of the programmed-instruction machine—faster, better, and more attractive to the student. More significantly, it works with pictures rather than words. The visuals do more than enhance and illustrate the message. Their very presence alters the nature of the message.

Of course, there have always been people who think in terms of visual imagery rather than in the abstraction of words. That was one distinction in early America between the self-educated possessors of "Yankee know-how" and the university intellectuals. In a study of early American technology, Anthony F. C. Wallace observed a "growing isolation" of people who think in mental pictures. "Theologians, humanists, even scientists can converse freely because the thinking is done with the same system of symbols as those used in communication," Wallace wrote. "Indeed, it has become conventional to assume that thought itself is merely a kind of internal speech and to disregard almost completely those kinds of cognitive processes that are conducted without language, as though they were somehow more primitive and less worthy of intellectual attention."

Teaching with the interactive video disc could suffer this same stigma in the universities while receiving a warmer welcome in other institutions with growing educational needs. Computer-aided instruction had been virtually discarded by the educational establishment by the end of the 1960s, but has made its comeback outside the traditional school. During the 1970s, no institutions had a greater need to train large numbers of people ef-

fectively than the big corporations and the military. They also had the resources to do it.

Many people in the labor pool were neither well-read in the liberal arts and sciences nor trained in any technique of critical thinking. They weren't accustomed to assembling facts from diverse sources and using them to reach independent or original conclusions. But that mattered little, as the task of computer-aided instruction was to teach specific, unambiguous, and replicable technical skills. The fact that this kind of training did not convey education as culture, critical discrimination, or intellectual delight wasn't important to the institutions paying the training bills.

Indeed, the relics of liberal education earned their own pejorative sobriquet from the new breed of instructional designers: "soft skills." The important, how-to stuff is called "hard skills."

## The disc can teach illiterates to perform highly exacting technical work.

To the extent that technology trains workers to do their jobs without preparing them to think independently, the socially useful skills will erode as the information age continues. Already, there are widespread complaints that clerical workers using computers go to great lengths to avoid any situation requiring them to exercise judgment or make qualitative evaluations.

In the hands of corporate personnel trainers, the interactive disc may contribute to this kind of intellectual passivity, but there is no technological reason that the disc can't be used equally effectively to teach "soft skills" and encourage independent thinking. Indeed, the disc's unique way with pictorial and printed material should be an ideal medium for liberal education. Few discs have been made for this purpose, but a truly inspired example was produced by the University of Delaware. The disc dissects Schubert's haunting song "Der Erlkönig" ("The Elf King") in visual terms, while the two audio channels carry the song in German and English, allowing the student to switch at random between them.

The visual part of the disc develops an increasingly complex musical analysis of the song's harmonies, melodies, counterpoint, and rhythms, to be pursued at the student's own pace.

Such excursions into the "soft skills" are, of course, not big moneymakers. Today, the most certain long-term market for video discs appears to be in training, merchandising, and other interactive applications for business. But there is still a

reasonable market for the disc player in the home; the electronics industry expects to sell 500,000 players and some 12 million discs this year, mostly for home use. Pioneer, the major maker of laser-disc players, claims to have made a profit on them for well over a year, and RCA predicts its disc operation will be profitable by 1986.

While more than a half-million homes now have disc players, the devices won't

become ubiquitous necessities of middle-class life unless producers can offer a tantalizing stock of "must-have" software to run on them. As the marketers say, home video is a "software-driven industry."

The video disc had the misfortune of coming to market in the late 1970s, just as the consumer television market was being glutted by a glittering array of new technologies. Cable television and video-cassette recorders, especially, inflicted great damage on the disc's prospects as a mass-entertainment medium. The VCR, with its unique abilities to record off the air or from a home video camera, is outselling disc players ten to one.

The disc, however, has its own special talents: interactivity; the ability to do double backflips at the behest of a computer; picture and sound quality higher than that of most VCRs; the random-access ability to play out any sequence or still frame from among 54,000 images on each silvery side, and the attractive ease of handling of a nearly indestructible phonograph record. And future models will have the additional selling point of playing digital audio compact discs as well as video discs.

If consumers can be made to hunger for interactive programs, which are not available through any other video technology, the disc would have a chance to become a major entertainment medium. That chance may come with home versions of the new video games incorporating the disc (see box).

More likely, the disc will have other roles in the home and in business. In a world where telephones, computers, typewriters, TV sets, and every other electrical contrivance will be wired together for concerted action, the video-disc player could be the most remarkable member of the electronic family.

One video-disc manufacturer, Philips, gives away the likely ending to this story with the surprising design of one of its latest player models. In contrast to the typical video device, laden with knobs and buttons, this disc machine has almost no controls designed for the human touch. It takes its cues instead through connections to a microcomputer. The disc player is surely the junior partner in that pair. Computer folks even call it a "dumb peripheral."

The video disc may take its orders from other sources, but it executes those commands with a flexibility all its own. By creating a unique combination of our two most important technologies—television and the computer—the interactive video disc raises the powers of both exponentially. Whether harnessed for purposes of education, entertainment, persuasion, or indoctrination, those shiny discs are changing the way we see, learn, and act. ■

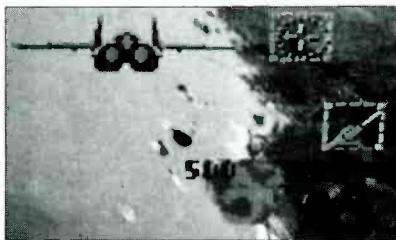
## Shortcut to the Home

**T**HE VIDEO DISC'S QUICKEST route into the American home may be through the video-game arcade. The disc is already a hit in the arcades and pizza shops of the land, spinning out fast-action adventures for would-be bomber pilots and dragon-slayers. Next, it may bring home a wider variety of games and, possibly, unforeseen forms of interactive electronic entertainment.

One of the first games using a video disc to supply pictures, Dragon's Lair became the arcades' most popular game for many months, and was also the first to break the quarter barrier, allowing arcade operators to extract 50 cents a play. Instead of the simple moving figures and bleeps of a computer game, the new disc-based machines use stereo sound tracks and either live-action footage or Disney-style animation to heighten the games' realism.

The next big wave of disc games will come if designers can make them enticing and cheap enough for home use. It's too early to say how high that wave will crest, but at least one communications-industry analyst thinks a rapid boom in video-disc games could help sweep disc players into 15 million homes by 1990. Sales of rock-music video discs will also help make that happen, says David Butterfield, a Cambridge media consultant. In a study, Butterfield projected that entertainment video discs could be a \$6.75 billion industry six years from now—bigger than total movie box-office grosses or record sales. (Other industry analysts have doubts the disc will become a common home device so quickly, or that games are the key.)

Games using video discs thrill their players with high-quality animation or movie footage shot from low-flying jets and race cars, although players have less control over what happens on-screen than in earlier games of the Pac-Man generation, with their com-



puter-generated graphics. But designers say the "playability" of games in the arcades today is crude compared to that of disc games now in development.

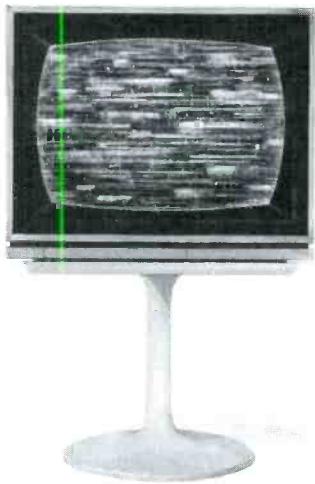
Games designed to be played at home are likely to change in nature from the arcade games, possibly becoming more cerebral and less violent. There won't be the economic incentive for fast action, for one thing. "Home games could take on a whole different feel because they're not demanding a coin drop every 90 seconds to two minutes," says Garry Hare, a California game designer who has worked with Atari, Lucasfilm, and other firms. Hare's company, Search & Design, stands ready to produce seven new disc games when the home market opens up. "We're either slightly ahead of our time," he admits, "or dumber than hell."

Bigger companies are also taking the gamble. Coleco, a major game-maker, has paid a reported \$2 million for rights to sell a home version of Dragon's Lair, and industry observers expect the video-disc version to be compatible with Coleco's home computer. RCA is also issuing disc games, and next year plans to sell a disc player that can work under computer control.

Word games, trivia quizzes, mysteries with variable plots, and other interactive amusements are already being produced for the disc. The designers' next challenge will be to conceive new kinds of popular art that interact with their viewers.

STEVE BEHRENS

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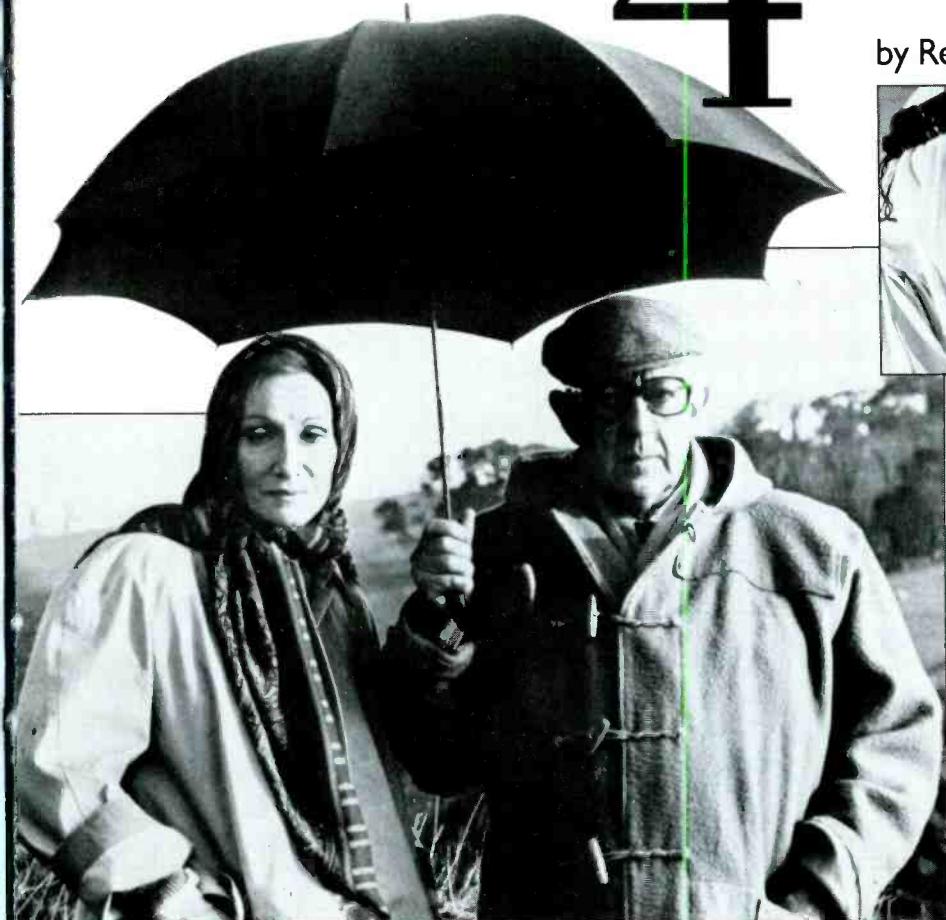
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# SCRAMBLING TO BE 4th

by Reese Schonfeld



**Testing the waters** for a fourth network were such programs as *A Woman Called Golda*, with Ingrid Bergman (above), *Smiley's People*, with Alec Guinness (at left), and the daily series *Breakaway*, with hosts Martha Lambert and Norman Mark (below).



**I**N THE BEGINNING there were four networks—NBC, CBS, ABC, and DuMont. As it turned out back then in the '50s, there were barely enough stations on the air to support three proper networks, and scarcely enough advertising money to support two. The DuMont Network struggled gamely with quiz shows, Bishop Sheen, wrestling, and other low-budgeters for about nine years and finally collapsed in 1955. The handful of stations it owned, having lost their tie to a network, became Metromedia, the largest chain of independent stations. And their struggle continued.

For about a quarter-century the independent stations' lot was to live in the shadow of the powerful networks, surviving on ball games, vintage movies and cartoons, and reruns of used-up network series.

But time has brought change. Today there are many more unaffiliated stations on the air than in the early days, and many are

*Reese Schonfeld, a consultant for Cox Cable, was founding president of Cable News Network.*

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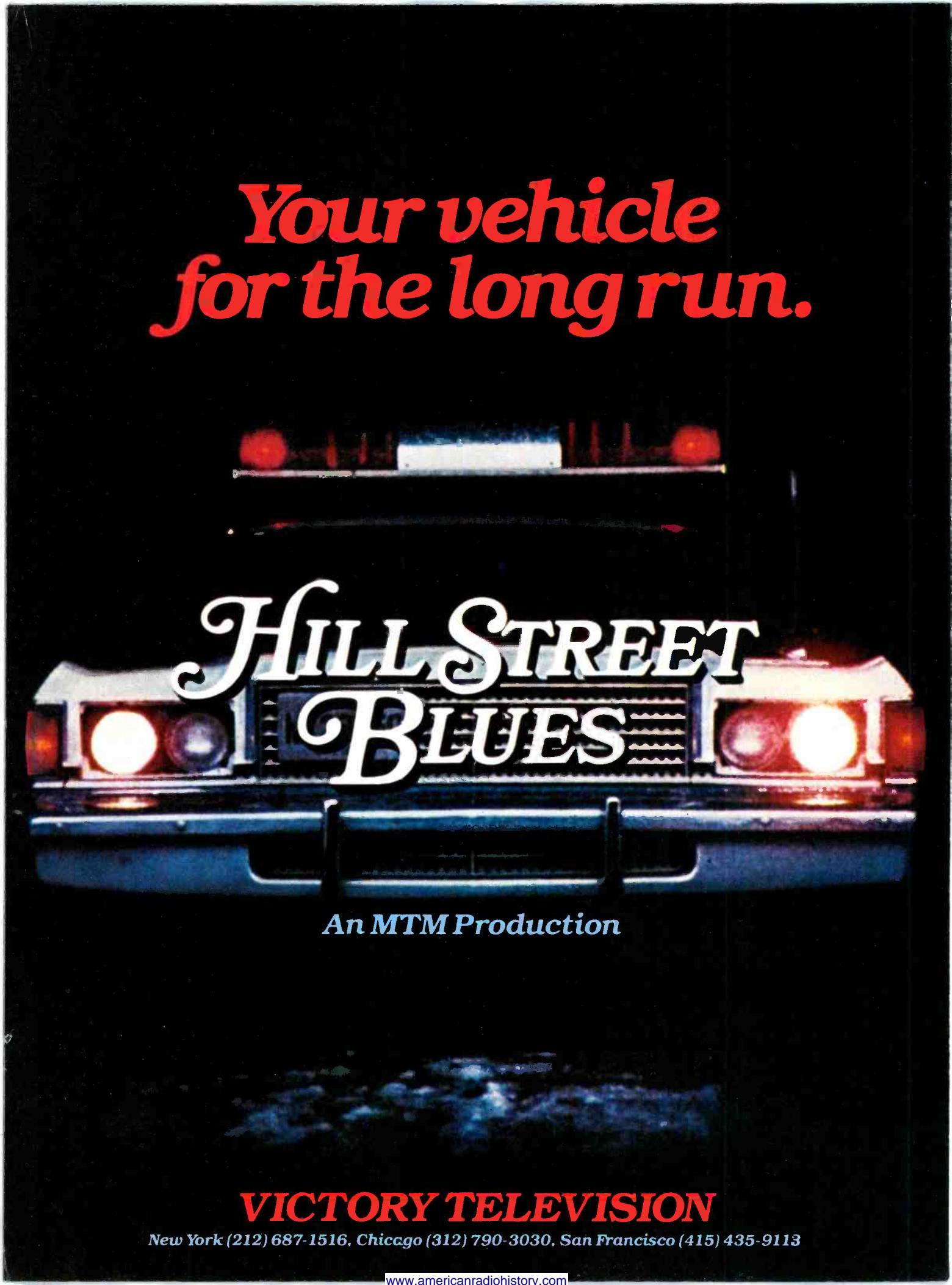
**Top Ten Nielsen  
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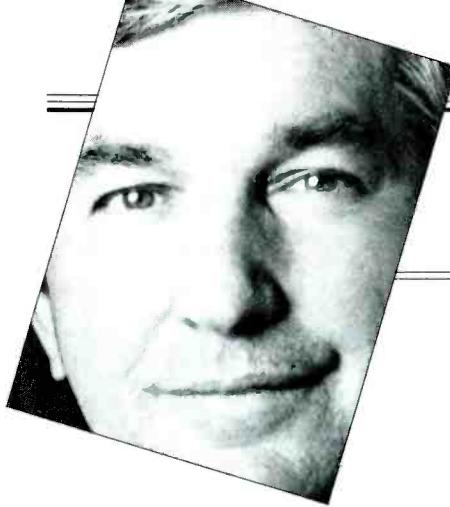
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# SFM entertainment



## Metromedia's Bob Bennett will offer up to 17 hours a week of national programming.

thriving on original syndicated fare and the reruns of such still-popular network shows as *M\*A\*S\*H*, *Three's Company*, and *All in the Family*. Moreover, the advertising market has burgeoned since the '50s. Today there is such demand for commercial time on the three networks that ad rates keep soaring, making advertisers wish for a new competitor in the marketplace.

And so Metromedia has come full circle. The offspring of DuMont has designs again on a fourth network.

To succeed, it has to put together a confederation of stations that would enable it to reach around 70 percent of American households, conventionally the minimum required to compete for network advertising. This means that Metromedia needs not only one station in every market where independents exist, but also cooperation from network affiliates in cities that have no independent outlets. Such a network would seem within Metromedia's grasp, at least for a limited schedule of programs, but for one complication: Another company, almost as big and influential, has the same idea—the Tribune Company.

The importance of networks is that they bring larger audiences to stations by producing programs on a grand scale and promoting them nationally. During the '50s and '60s, when ABC was losing millions as a network, the losses were justified by the glamour and importance the network gave to the five stations owned by ABC. Those stations' profits more than compensated for the network's poor competitive position in the league dominated by CBS and NBC. Any ABC station in those years was better off by far than an independent and was worth more when it went up for sale. And that is why Metromedia and Tribune are verging on

war in their drive to create a fourth network.

How the other independent groups align themselves with these aspiring new networks depends in large part on whether they compete with either Metromedia or Tribune in their main markets. A group such as Chris-Craft, for example, would be loath to contribute to Metromedia's success because its flagship station competes with Metromedia's KTTV in the lucrative Los Angeles market.

Metromedia and Tribune are old antagonists, having battled each other in the New York market for 30 years. That conflict was extended to Chicago last year when Metromedia bought a UHF independent, WFLD, challenging Tribune on its home turf, where WGN has long ruled. The race to establish a fourth network might be said to have begun then and there.

The strength of ABC, CBS, and NBC centers on the fact that each has a well-established VHF station in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. In terms of television population, these three markets represent coverage of more than 16 percent of the country. Metromedia's purchase of the Chicago station now gives it a presence in those same three cities, while Tribune has powerful VHF stations in New York and Chicago.

At both companies, leadership has passed to a new generation. Metromedia's field general is Bob Bennett, who had headed New York station WNEW-TV with spectacular success during the late '60s. In 1971, Bennett left Metromedia to establish WCVB in Boston, joining a new group that had won the contested license to the station. Very quickly, WCVB, an ABC affiliate, became the country's exemplary station for public-service and local programming. It was such an attractive property that Metromedia bought it in 1982 for the then record price of \$220 million, putting Bennett in charge of the company's entire broadcast operation.

Bennett is bold and aggressive. He re-

tains some of the pleasant brashness that served him well early in his career when he sold commercial time. He has the confidence not only to take on the Tribune Company but also the three major networks, some of whose affiliates he will need for his own network.

Jim Dowdle is Bennett's counterpart at Tribune. Dowdle also rose through the ranks from sales. He is a quiet, modest man, a powerfully built former Marine, born in Chicago, educated at Notre Dame, thoroughly Midwestern. Dowdle is not a swashbuckler; he keeps a low profile. Without calling much attention to himself, he is an effective leader.

Thus, as the two companies set out to build the fourth-network empire, they do so in sharply contrasting styles.

Bennett's brashness and flamboyance show up when he speaks of the Tribune Company. "They're just doing what I'd be doing in their place," he says. "They're reacting defensively to our plan."

Dowdle, on the other hand, maintains that he's not trying to start a fourth network. He says that's just something for people to write about. He says his efforts are just "a continuation of the other occasional ad hoc networks" that have been formed to finance and air such programs as *A Woman Called Golda*, *Smiley's People*, and *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*.

But Dowdle last year called a meeting in Chicago with his fellow independent-station barons to see about establishing a permanent confederation of independents. The group he met with—Taft Broadcasting, Gaylord Broadcasting, and Chris-Craft Industries—are all Metromedia competitors. Five years ago Metromedia moved into Texas. The station it bought in Houston soon beat out the Gaylord station there; now it has en-

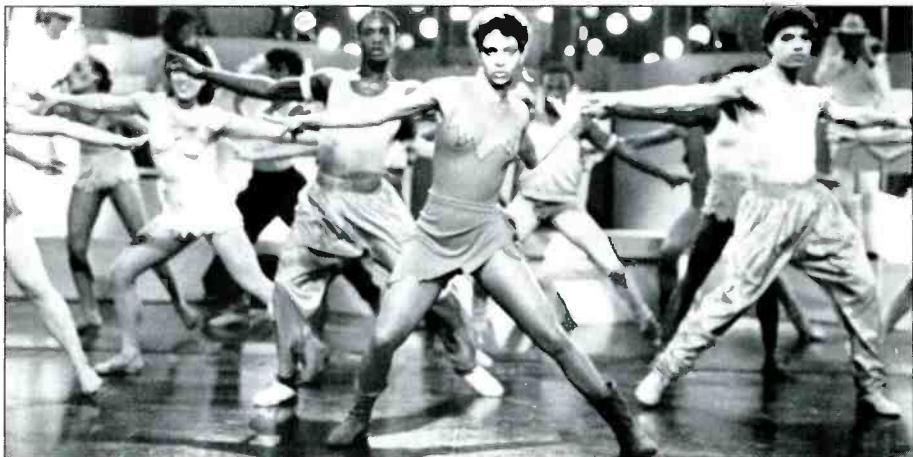


## Tribune's Jim Dowdle called together owners of independents reaching nearly half the population.

## Whatever develops over the next year or two, there will almost certainly be five networks before there are four.



**Thicke of the Night:** Metromedia's first offering toward a network.



**Fame:** Canceled by NBC, the striving young performers were brought back into production by a Bennett partnership.

tered Dallas to compete again with Gaylord. In the District of Columbia, Metromedia competes with Taft, in Los Angeles with Chris-Craft's KCOP; in both markets, Metromedia is ahead.

All the Metromedia rivals own other TV stations. Chris-Craft has the number-two independent in San Francisco, in addition to outlets in Minneapolis and Portland, Oregon. Gaylord has stations in Cleveland, Seattle, and Milwaukee, along with the two in Texas. Taft has outlets in Philadelphia, Miami, and Cincinnati, as well as Washington. The Tribune Company's other stations are in Denver, Atlanta, and New Orleans.

So when the four groups sat down to talk, they represented 17 of the top 30 television markets, or coverage of nearly half the country's population. They are a formidable gathering of forces—made even more so by the presence at the meeting of an executive from Paramount TV.

Dowdle says, "We are not reacting to Metromedia. When we met a year ago, Metromedia wasn't even talking about a fourth network. We have to run our own companies. What the other guy does is very secondary." Dowdle says that all he and his group of Metromedia rivals are talking about is a one-night-a-week network.

Paramount had figured prominently in the plan initially; now it seems to have usurped it. "Paramount wants to be the fourth network, by itself," Dowdle says.

The film company has had network ambitions ever since it made the horrible mistake of letting William S. Paley buy out its half interest in the Columbia Broadcasting System during the '30s. In recent times Paramount has made several efforts to build a network. In 1973 it bought 50 percent of UPI Television News, hoping to make it the foundation for a program-distribution system. Four years later it purchased the Hughes Sports Network with a view to delivering more than sports. And some time after that it announced a joint venture with the Benton & Bowles advertising agency for a proposed one-night-a-week network on independent stations. None of these plans panned out.

Recently, however, Paramount hit it big in the syndication-by-satellite market with *Entertainment Tonight* and *Solid Gold*; through these successes it has developed tight relationships with independent stations. Paramount speaks openly now of its involvement in a consortium of station groups that intends to feed out programs in network style all year round. The consortium, which includes the Chris-Craft and Taft groups, is preparing to invest \$100 million in original prime-time programming, ranging from series to made-for-TV movies. Indicating that it means business, Paramount has already opened a network advertising-sales office in New York.

Bennett is already doing business. His



THE NIELSENS

# Gaining Independents

first offering toward a network was *Thicke of the Night*, a 90-minute program that audaciously went head-to-head with Johnny Carson last September on stations that covered approximately 85 percent of the country. "If it works," Bennett said before the debut, "it's Armageddon. Carson grosses \$100 million for NBC every year, and \$25 million of that comes right to the bottom line." If *Thicke* had been an instant hit, NBC would have been in trouble. It didn't happen, but it does illustrate what Bennett has in mind. He succeeded in pulling in several key network affiliates for the show.

Through Bennett, Metromedia became a partner in *Breakaway*, a syndicated news-magazine show, and also led the consortium that kept alive *Fame* and *Too Close for Comfort* after they had been canceled by the networks. He is developing a Saturday-night music show, *On Stage America*, with producers Nick Vanoff, Gary Smith, and Dwight Hemion, whose credits include *The Hollywood Palace*, *The Sonny and Cher Show*, and *Hee Haw*. He also hopes to clear one Sunday a month with his affiliates for a movie and 30 minutes a night for a national prime-time news show. And he has committed prime time on all the Metromedia independents for a nightly soap opera, *Rituals*, produced jointly with Telepictures. If all Bennett's plans bear fruit, Metromedia will be responsible for some 17 hours of national programming each week.

The Metromedia plan for a prime-time news service has not yet taken shape because the Tribune Company got there first. The Independent News Network, a Tribune subsidiary based at WPIX, New York, has been in operation for more than three years and has garnered satisfactory ratings and favorable critical reviews. INN could be the foundation for a Tribune Company network.

Typically combative, Bennett remarks: "I don't think of INN as commercially viable. All I see is a bunch of one ratings. I frankly haven't seen anything to worry about. We're going after every one of their stations."

John Corporon, president of INN, sees it differently. He says the reason Metromedia hasn't gotten off the ground with its news program is that it hasn't been able to take away any of the INN stations. He knows Metromedia has visited his member stations and tried to lure them away, but so far none has defected. Although he concedes that many of the stations carrying INN are not breaking any records in the ratings, he points with pride to the continuing growth of his news network's national audience. Corporon

THE RISE of independent television is manifested in these statistics: Ten years ago, 78 independent stations were on the air; today there are 193, about half of which have begun operations in the last five years. Collectively, the independent stations can reach around 80 percent of the population.

But these stations are not distributed evenly around the country. New York and Los Angeles, the two largest markets, have 17 independent stations between them, while many smaller cities have only one or two, and some areas of the country none. (A number of independents are actually committed to religious or foreign-language programming; a score of them are affiliates of the Spanish International Network.) This makes it necessary for any aspiring network to gain air-time from affiliates of ABC, CBS, or NBC in certain parts

of the country. For example, *The Wall Street Journal Report*, distributed by the Tribune Company, is aired on 85 stations, 19 of which are network affiliates. This dependency on network affiliates hinders the establishment of a full-time fourth network.

Another handicap to the formation of a network is that independents are predominantly on the UHF band, which makes them somewhat harder to receive on ordinary television sets than VHF stations. Of the 193 independents on the air, only 29 are on VHF (channels 2-13). Cable, however, has been a boon to independents, not only making them more accessible locally but also carrying their signals to other markets. The prospects for independents thus stand to improve markedly with the wiring of the major cities.

RICHARD BARBIERI

thinks Bennett and Metromedia are really reacting to INN, and that Metromedia missed a step when it let Tribune establish a national news service to which it is now playing catch-up. *Independent Network News* now claims to serve 125 stations with its midday, nightly, and weekly roundups. A companion venture, *The Wall Street Journal Report*, is said to be in reach of 70 percent of American television households. The Tribune Company also syndicates *At the Movies*, with film critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, to 120 markets.

But Tribune's biggest thrust into networking is Operation Prime Time, the consortium of independent television stations that pools large amounts of money to produce programs of network quality. OPT's biggest success to date has been *Golda*, the biography of Israel's Golda Meir, starring Ingrid Bergman, which not only cut deeply into the network ratings but made off with three Emmy awards.

The race between Metromedia and Tribune to establish a fourth network will ultimately be decided by their ability to enlist affiliates. Metromedia starts with a base of seven stations of its own, six of them independents. But the Tribune Company, with its alliances, has a foothold in 17 independent markets. How does Bennett plan to gain entry to the cities where Tribune is established? In a market where a Metromedia station competes with another, he says, he would go so far as to divvy up programs between them. Thus, in Washington, the Taft station would get one program and the Me-

tromedia-owned station another. Taft controls the best independent station in Philadelphia, the fourth largest market in America and one vital to any new network's hope for success. Except for Taft, Bennett thinks he can make it without participation from the Tribune coalition.

Watching all this with keen interest are the heads of other broadcast groups owning independent stations. One executive who deals with both Metromedia and the Tribune Company sees no need to become the permanent ally of either. He intends to maintain the freedom to join the Tribune network one night, the Metromedia network another, and no network most of the time. The ultimate decision, he says, will be based on the quality of the programs and their ability to draw audiences substantially larger than an independent can attract with its own shows.

Whatever may develop over the next year or two, there will almost certainly be five networks before there are four. If either of the two fledgling networks should enjoy any significant degree of success, even with a limited schedule, the three major networks will feel the brunt. A fourth player changes the chemistry of the game. It's to be remembered that back in the early days, it was DuMont that had the big Monday-night sports event—boxing; it was DuMont that brought the National Football League to television, and it was DuMont that carried the historic Army-McCarthy hearings. And Bishop Fulton J. Sheen pulled in a whale of an audience during prime time. ■

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*Television Editorial:* KPIX-TV, San Francisco, California ("The Snitch Rule,"

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*Television Entertainment:* NBC-TV

("Family Ties" - "Oops" episode)

*Radio Documentary:* WRKS-FM, New York City ("The Stork Doesn't Work Alone")

*Magazine Feature:* PARENTS MAGAZINE

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*Television News:* WFSB - Hartford,

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*Magazine Feature:* NEWSWEEK ("Infertility") FAMILY CIRCLE MAGAZINE ("How Women Feel About Abortion: An Exclusive Family Circle Survey")

*Magazine News:* GLAMOUR ("The Battle Over Abortion")

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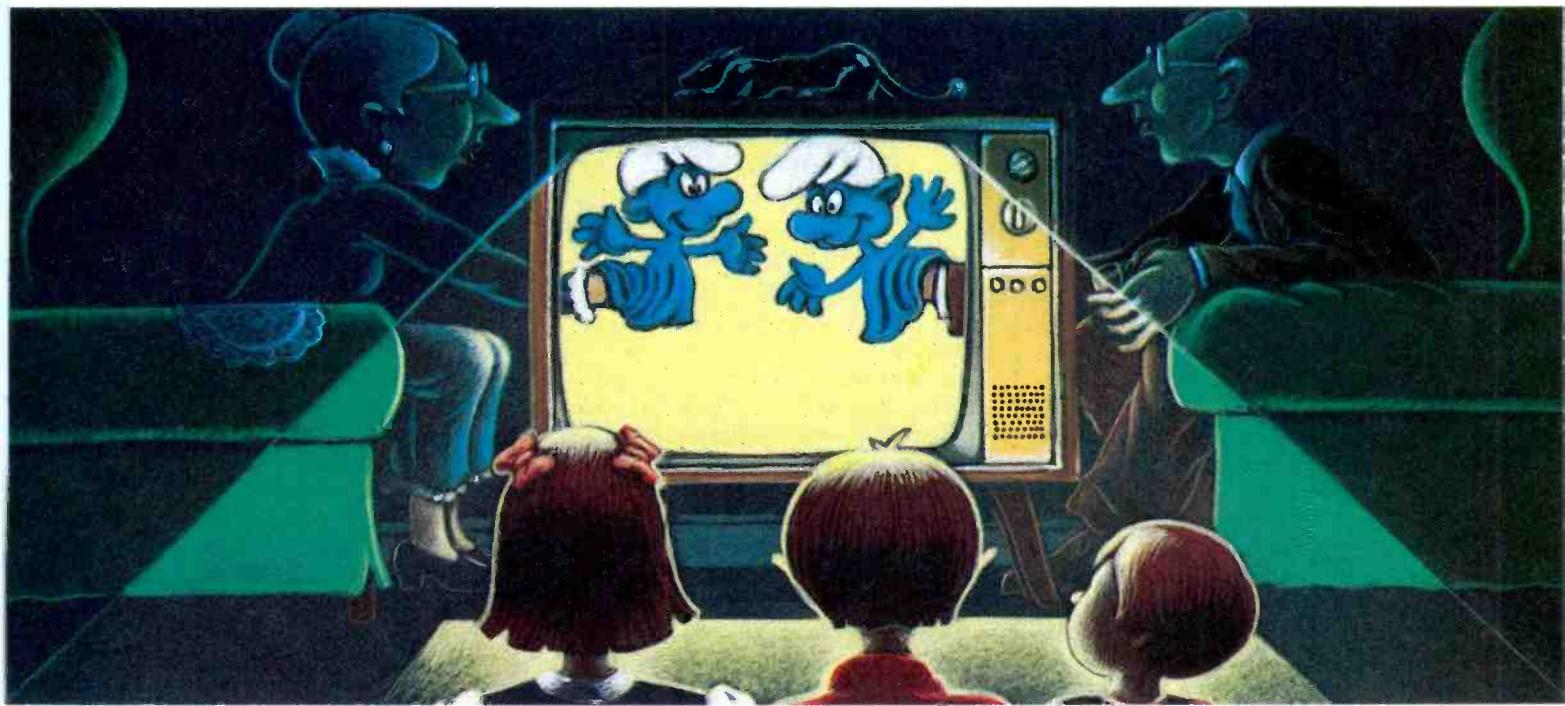
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# Where the Do-Gooders Went Wrong

by Walter Karp



## In slavishly enforcing the reformers' 'pro-social' dogma, the networks have adulterated children's cartoons.

**T**HERE IS SOMETHING distinctly sinister about the world of children's television. I discovered this quite by accident while trying to resolve a difference of opinion: My children like Saturday-morning children's television; the critics loathe it. "A monstrous mess," Gary Grossman calls it in his 1981 study, *Saturday Morning TV*. "An animated world of meanness and mayhem," is how it appears to Peggy Charren, founder and head of Action for Children's Television. The critics especially deplore "outdated" cartoons such as *Bugs Bunny*. My children like *Bugs Bunny* best of all.

Intrigued by a difference of opinion so sharp, I decided to spend a few Saturday mornings judging for myself the merits and defects of children's television. Here I made the first of many curious discoveries. I thought judging the merits of children's TV would be comparatively easy. Instead I found it virtually impossible. I

simply had no standard for judging what I saw. One episode of the *Smurfs*, a blue-skinned race of dwarlets, convinced me of that.

In the episode, a trumpet-playing Smurf, feeling spurned by his fellows, blows a loud blast on his trumpet, unwittingly disclosing to the evil wizard the whereabouts of the Smurf village. What, if anything, did the plot signify? I certainly didn't know. The wizard looked to me far more comical than menacing, but was he? How can an adult know what a child will find fearsome? The wizard chases the tiny Smurf up hill and down dale, but in vain. His back aches, he gasps for breath. He is an *out-of-shape* wizard. A witty idea, I thought, but I wondered whether it was not perhaps too adult an idea. Do children really think big hulking adults are too weak to harm them? I suspected not, but what did it signify one way or the other?

Ultimately the exhausted wizard winds up hanging from a log slung over a ravine. Instead of shoving him to his doom, the Smurf decides that vengeance is "un-Smurflike" and mercifully spares the

wicked wizard. When the Grimm brothers' Gretel had the witch at her mercy, she shoved her into a hot oven. Was Smurf mercy "better" for children than Hansel and Gretel's grisly justice? Again, I simply did not know, and I think most people don't know. My own knowledge of children is exactly the common knowledge: Once I was one of them, now I have two of them. The common knowledge does not suffice. That leaves a vacuum and a politically perilous one, for the ignorance of a free people endangers their freedom.

Trying hard to fill that vacuum are the various critics of children's television. They include organized parents, educators, enlightened (usually public) broadcasters, pediatricians, child psychologists, and professors of human development. They have also included a few powerful politicians, but that I did not know until much later.

The critics (whom I now began to read in earnest) have evolved a stringent standard of judgment. They believe that good children's television teaches children to be cooperative, hard-working, and

Walter Karp is a contributing editor of *Channels* and author of *The Politics of War* (Harper & Row).

Peter Cross

peace-loving members of society. Programs that carry such lessons are praised as "pro-social." The critics regard as defective those programs that appear to encourage selfishness, self-assertiveness, and aggression. After an experimental group of young children watched *Superman* and *Batman*, which are deemed to be "aggressive" shows, they demonstrated a heightening of aggressive tendencies, according to two professors of human development at the University of Pennsylvania. After watching *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, a much-lauded "pro-social" program, young children reportedly demonstrated greater "observance of the rules, tolerance of delays, and persistence in tasks."

**I**N ORDER TO SERVE the pro-social ideal of peaceful, unselfish, cooperative behavior, pro-social programming would feature, for example, "television characters who solve problems in non-aggressive ways" and "television characters who cooperate with each other, who openly express their feelings, who devote their energies to helping other people." Pro-social programming would alter, often drastically, traditional story-telling devices. In the *ACT Guide to Children's Television*, which was written "with the cooperation of the American Academy of Pediatrics," Evelyn Kaye points out that "constructive" children's stories would show superior evil forces overcome by means of "thoughtfulness, cooperation, or reason," rather than by "magic, cunning, or

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## Group-minded kids would resemble those Japanese workers so admired by U.S. businessmen.

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cheating"—traditional modes of besting giants and wizards who violate the pro-social rules.

Group-minded, industrious, and self-effacing, the pro-social child envisioned by the critics of children's television bears a curious resemblance to those Japanese workers so much admired of late by American businessmen.

Determined to "socialize" children and provide them with "strategies for coping with an increasingly complex world," the critics of children's television also prefer factuality to fantasy and realism to rowdy comedy. Slapstick, for one thing, is excessively aggressive, while fantasy the critics tend to regard as deceiving. As Peggy Charren puts it in *Changing Channels*: "Children need to understand that many of the things they see on TV do not happen in real life. Real

people do not fly or disappear or walk through walls." The critics prefer programs that "reflect our own reality"—programs, for example, that would make children more aware of the people "who carry out the basic tasks of American society," such as blue-collar workers and sales personnel. They also prefer stories that show black and Hispanic characters in positions of leadership.

This kind of sanitized "realism" bears a striking resemblance to what was taught in the "progressive" schools of the 1940s, described by David Reisman in his celebrated work *The Lonely Crowd* as "agencies for the destruction of fantasy," where "fairy tales are replaced by stories about trains, telephones, and grocery stores and later by material on race relations or the United Nations or 'our Latin-American neighbors.'"

Lastly, the critics of children's television have taken great pains to demonstrate to the nation's parents that whatever is not pro-social is physically and mentally *harmful* to their children. Working closely with pediatricians and child psychologists, the critics contend that frightening stories and fearsome villains make children "anxious" and give them nightmares. Citing studies that show "some children" cannot distinguish an animated cartoon from real life, the critics demand the elimination of any rowdy or unreal actions that a deluded child might imitate at his peril, as in the extreme instance of children jumping off roofs thinking they are Superman. In this way the critics can demand on the grounds of safety the curtailment of "aggressive" actions that they disfavor, in any case, on pro-social grounds.

More persistently, the critics of children's television have tried to marshal incontrovertible scientific proof that viewing violent action on television incites violent behavior in children. The proof has not been forthcoming. The most positive conclusions are hedged and cautious, as in the assertion that "there is evidence to support the theory that watching destructive cartoons leads to destructive play." Other studies give exactly the opposite results. As Cecily Truett, a former PBS official, ruefully noted in *Television & Children*, "Studies on the effects of violence on children's behavior are inconsistent and inconclusive." Completely undaunted by these disappointing results, the critics of children's television remain determined to root out televised violence and destruction.

In their hostility to violent deeds and powerful emotions, the critics of children's television bear a remarkable resemblance to those bowdlerizing turn-of-the-century schoolmarm who used to



Most group-minded of all,  
NBC's Smurfs depend on  
each others' specialties.

march through Grimms' fairy tales snipping out cruelty and cutting down ogres in the name of "mental hygiene."

**T**HAT RESEMBLANCE more than anything, made me suspicious of the pro-social standard. In defending the fairy tales from the censorious schoolmarm, England's G.K. Chesterton offered a memorable insight into the psychology of children and of the ancient children's stories. "Fairy tales," wrote Chesterton, "do not give the child the idea of the evil or the ugly; that is in the child already because it is in the world already. Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey." Instead of protecting children from unhealthy fears, the bowdlerizers of the fairy tales were depriving them of much-needed hope, the hope that the ghouls beneath their beds and the monsters in their closets have forms and faces, and that there is a champion who can best them, if not by "thoughtfulness, cooperation, or reason," then somehow or other—perhaps with a sword. The fairy tales, as Chesterton understood them, exposed the schoolmarm as the children's false friends. I strongly suspected that they might shed the same merciless light on today's pro-social critics and, more important, on the real merits and defects of children's television.

I thought I knew where such light could be found. In 1976 Bruno Bettelheim, an eminent child psychologist and one of the shining spirits of our time, published a book entitled *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. It is a rich and difficult work (especially after reading the banalities of the pro-social), the fruit of high intelligence, long reflection, and deep compassion for children—the work of an "informed heart," to borrow the title of Dr. Bettelheim's own account of what he learned about himself and his fellow man in the hellhole of a Nazi concentration camp.

In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bettelheim shows how irrelevant to the real needs of children the pro-social enterprise turns out to be. "Since the child at every moment of his life is exposed to the society in which he lives, he will certainly learn to cope with its conditions, provided his inner resources permit him to do so." In concentrating on mere outward behavior (cooperating, helping others), proponents of the pro-social neglect the child himself—the fearful, struggling child "with his immense anxieties about what will happen to him and his aspirations." The difficulties a child faces seem

## Fairy tales come to the rescue of children, giving hope that bogeys can be defeated.

to him so great, his fears so immense, his sense of failure so complete, says Bettelheim, that without encouragement of the most powerful kind he is in constant danger of falling prey to despair, "of completely withdrawing into himself, away from the world." What children urgently need from children's stories are not lessons in cooperative living but the life-saving "assurance that one can succeed"—that monsters can be slain, injustice remedied, and all obstacles overcome on the hard road to adulthood.

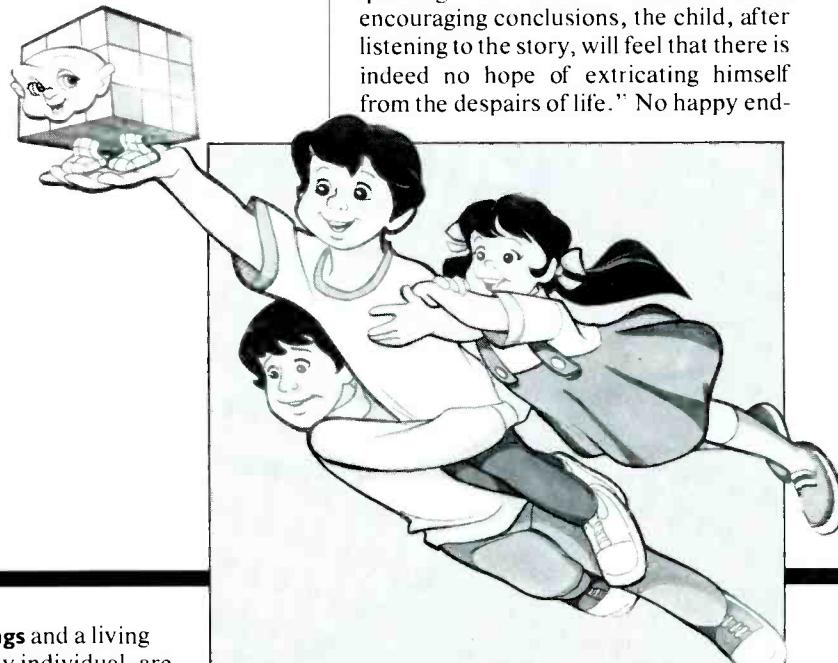
Fairy tales can help provide the inner strength to grow up, notes Bettelheim, only because they are fantasies. The menace of despair weighs so heavily on a child that "only exaggerated hopes and fantasies of future achievement can balance the scales so that the child can go on living and striving." "Realistic" stories, he says, cannot give children inner

strength because they can offer only pedestrian hopes and mundane triumphs. They inform without nourishing, like the "educational reports" and "social studies" that the pro-social critics demand of children's television as part of their curious campaign to make blissful Saturday a sixth day of school.

Fairy tales can "come to the rescue" of children, moreover, only because their fearsome, fantastic dangers are rooted in a child's real fears—the fear of being lost or abandoned; the dread of monsters, which represent to the child, says Bettelheim, the monstrous side of himself, the side he must learn how to master. Fairy tales, in a word, are meant to be scary. If they do not frighten, they do not work, for overcoming a flimsy danger gives a child no real assurance.

In the fairy tales, the hero of the story struggles alone. This, too, is an essential feature, for without it the fairy tales could not fulfill their task of helping the child "go on living and striving." The lonely hero offers the child "the image of the isolated man who is nevertheless capable of meaningful achievement." His isolation mirrors the isolation every child feels in the face of his real terrors. The hero's ultimate triumph provides the heart-swelling promise that the child, too, will find inner strength when he ventures forth on his own.

Lastly, the fairy tales help rescue the child from despair with their triumphantly happy endings—gaining a kingdom, winning a peerless spouse, vanquishing all foes. "Without such encouraging conclusions, the child, after listening to the story, will feel that there is indeed no hope of extricating himself from the despairs of life." No happy end-



**Three siblings** and a living cube, not any individual, are the collective hero of ABC's *Rubik's Cube*.

ing is complete, moreover, unless the wicked are severely punished. To a child, says Bettelheim, only severe punishment truly fits the terrible crimes he believes are committed against *him*—which, in his own view, go utterly unpunished. The punishment of the wicked is welcome proof to the child that he, too, will find justice one day; the great world will not let him down. “The more severely those bad ones are dealt with, the more secure the child feels.” Thus, the fairy tales (speaking through Bettelheim’s deep, tender analysis) answered my question about the significance of mercy in a children’s story. Quite simply, it is adulteration: something adults foist upon children at the children’s expense.

By conjuring up fearful dangers, lonely trials, and justice triumphant, the fairy tales give children strength for their arduous journey to the kingdom of adulthood. Like wise and loving parents, these ancient, universal tales serve the true interests of children as distinct from the interests of society, which cares nothing about the inner strength of its members, but only about their outward conformity. The fairy tales are not pro-social. What they are is pro-child. They stand guard against the adulteration of childhood by society’s overzealous agents.

**H**OW PRO-CHILD would children’s television turn out to be, I wondered, when at last I felt ready to return to the animated cartoon world of Saturday-morning television? With eyes

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## A lone person is helpless, the cartoons say, and the group is strong and kind.

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sharpened by *The Uses of Enchantment*, I discovered the astonishing answer quickly enough. Every essential element that makes it possible for fairy tales to give children inner strength, hope, and security is absent today from children’s TV.

The hero of children’s television is not a person at all. It is the ubiquitous group. The group is five dogs roaming the world; two frogs and a turtle solving crimes; two teenagers and two dogs unmasking villains; team of young gymnasts and their ghetto-smart leader; three chipmunks; an explorer, his niece, and a cowardly lion; a village of minuscule dwarfs; an island of minuscule monkeys; a team of tree-dwelling elves.

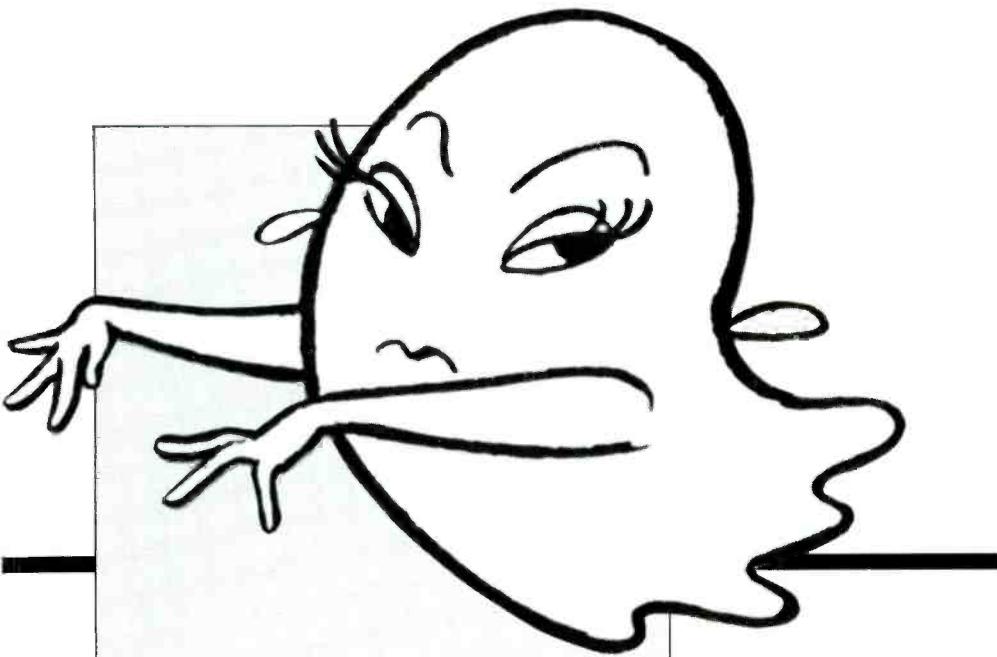
In this group-dominated world, deeds are group deeds, and motives, group motives. It is the group that faces the dangers and the group that emerges triumphant, demonstrating its invincible

strength. The sources of group strength are constantly made clear through social backchat among the group members. Their discussions of tolerance, teamwork, and the evils of vanity and selfishness often rival, and sometimes overwhelm, the action. The sources of group weakness are also made clear. In Saturday’s group-minded world, the nonconformist is an obnoxious complainer. In the *Smurfs*, he is Grouchy. In *Dungeons and Dragons*, he is Eric, the sneering sourpuss who constantly derides the group’s judgment. In every conceivable way, children are taught the pro-social virtues of cooperation, self-effacement, and subservience to the group.

The “image of the isolated man who is nonetheless capable of meaningful achievement”—so important to the child, so useless to society—rarely crosses the screen on Saturday morning. Even when the group must split up to perform special tasks, nobody goes forth alone. Like an army unit, the group, when it splits, divides into squads. That an isolated being may be capable of meaningful achievement is an idea kept from the children as though it were a secret of state. If, as the fairy tales tell us, a child learns to have faith in his own inner strength through fantastic tales of lone heroes, then children’s television systematically deprives children of that faith.

What is even worse, it actively subverts a child’s faith in his own inner strength. On Saturday-morning television, practically the only thing a lone being can do is fall prey to wizards, wicked adults, and master criminals. On Saturday-morning television, the most vivid “image of the isolated man” is that of a hapless victim whom the group decides to rescue. The group-rescue motif is one of the main devices of children’s television, and its primary message is perfectly plain: The lone individual is weak and helpless; the group is strong and kind. Several programs dramatize this seductive message by making one of the group’s members a slightly comical coward whom the group treats with bemused toleration; the group has strength enough for all.

This kind of reassurance is sweet consolation to children (including my own), but it is treacherous and baseless, the most insidious kind of false comfort. In real life, no gang can help a child master the deep anxieties that beset him. In real life, cowardice is not in the least comical, for every child knows in his heart how desperately he needs courage. Like the sugary cereals the pro-social critics are forever assailing, this kind of sugary, pro-social reassurance sweetens subservience and weakens the child.



**The goofy ghosts** of *Pac-Man* and other Saturday-morning villains mock children’s real fears.

Children's television doles out equally poisonous comfort with its treatment of danger. Whereas the fairy tales confront the terrors of childhood by showing great perils overcome, children's television deals with those terrors by making light of them. The out-of-shape wizard who had puzzled me at first proved to be merely one example of television's massive falsifying of children's fears. With the consistent exception of two programs, *Dungeons and Dragons* and *The Littles*, the bogeys and perils of Saturday-morning television have little or no power to frighten.

Often the villains are deliberately portrayed as inept clowns. The Grumplins are manifestly too silly to do the Monchichis any harm. Dragons are drawn with goofy faces, or they trip over their tails as soon as they breathe fire. "Isn't danger funny?" these shows seem to say.

On the more "realistic" programs, children's fears are mocked outright: A disguised villain, seemingly scary and phantasmal, is unmasked at the end, revealing a run-of-the-mill crook. The two teenagers and two dogs on *Scooby-Doo* reveal that the "Hound of the Bakersvilles" is only the caretaker disguised. Richie Rich reveals that the "Phantom of TV" is merely a security guard at the broadcasting studio. This kind of unmasking is petty rationalism at its worst. It does no good whatever to call a child's fears groundless. It only makes his demons all the more terrible, since the child sees no way to overcome them.

These cartoons seldom present the kinds of dangers that spring from the real fears of childhood. Bank robbers and master criminals are not rooted in children's primordial fears. They are merely cartoon copies of adult television. Wicked witches and evil stepmothers do rise up from childhood's primordial depths, but during many, many hours of watching Saturday television, I saw not a one of them. Rooted in the child's passionate life in the family, these mother figures (as Dr. Bettelheim shows) are much too potent, it seems, for the anti-septic world of children's television. In the great majority of children's shows, the family does not exist at all, perhaps because it is the only group that deeply matters to the child. The characters in most children's television shows dwell in a kinless, bloodless limbo drained of all real emotion.

Even the pro-social campaign against "aggression" and "violence" ends by betraying the real interests of children. Out of fear of encouraging "aggressive" behavior, it deprives children of the very promise of justice itself. In the sanitized world of children's television, the wicked

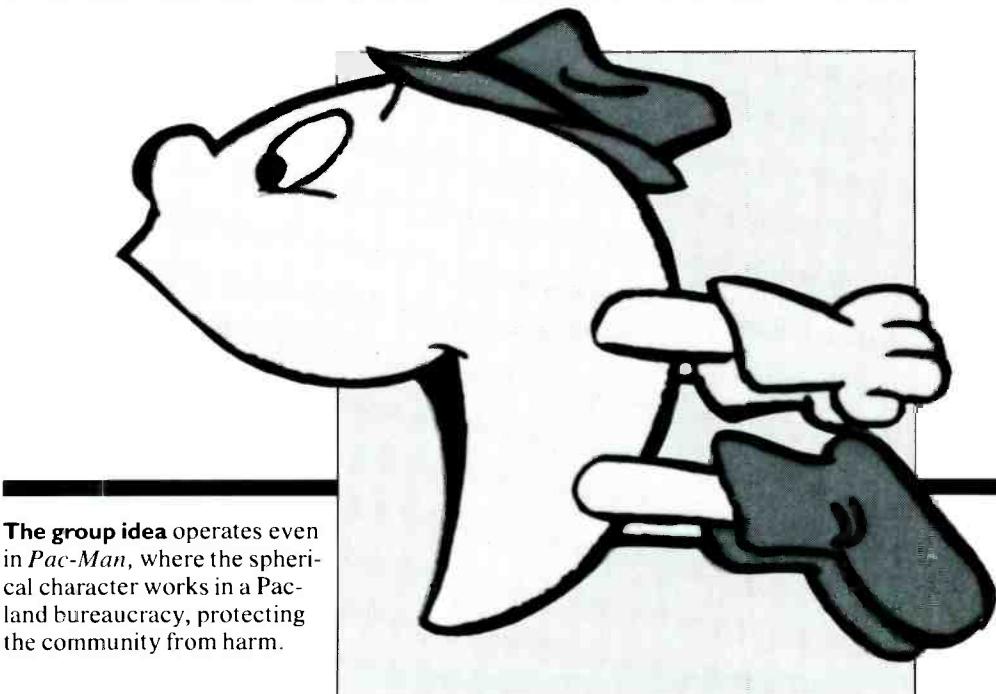
## Seldom do the cartoon plots deal with kids' most profound fears and passions.

are merely foiled, the scene quickly changes, and they are left scot-free, presumably because punishment would be too "violent." So children's television, which gives children no faith in their own inner strength, which gives them no hope that their demons will be bested, robs them of the precious assurance that justice will be theirs when they, too, venture into the great world. You must put no faith in yourself, says children's television: You must put no faith in an unjust world; the group alone can save you. This is a very strange lesson to teach a free people's children.

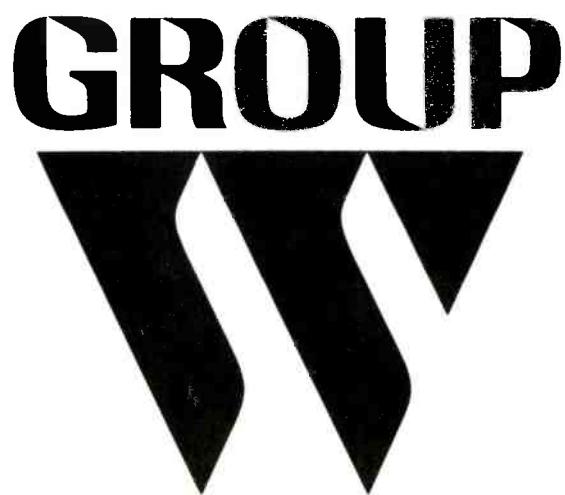
**W**HEN I FIRST READ the pro-social critics, I assumed that they were lonely voices in the video wilderness. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. The pro-social standard dominates children's television. As one veteran children's show producer, David de Patie, put it four years ago: "The greatest

changes [in children's television] are because of the ladies in Boston—Action for Children's Television. I think they have exerted a great influence." Rigid network codes, I learned, rigorously enforce the pro-social standard by eliminating "aggression" and emasculating danger. "Today, networks red-pencil any prolonged action that would so much as make a palm sweat," notes Gary Grossman in *Saturday Morning TV*. One network code rules that if a building is damaged in the course of an episode it must be repaired by the episode's end. The networks' "program practices" departments—the censors—also enforce with rigor the pro-social stricture against dangerously "imitable" behavior. One network cut out a scene showing a pussy-cat character hiding from a monster in a dish of spaghetti on the grounds that some child might dunk his cat into pasta as well. "I can't even have a character throw a pie in somebody's face anymore," says Joseph Barbera, the most prolific producer of children's cartoon shows. "The reason is simple. It's imitable, and the networks say we can't do anything bad that a child might imitate. It's gone that far."

The pro-social may not be esteemed, but it is certainly feared. When I interviewed a children's programming executive, she quickly assured me (supposing me to be a snoop from pro-social headquarters) that her network was dedicated to promoting "positive values" such as "cooperation as a group," "teamwork," and "working together," and that it dutifully showed characters "resolving conflicts within the group" while scrupulously putting "selfishness" and "bellyaching" in a "negative" light. Only



The group idea operates even in *Pac-Man*, where the spherical character works in a Pac-land bureaucracy, protecting the community from harm.



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when I hinted that my preferences lay elsewhere did she feel free to tell me how "browbeaten" by the codes the script-writers felt and how hard it was, under the rules, to establish "emotional contact with the child." The pro-social has become a despotic little orthodoxy.

Interestingly enough, you would never know this from reading the pro-social literature. When a leading critic assails Saturday-morning television in 1982 as an "animated world of meanness and mayhem," who would ever suspect that the networks had paid the pro-social any heed whatever?

This, too, struck me as a little strange, because it cuts off a question that would arise naturally in people's minds if they knew how thoroughly the pro-social forces have triumphed. The question is: How did a band of pedagogues, "ladies in Boston," and professors of human development manage to wield so much power? The question would open up interesting lines of inquiry. It would lead back from the pro-social critics to the real wielders of power who have promoted the pro-social cause. It would lead, as I discovered, to powerful federal officials such as the Federal Communications Commission member who, in 1968, invited parents to sue the networks if they thought television had harmed their children—an invitation to the most overwrought, irresponsible, and censorious parents to help the government bowdlerize children's TV. It would lead back to still more powerful political figures, such as Senator John Pastore of Rhode Island, a former chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee's powerful communications subcommittee. In 1972 Senator Pastore put the frightened networks on notice that he and his senatorial colleagues would no longer tolerate television's "endless repetition

## Alarmed by 1960s protests, leaders looked to TV to help model a more docile youth.

of the message that conflict may be resolved by aggression." It was behind Pastore's well-organized assault on televised aggression, begun in 1968, that the pro-social critics gathered their forces. His victory became their victory.

Interestingly enough, while Senator Pastore was forcing the networks to cut down on "aggression" for the sake of the children, he remained a diehard supporter of the Vietnam War. Here was a powerful public man who approved of B-52 bombers blowing women and children to bits while frowning on Bugs Bunny as an incitement to violence. Nor was Pastore the first bellicose senator to campaign against televised violence. His predecessor in this work was the infamous Thomas Dodd of Connecticut, who was as determined to rid television of "aggression" as he was to see America girded for war in every corner of the globe.

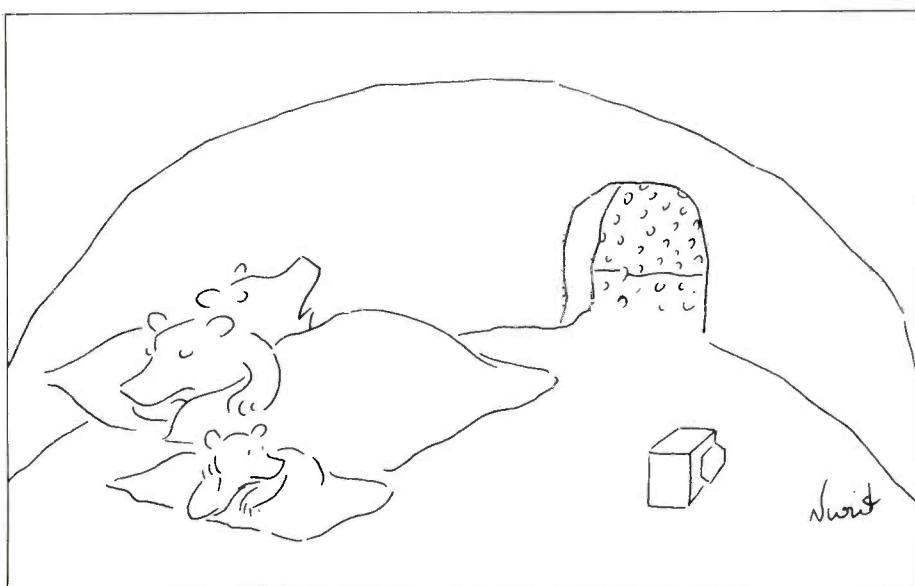
That those two senators should have worried so greatly about televised violence struck me, I confess, as a very odd coincidence. Pondering that coincidence brought dark suspicions to my mind. I

wondered whether the Dodds and the Pastores were really worried about televised "aggression" at all, or whether, perhaps, they harbored concerns of a very different kind. Their timing alone was worth considering. While these two war-minded worthies were fretting over fistfights on *Wagon Train*, a vast rebellion against official violence and official aggression was taking place in America, a vast protest in the cause of peace, a vast uprising against the war policies that the Dodds and the Pastores had so ardently supported for so many long years. For the first time in more than half a century, private citizens in America were demonstrating that they still had the inner strength to think for themselves, to judge for themselves, and to act for themselves. That demonstration profoundly shocked the established political leaders of the country, especially old-line machine politicians like Senator Pastore.

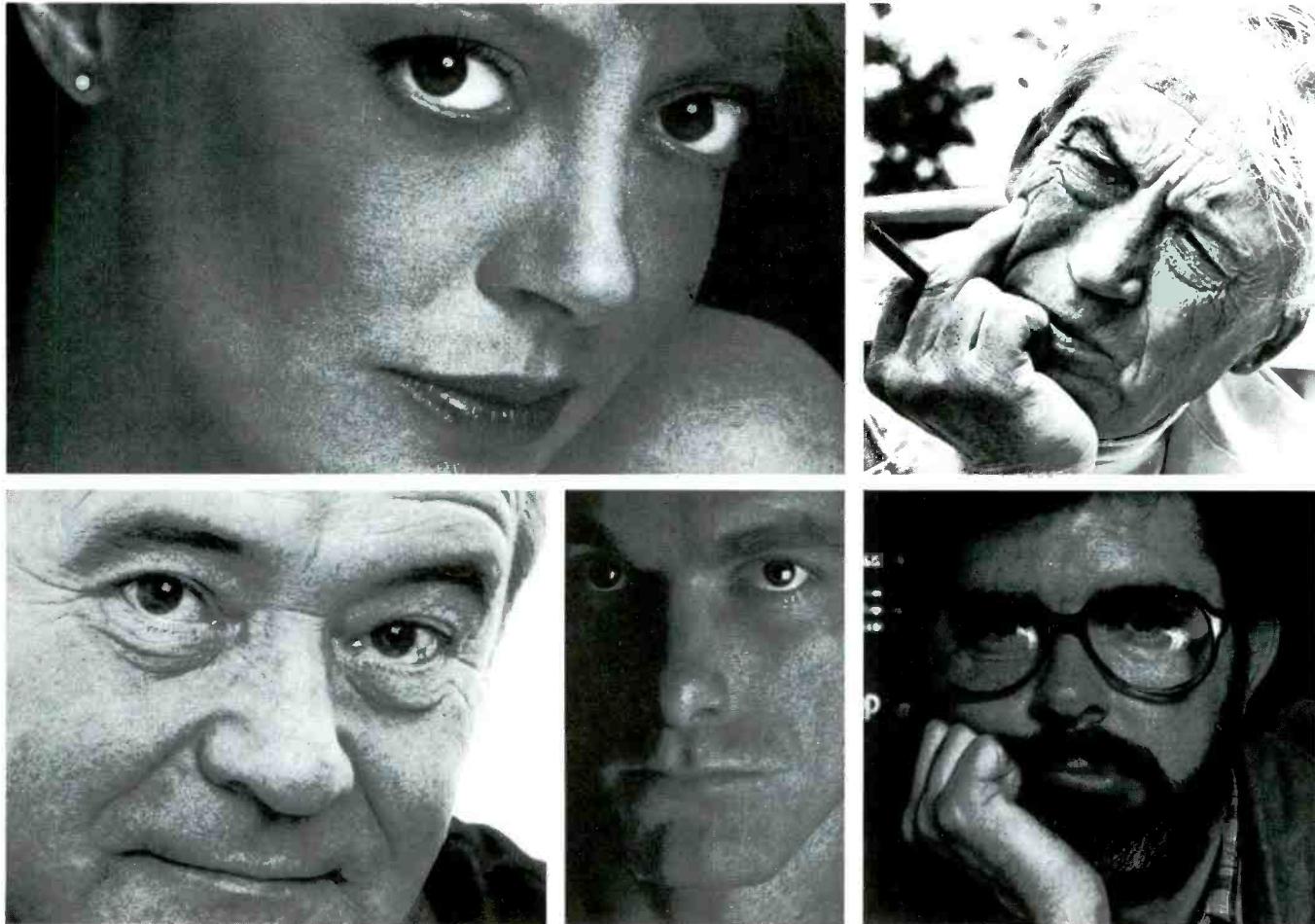
**E**NTRENCED IN POWER for 50 years, unchallenged by a people grown pliant and credulous, the nation's star-tled leaders suddenly found themselves facing a great democratic revolt against their power and prerogatives. It was plain enough what the nation's leaders needed to put their challenged power on a more secure and lasting basis. They needed a citizenry more prone to obedience and less prone to act for themselves than young Americans so surprisingly had turned out to be. It was clear, too, that the traditional anarchy of children's television, with its knockabout comedy, irreverent clowns, and headstrong heroes, had done nothing to aid and abet the nation's leaders. It seemed to me, therefore, that when Pastore struck his decisive blow for pro-social children's television, what he was really asking the networks to do was make a more positive contribution to the indoctrination of America's children, to play a more systematic role in modeling a more docile and subservient people.

Such was my suspicion, and it seems to me far from groundless, for this is precisely what pro-social television attempts to accomplish. It is systematic training for personal weakness and social subservience. It promotes conformity and saps inner strength. It teaches the children of a free people (whose ignorance thus menaces their liberty) to look to the group for their opinions and to despise those who do not do the same. Out of a pretended fear of "aggressiveness," it would deprive a free people of the very inner force and self-assurance they need to stand up and fight for their rights.

Is this not a little sinister? ■



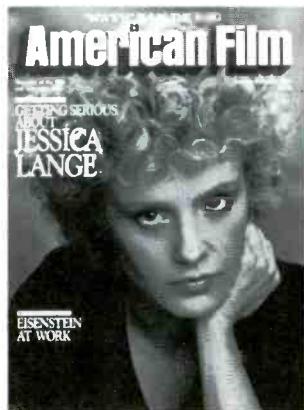
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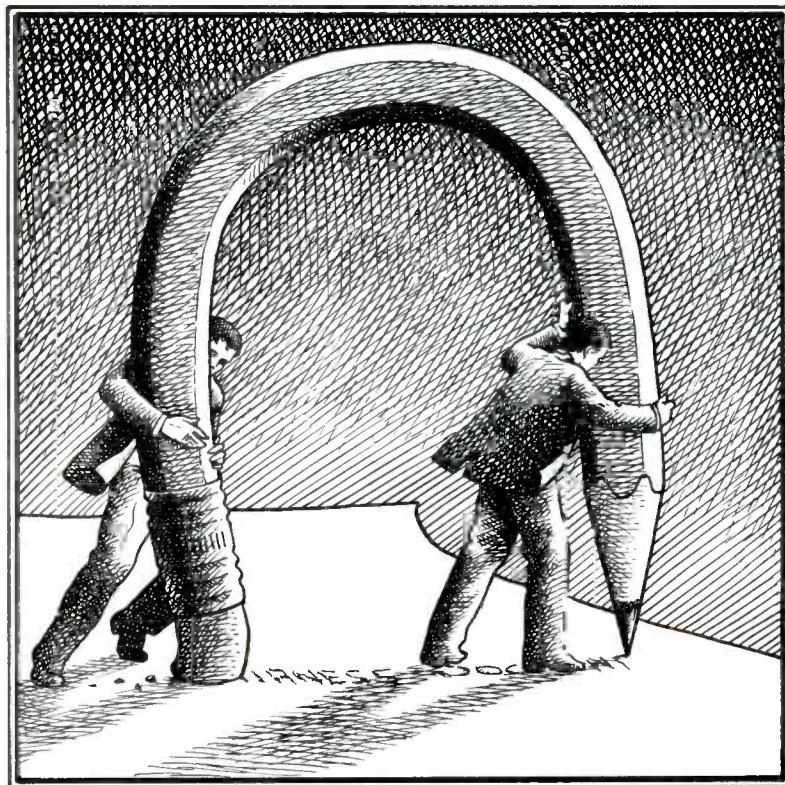
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# THE RELUCTANT DOCTRINE



**In the rule book, the Fairness Doctrine is down in black and white, but in practice it's fading away.**

by Stuart F. Sucherman

**A** FEW WEEKS AGO, a friend recounted a meeting of newspaper executives whose topic was their growing concern about the public's attitude toward the press. At one point during the meeting, a lawyer voiced the fear that something similar to broadcasting's Fairness Doctrine might one day be applied to the newspaper industry. My question to him was, "What Fairness Doctrine?"

Complaints still pile up at the Federal

Communications Commission (in 1981, the last year the FCC kept separate Fairness and Equal Time figures, there were almost 6,000 grievances). The procedural enforcement mechanisms are still in place, but the doctrine seems to have died a natural and unnoticed death. Since 1976 the commission has not penalized any station for a Fairness complaint, and there has been no major Fairness case since 1974. What happened?

There seem to be a number of opinions about that. Pro-Fairness Doctrine disciples argue that the very existence of the Fairness Doctrine keeps broadcasters by and large acting in a fair and responsible fashion.

Another, probably more plausible argument is that from the beginning the

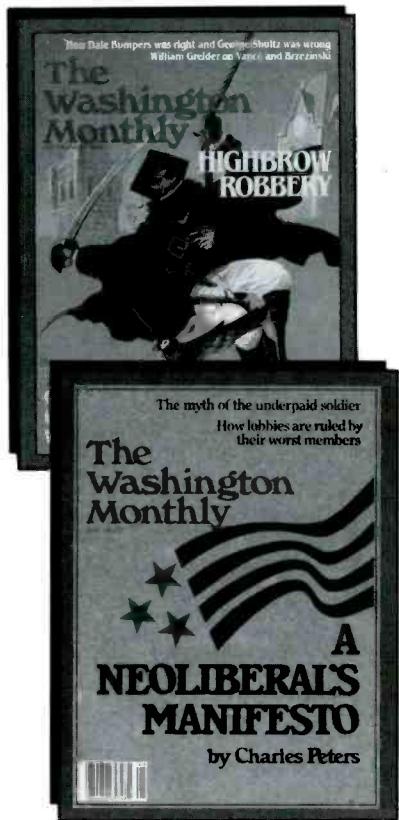
doctrine did not have any practical viability. Proponents of this theory maintain that we are merely witnessing the doctrine's death after a 35-year illness, caused by obscure reasoning and the complaining party's historically crushing procedural burdens.

In order to understand exactly what has died, one has to conjure up an overall picture of the beast. If this were a political cartoon, I would draw all of the FCC regulations on content as a huge lumbering dragon with many heads. On the right side of this dragon's body are the heads relating to politics and elections: Equal Time, reasonable access for political candidates, etc. On the beast's left side are the Fairness Doctrine heads: Basic Fairness, personal attack, and some smaller

*Stuart Sucherman is executive director of the Media and Society Seminars at Columbia University and executive producer of the PBS series, The Constitution: That Delicate Balance.*

*Jean Francois Allauz*

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ones, such as political editorializing, which are similar to the heads on the right side. The heads on the left side are atrophying, while the political parts seem to be prospering.

The head in the worst shape is the one relating to the Fairness Doctrine. That is, a broadcast licensee's obligation to devote a reasonable amount of its programming to the coverage of controversial issues of public importance, and to afford reasonable opportunity for the expression of opposing viewpoints. Often confused with the Equal Time Rule, which is concerned only with elections, this concept has been floating around the broadcast industry for decades. While reasonable on its face (who could be against broadcasters producing programs on controversial issues and being fair while doing it?), the doctrine cannot be enforced without raising the danger of government intrusion into the editorial process. As a result, almost as soon as the commission enunciated the doctrine, it began an elaborate semantic and procedural dance away from it.

Early on it was established that a licensee's fairness not be judged on the basis of a single program but by his overall programming on a particular issue or controversy. So a single program or series of programs could be totally biased toward a particular point of view, as long as somewhere in the schedule contrasting viewpoints were presented.

The commission's next series of dance steps away from the doctrine was to invent an elaborate, confusing, and totally inconsistent game of defining the words that make it up: What is the "issue" raised in a particular program? When is an issue "controversial" or of "public importance"? What is a "contrasting" or "conflicting" viewpoint? There are literally thousands of pages of decisions in FCC files that come to some peculiar conclusions. For instance, in its desire to avoid enforcement, the commission found that a program entitled *Hunger: A National Disgrace* did not "raise the issue" of whether hunger is a national disgrace; similarly, a discussion of fluoridation in a segment on dental care did not "raise the issue" of fluoridation.

In trying to cope with material that would make Alice's conversation at the Mad Hatter's tea party seem like lucid discourse, the commission then developed a standard relying heavily on a licensee's "reasonable judgment." If the licensee made a "reasonable judgment" on the thrust of an issue, choosing an appropriate spokesman and allowing an adequate amount of time for the opposition, the commission would in all likelihood

## As soon as it proclaimed the doctrine, the FCC began to waltz away from it.

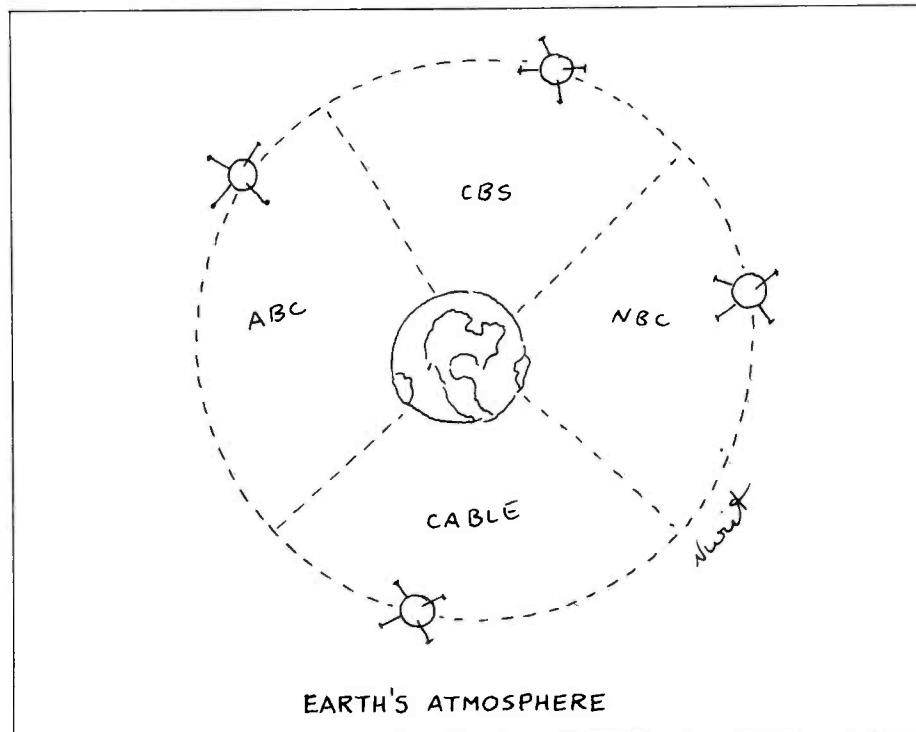
walk away from the controversy.

In 1974 NBC clashed with the FCC and Accuracy in Media (AIM) about a program entitled *Pensions: The Broken Promise*. In a fascinating, bewildering, often raucous series of hearings, federal court rulings, and *en banc* proceedings, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia came to the conclusion that a hard-hitting, aggressive, investigative documentary that won numerous awards and that may have been responsible for new legislation involving pension reform, did not deal with a "controversial issue of public importance." While the case was mercifully allowed to expire, in a form of legalistic euthanasia, it left a frustrating legacy for lawyers, regulators, and especially NBC, which had to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees for producing material far better than normal network fare.

The second and possibly more impor-

tant set of FCC decisions strangling the doctrine have been those placing extraordinary procedural burdens on persons or institutions bringing Fairness complaints. To begin with, the complainant must show that a station has not provided reasonable opportunities for contrasting viewpoints. Since the station has no obligation to show transcripts of all its programming, a person seeking to win a Fairness Doctrine complaint must monitor the station for months and months to support the claim that conflicting viewpoints have *not* been presented. The end result is that unless the complaining party is made up of crazed, monomaniacal insomniacs who have nothing better to do than watch the licensee's programs for months on end, chances of winning a traditional Fairness complaint are practically zero.

As indicated earlier, certain adjuncts of the Fairness Doctrine remain alive and well. The so-called Cullman Doctrine (under which broadcasters must give free time to counter paid political advertisements in the absence of any other presentation of conflicting viewpoints) remains strong, particularly regarding ballot propositions and referenda. But if you look closely, Cullman is fairly political. The rules applying more generally to the Fairness issue seem to have died, and nobody has noticed. It just may be that over the years the commission came to some form of communal subconscious recognition that it was just too dangerous to have lawyers, tribunals, regulators, and judges knee-deep in what, after all, are editorial judgments. ■



**They're portrayed night after night as billionaires, bombers, and belly dancers.**

# ARABS— TV's Villains of Choice

by Jack G. Shaheen

**T**URN TO ANY CHANNEL, to any show from *Alice* to *Hart to Hart*. Billionaires, bombers, and belly dancers are virtually the only TV images of Arabs that Americans ever see.

Our perceptions come from four myths about Arabs: They are fabulously wealthy; they are barbaric and uncultured; they are sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery, and they are prone to terrorist acts. Yet just a little surface probing reveals that these notions are as false as the assertions that blacks are lazy, Hispanics dirty, Jews greedy, and Italians all Mafia types.

Extensive interviews with television executives suggest that they permit Arab stereotypes because they have run out of other villains. Hollywood films preserve traditional stereotypes, and television follows Hollywood's lead.

Some might argue that television has stereotyped most ethnic groups, and not just Arabs. But through organized pressure, many of these images have been replaced: The popular comedy *Benson* features a black as the savvy, sophisticated aide to a governor. *Chico and the Man* featured a Hispanic in a leading role as a

tough, lovable Los Angeles Chicano. And Captain Frank Furillo of *Hill Street Blues* is the Italian-American Eliot Ness, just the right blend of law-and-order cop and compassionate civil servant. Arabs have not received the same second look as these groups.

Grotesque Arab images often appear in TV dramas. In one episode of *Charlie's Angels*, Arab terrorists attempt to murder an Arab delegation as well as scores of innocent Americans.

In *The Powers of Matthew Star*, "Mr. Moustafa" tries to purchase the services of kidnapped American geniuses.

In *Hart to Hart*, Arab dignitaries try to assassinate their king.

In *Small & Frye*, the detectives jeer: "You can tell the man's an Arab. He stole the bedsheets from the Aladdin Hotel."

In *Callahan*, an ABC pilot program, a mythical oil-rich Arab nation's symbol—a dagger—is stolen. If the dagger isn't found, the Arabs will "shut off" America's oil supply.

In a *Cagney & Lacey* episode, we see the policewomen dupe an arrogant, oil-rich Arab who has run over an American Jew with his Rolls Royce, which bears a license plate reading "OILBUX." The Arab has diplomatic immunity. He won't pay his victim's hospital bills. And he can't be arrested. An angry Cagney says: "You know what ticks me off, inspector? In this guy's country you steal a piece of

fruit off a cart and they cut your hand off. He comes over here and . . . nearly kills a man. And we can't even touch him."

On visiting the Arab's embassy, the women are served Arabic coffee and Lacey complains, "Ohhhh, how do they drink this stuff?" Cagney replies, "It's a ritual of politeness." The women laugh. Lacey then dumps her coffee into the nearest flower pot.

Eventually, the two outsmart the Arab, who agrees to pay the hospital bills and gives the officers a \$500 donation to a "worthy charity—the United Jewish Appeal."

What if the writer had switched the characters' identities? Would it be acceptable to telecast a program that shows a rich Jew running down an Arab?

Television comedy, too, has its share of anti-Arab barbs: Bob Hope, for example, in his 1982 *Pink Panther/Thanksgiving Special*, said, "Not everyone in Beverly Hills has a turkey. The Arabs sacrifice a goat."

When Mork prepares a Moroccan meal for Mindy in a *Mork and Mindy* episode, he insists they eat with their fingers. First they wash their hands in dishwashing liquid. "Feet next," chuckles Mork. Silverware is a no-no because "all the silverware in Morocco is used to break out of prisons." Mindy gags on the food. Mork sighs, "It's so hard to get fresh camel lips in Boulder."

*Jack G. Shaheen is professor of communications at Southern Illinois University. His book, The TV Arab, will be published this year by the Popular Press.*

In an episode of *Condo*, a sitcom designed to "throw some light on a few of our prejudices," James asks his Hispanic friend, Jesse, "Where do all the millionaires come from?" Replies Jesse, "Saudi Arabia. They come over here and buy up everything."

"The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, continued, and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic," said President John F. Kennedy. Here are a few of the myths that TV writers employ about Arabs:

- **Arabs are buying up America.** In reality, European nations and Canada account for 80 percent of foreign investment in the United States, according to U.S. government reports. Direct investment by OPEC countries amounts to less than one-half of 1 percent of all foreign investment. Arabs buy less than 1 percent of the American agricultural land sold annually.

- **Arabs are fabulously wealthy.** The average gross national product of per capita income in the Arab world, notes the U.S. Department of Commerce, is about \$1,000 a year, or one-eighth the per-capita gross national product of the United States. Those Arab countries in which the per-capita income reaches that of the United States—Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Libya, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia—represent no more than 8 percent of the total population of the Arab world.

- **OPEC's members are all Arab.** Only seven of the 13 member nations of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries are Arab. Of the five largest oil-producing nations, only one, Saudi Arabia, is Arab.

- **Iranians are Arabs.** Iranians are Persians. They are not Semites, as Arabs are. They are Aryans who moved into the Persian plateau in the 17th century B.C. They do not speak Arabic, but Farsi, an Indo-European tongue that shares several characteristics with Western European languages.

- **All Palestinians are terrorists.** The

## In one show, an Arab runs over a Jew with his Rolls Royce. But would it have played if it had been a rich Jew running over an Arab?

Palestinian population is made up of more than four million peace-loving people who, like the once-scattered Jews, believe they have a historical right to a homeland. Explains an Israeli official: "Since 1948, out of approximately



JACK G. SHAHEEN

Scriptwriters stereotyped an oil baron in an episode of *Alice*.

450,000 Israeli Arabs, only about 400 have joined 'terrorist' groups. The number of Palestinians holding university degrees is exceptionally high." And a 1982 issue of *Time* magazine reported, "Their industry and zeal for learning have earned them the sobriquet 'the Jews of the Arab world.'

"I think the Arab stereotype is attractive to a number of people," says James Baerg, director of program practices for ABC-TV. "It is an easy thing to do. It is the thing that is going to be most readily accepted by a large number of the audience. It is the same thing as throwing in violence when an episode is slow."

"I don't have any explanation for stereotyping other than that it's easy," says

Harve Bennett, producer of *The Bionic Woman* and *The Six Million Dollar Man*. "Let me put it to you this way. Do you know how to play charades? Television is one great charade. You don't go for the meat of the material. You do a pantomime of a guy in a burnoose. It's sign language. It saves the writer the ultimate discomfort of having to think."

He also notes that the television medium itself often forces the writer to give subjects and characters only cursory treatment. "Sometimes, unthinkingly and under deadline pressure in a medium that has no lead time, everyone tends to think in quick solutions."

Some television officials say it would help if more Arabs worked in television. "Sure, if Arabs were writing, producing, and directing a lot of shows, you'd see more Arabs," says Alan Rafkin, executive producer of the popular comedy *One Day at a Time*. "If we had an Arab working on *One Day*, he might say, 'Excuse me, Alan, we're not all rich. We don't all do the same things.'"

Scriptwriter Irving Pearlberg thinks Arabs should form a television-monitoring group similar to the ones other minorities have. "Any minority group that has achieved anything [in broadcasting] has done it through organized pressure," says Pearlberg. "The Jews, the blacks, the gays have, and the Chicanos a little."

But whom to pressure? "Go to the top, to the networks," advises Pearlberg, "because whatever pressure they exert goes downward and would affect everything. You should get to a point where a broadcast standards division of any network will say, 'No, we will not accept any reference to camel jockey. We will not accept anything that can be construed as anti-Arab.' If that can be done, I think the battle is half won."

As TV comedian Milton Berle said in 1951, "There is no room for prejudice in our profession." The distorted TV images of Arabs should be taking their place in video heaven alongside other stereotypes—the black domestic, the savage American Indian, the dirty Hispanic, and the Italian-American mobster. ■

## Producers admit the easy way out for a writer in search of a bad guy is simply to dress someone in a burnoose.

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Some of the most startling stories on television today are taken right from the pages of *Mother Jones*...yesterday.

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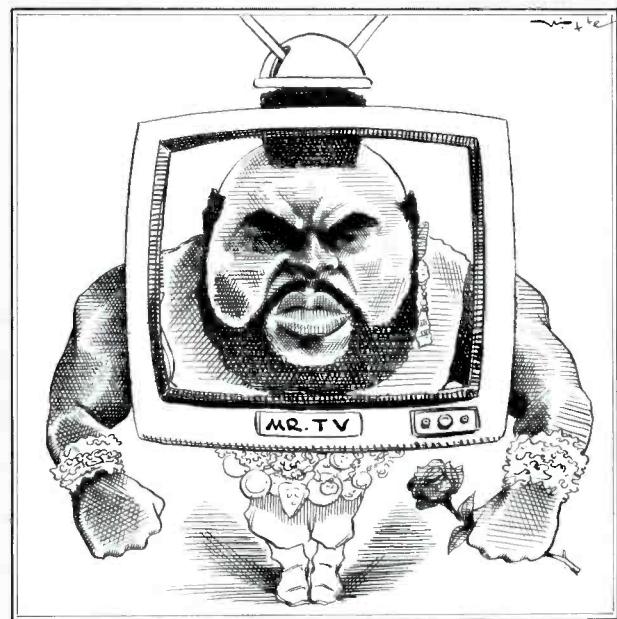
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# In Praise of the Dumbest Show of All

by William A. Henry III



**H**E MAY HAVE EXISTED only in the imagination of some journalist, but I've always longed to meet the college professor who was supposedly devoted to *The Beverly Hillbillies*. I do know a Harvard literature teacher who adored *Laverne & Shirley*, and a Massachusetts Institute of Technology faculty member who was enchanted by *The Rockford Files*. Miz Lillian Carter used to watch the wrestling matches. Novelist Dan Wakefield is just one of many acquaintances who have given themselves passionately to *All My Children*. My mother would cancel almost anything for *Barnaby Jones* reruns, and my wife gets up at 7 A.M. on Saturdays to watch the cartoons, even though we don't have children. Everybody, I guess, is entitled to a television vice: Mine is for what may be the dumbest, most exploitative, and most violent show on the medium, *The A Team*.

What is there to like? I could mention genial good humor, self-deprecating one-liners, an ingratiating mix of characters. I could josh about the camp appeal of deadpan dialogue and once-over-lightly adventure plots. (Who could resist the cultural mélange and devil-may-care daffiness of an episode about Chinese-American Tong wars that starts out in Athens and is called "The Maltese Cow"?) I could opine about sociological implications. Each week the plot is a rescue fantasy, rather like what is peddled on *60 Minutes*: a quartet of tough guys standing ready on behalf of the public to oppose wrongdoers of every description. (The members of *The A Team* are military commandos, wrongfully accused of a crime, who escaped from prison and set up shop as a rather philanthropic private army.) The show also has its place in the family tree of popular culture: It is an unmistakable bastard of forebears ranging from an incoherent kung-fu movie called *Force Five* to *Mission Impossible*, and is even related, in its vigilantism, to *The Lone Ranger*. But when I watch *The A Team*, I do not think like a critic. I watch for pleasure—above all, for the satisfaction of seeing cheerfully administered violence.

Few if any of my life's problems could be solved with a gun, and the same is true of the lives of most people I know. Thus I do not fear that my soul, or almost anyone else's, is likely to be

corrupted by seeing violent acts performed. Beatings, bludgeonings, and bombings have almost no relevance to the workaday me. But I have always responded to violence on-screen. I derive great comfort from the fantasy that there are simple, straightforward solutions to life's complexities. There are really only two schools of thought about cinematic violence: Watching it either keys you up dangerously, or else it mercifully helps you let off

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**Off-duty as a critic, I  
watch *The A Team* for the  
satisfaction of cheerfully  
administered violence.**

---

steam. Belief in either tenet requires, in the end, a religious leap of faith. Neither side, therefore, would be likely to win a debate based on logic, as all the contradictory research bears out.

To be sure, there is more than violence to *The A Team*. Or perhaps one ought to say that there is less than violence. Part of the charm of the show (and much of its insidiousness, according to critics) is that in a typical episode, hundreds of bullets are fired, dozens of cars wrecked, squadrons of enemies flattened by the team's four invincible misfits. Yet there is no death, no injury, virtually no blood. Hardly anyone is ever so much as scratched. Cynics say that this is NBC's way of getting around its own regulations, and complain that the show teaches children that violence can unfold without brutal consequences. I doubt whether even the smallest child takes this show any more seriously than he does his comic books, which *The A Team* resembles. Most likely, the show appeals to children, as it does to me, as a "gang comedy," a genial and funny little treatise about teamwork. The violent outbursts are almost a poetic afterthought—they are what the team does well, just as football is

William A. Henry III is an associate editor of Time magazine.

Michael White

# P R I V A T E E Y E

what the Raiders do well.

It is axiomatic that, for a show to succeed these days in Hollywood, it must have a "breakout character"—a figure who strikes the public fancy and thus becomes a star even beyond the context of his original vehicle. By now it is hard to imagine that there is anyone in America who has not at least heard of *The A Team's* breakout personality, Mr. T, the bejeweled behemoth with the Mohawk haircut who is the show's least articulate and (perhaps not coincidentally) its most beloved character. Mr. T first came to public attention in *Rocky III* as the embodiment of an urban nightmare: Black as night and big as Mt. Rushmore, bizarre in appearance and hulking in manner, he carried enough muscle to terrify the character played by Sylvester Stallone.

For television, NBC preserved Mr. T's almost monstrous image but turned the character (officially named B.A. Baracas) into a sort of huggable help-meet. The TV version of Mr. T is afraid of flying in an airplane or helicopter, and says so. He mutters almost ceaseless threats, especially to his colleagues, but the words turn out to be just a perverse sort of affection—he hardly ever clobbers anyone. Off-camera, Mr. T is a Bible-quoting eccentric who views himself in messianic terms but who has an almost divine instinct for public relations. At Christmas, he donned a Santa suit and lured Nancy Reagan, bangles and all, onto his lap. A friend of mine who spent some days on location with *The A Team* said that Mr. T. is known as "One-Take." He is never directed, because he is undirectable. He never rehearses, because he is not an actor. He is never asked to change anything, because he would find it both unbearable and impossible. And he rarely shoots more than one take of each scene, because he has exactly one way of reading each line.

Mr. T is used carefully. He records seemingly all of the promotional spots for the show—although the cast includes veteran pretty-boy Dirk Benedict as a non-macho character aptly named Face, George Peppard as the group's canny leader, and a gifted mock-lunatic named Dwight Schultz as the team's be-bopping oddball, a psychic chameleon who changes personality and accent almost minute by minute and frequently talks to himself.

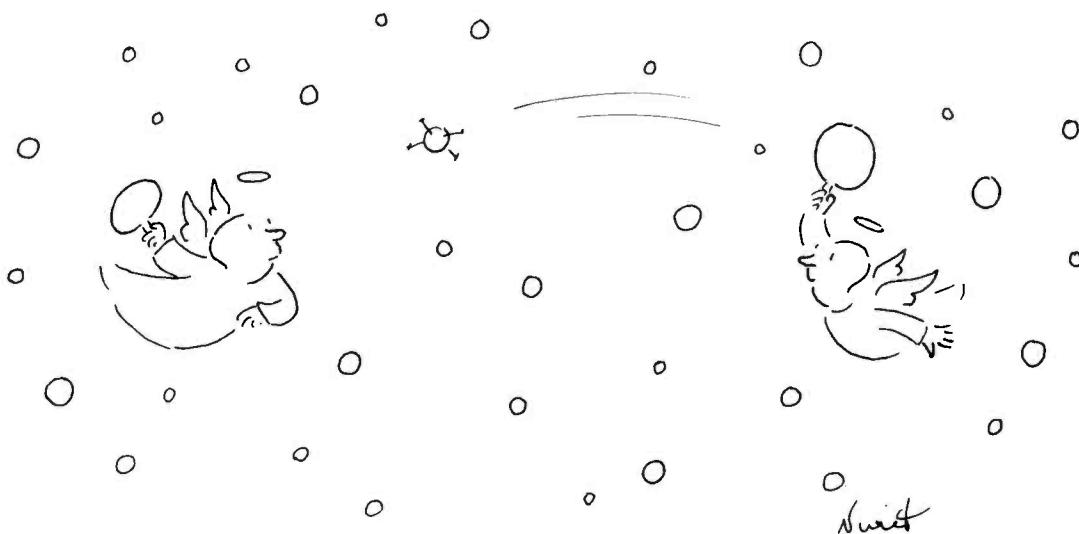
On the show itself, however, Mr. T mostly stands around, making few and short speeches. He could too easily be overexposed.

In any case, sometime in the next year or two, Mr. T, like the Fonz and Mork and all the other youth heroes of the recent past, will almost certainly be jilted by that most fickle of publics, young kids. Childhood is not a continuum but a whole sequence

**Mr. T is known as "One-Take."**  
**He never reshoots a scene**  
**because he has exactly**  
**one way of reading a line.**

of generations. Part of growing up is having heroes; part of differentiating oneself from younger and older kids is dropping old favorites and finding new ones, which takes place at the same fast pace that children grow up. When the current crop of devoted kids turn away from Mr. T, NBC may be quick to drop the show that featured him. That will leave me bereft. There will be other violent and undemanding shows, other simple-minded morality plays, other cotton candy for the eyes. But none, I suspect, will be quite so beguilingly light-hearted, quite so ingratiatingly devoid of standards and self-respect, as *The A Team*. I can only hope that when I have to go shopping again for a slam-bang giggle, CBS and its less volatile audience of teenagers will have kept afloat my other old favorite, *The Dukes of Hazzard*. It, too, offers crashes but no damage.

But I am not quite ready to watch the grand-daddy of violence-without-violence shows: I cannot abide the wrestling, not even to honor Miz Lillian. ■





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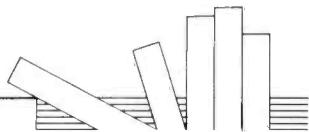
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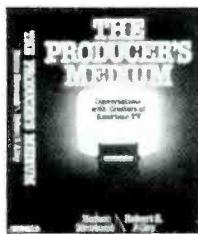
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## The Auteurs of Prime Time



**The Producer's Medium:**  
**Conversations with Creators of American TV**  
by Horace Newcomb and Robert S. Alley  
Oxford University Press, \$17.95

**B**UBBLE GUM for the eyes. The vast wasteland. The boob tube. Television has been called a lot of things but rarely has anyone had the courage to call it art. For Horace Newcomb and Robert Alley, both university humanities professors, commercial television constitutes a body of fictional stories ripe for literary analysis. In *The Producer's Medium* they are concerned with how fiction is made and how the individuals who make it view themselves and the creative process.

To this end, the authors have interviewed many of television's major producers: Norman Lear, Quinn Martin, Garry Marshall, David Victor, John Mantley, Richard Levinson and William Link, Earl Hamner, Grant Tinker, James Brooks, and Allan Burns. The introductory chapter and its analysis of American TV fiction may seem a bit stodgy to non-academic readers, and the authors occasionally rehash their interviews too much in the chapter prefaces. But the interviews themselves bring the book very much to life.

Each of the producers is an "auteur," an artist in a collaborative medium, whose vision

is fulfilled in the way his stories are told. How does a producer put his mark on a show? "I would try to pick a camera style and a photographic style and have it be something recognizable," says Quinn Martin (*The FBI*, *The Fugitive*, *Twelve O'Clock High*), "so that you viscerally know what show it is just by seeing it and feeling it."

And curiously, many of the producers' best-known creations befit the personalities that emerge in the interviews. Martin is somewhat detached but confident and decisive, not unlike *The FBI*'s Inspector Erskine or *The Fugitive*'s Dr. Richard Kimball. David Victor is warm and avuncular, as are his creations Marcus Welby and Owen Marshall.

"The producer is usually the

center of the creative process," says Norman Lear. "It is he or she who sees the project through all of its stages from inception to broadcast." Adds John Mantley (*Gunsmoke*), "The fact that a one-hour show must be shot every six days does not allow much time for a democratic society!"

Martin notes that the savvy producer must be sensitive to changes in the audience: "As commercials got people used to absorbing information more quickly, I had to change my style to give them more jump cuts or they'd be bored...the whole art form has speeded up."

Richard Levinson and William Link describe how, on *Columbo*, hours were spent figuring out how to move a character upstairs so that the audience wouldn't catch on, and so all the pieces of the puzzle would fit together—"to make it seamless."

The book confirms things some of us may have suspected. According to Martin, for instance, Fred Silverman didn't quite live up to his "golden gut" reputation. "[Silverman] tried to force me

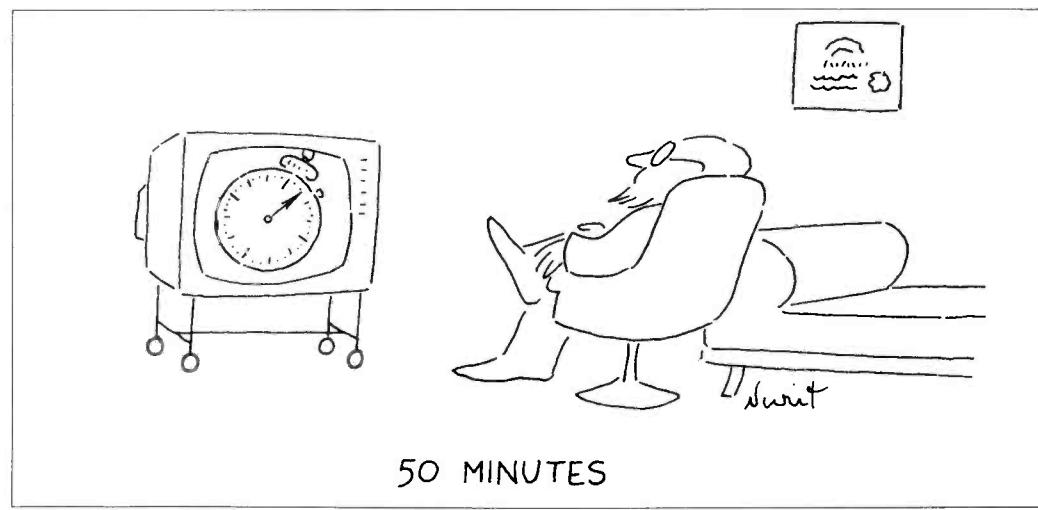
to make the fifth year of *Streets of San Francisco* more violent. He thought the characters talked too much." As for Tom Selleck, Silverman told Martin, "He stinks. Get rid of him."

The problem of wresting creative control away from the dullards at the networks is faced by every producer. Mantley waxes nostalgic for the days when the only interference came from the sponsor's advertising agency. (Back then Chevrolet sponsored *Bonanza*, and a script could not have characters "ford" a river. "On *Gunsmoke* we always 'forde' rivers," says Mantley, "on *Bonanza* they only crossed them!")

For those in the industry and for serious students of the medium, for budding TV writers, actors, directors, and producers, *The Producer's Medium* is required reading. One comes away with a deeper appreciation of commercial television, and the mechanism of TV production is revealed in a more palpable way than any textbook on TV production is likely to match.

ROBERT W. KUBEY

Robert Kubey conducts behavioral research on television's effects.





## FUTURE WORK: Where in the Rewired World Will Americans Find Jobs?

Martin Agronsky moderates this new segment of the provocative, critically-acclaimed series, "Rewiring Your World," which can be previewed by you for broadcast during the Orwellian year of 1984.

FUTURE WORK goes behind the grim headlines . . . "Robots Make Robots" . . . "Computers Eliminate Jobs" . . . to ask some of the most vital questions of the decade. How can we survive as a nation in a world that is bewildering in its breakneck rate of change? Who is working to meet the tremendous challenge to train America's workers for future work in the Information Age if we are not to become obsolete?

FUTURE WORK is the latest edition of "Rewiring Your World," a public affairs series sponsored by the Communications Workers of America (CWA) to focus attention on issues emerging in this nation's leap from the Industrial Age to the Information Age.

Panelists include Eleanor Holmes Norton, head of the National Council on the Future of Women in the Workplace; Dr. John Gibbons, Director of Congress' Office of Technology Assessment; Bill Wiggenhorn, director of the Motorola Corporation's Training and Education Center; Edward Cornish, president of the World Future Society, and Glenn E. Watts, president of the 650,000-member Communications Workers of America.

This half-hour program is now available for television broadcast. Program directors should contact Thea Marshall, executive producer, at 1511 K Street, N.W., Suite 207, Washington, DC 20005. (202) 737-5840.

### KTTL

(Continued from page 15)

unprotected 'speech' [access to] the limited resource of the airways is to deprive the 'public-interest' standard of all meaning," ADL legal affairs director Jeffrey P. Sinensky wrote in a letter to the FCC last year.

Even in a case as troubling as KTTL's, comparative renewal is an extraordinarily difficult procedure. Only once in 50 years has a radio license been denied solely on grounds of comparison. And no television licensee has ever lost a license in a comparative challenge.

It remains to be seen whether the sensational case of KTTL will have any effect on broadcasting, or a Congress and an FCC seemingly eager to eliminate the high costs of comparative hearings. Minow thinks the process has not been working well, and proposes that would-be challengers be required to make a "prior showing" that the license holder has violated FCC rules or otherwise performed inadequately.

For now, the KTTL license remains in the Babbs's hands—evidence to some observers of the First Amendment's strength. To others, however, the case now proves how intractable the regulatory apparatus has become. ■

## INTERNSHIP PROGRAM AT CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATIONS

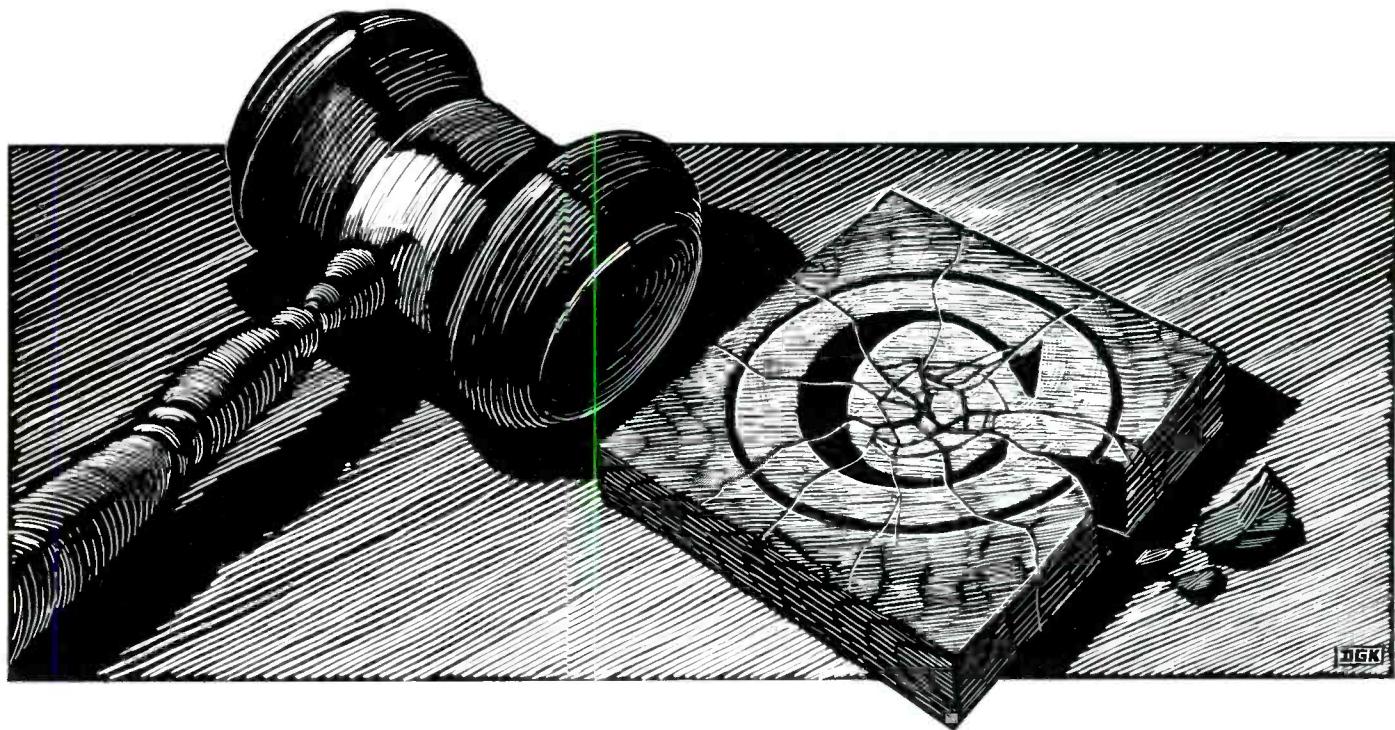
Applications are being accepted for the Internship Program at *Channels of Communications* for summer, 1984. Interns work with the editors and art directors in research, fact-checking, and promotional work. The position is unpaid, but interns will be paid for any articles they may write that the magazine accepts for publication. Editors will assist student-interns in arranging for academic credit. Both part-time and full-time positions are available.

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# Who Gets Hurt by Home Taping?

by Sanford Wolff



**T**HE RECENT Supreme Court decision on home taping lays a large responsibility at Congress's door. Many thousands of workers, pressmen, technicians, performers, and others who produce records and motion pictures will lose their jobs—merely because some people think they can have something for nothing. This should not be allowed to happen.

Unabated home taping inevitably results in diminished sales of original copyrighted material. In the absence of a copyright fee, the prices of copyrighted materials must be increased to counteract the diminished sales. This in turn increases the economic incentive to tape programs and music at home. The vicious cycle will continue until Congress enacts a copyright fee.

When our Constitution was drafted, it specifically authorized Congress to adopt copyright laws encouraging people to compose and write. It was recognized

## The lost sales have already cost thousands of workers their jobs.

that no one would make the effort to do so if there was no protection against someone else making an unauthorized copy of the work to sell or give away.

As was hoped, the law protected authors. And although the copyright law has been revised from time to time, its essential principle has not changed. Even the advent of new technologies—the phonograph, radio, and television—has not altered the fact that an author is entitled to compensation if someone uses his or her product. But the home tape recorder may change all that.

It used to be that we had to buy a record in order to enjoy our favorite singer in the privacy of our homes. The copyright holder, of course, received a portion of the purchase price. When we went to the

movies we paid for admission, and a portion of our payment made its way back to the copyright owners. But now people can buy blank tapes and make copies of records, audio tapes, or video tapes bought by others; copies can also be made off the air. Copyright owners receive nothing from the people making these copies.

Across the country, stores are opening that will *rent* a record and usually also sell a blank tape. Customers pay less than a dollar to copy the record and return it. The store owner makes his profit from the rental fees and from the thousands of blank tapes he sells. But the people who made the record get paid only for the sale of that one album to the store. Video rentals are following this same pattern.

The record-rental stores have clearly turned our system on its ear. None of us would accept that kind of practice in any other business. If you owned a hotel, would you allow your guests to profit from subletting their rooms to others? In 1980 alone, an estimated 455 million record albums were copied on home tape recorders—a volume with a market value of \$2.85 billion. Of course, if buying were

*Sanford Wolff is executive secretary of The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists.*

David G. Klein

the only means of getting the records, it is unlikely that people would *buy* as many records as they had taped. But even so, experts estimate that taping costs the recording industry at least \$1 billion in sales each year.

A recent survey in Japan found that 97.4 percent of all record-rental outlet customers said they taped the records they rented. Record-store sales, correspondingly, fell by 30 percent. And for the first time in 25 years, overall Japanese record sales dropped—by a substantial 15 percent. As video-cassette recorders proliferate, a similar impact is being felt in this country by video producers and distributors.

The overwhelming majority of composers, screenwriters, performers, and others who earn their living in the production of sound recordings and motion pictures endure numerous failures for

every success. On the average, male performers in the arts earn between \$6,000 and \$10,000 less annually than other professionals; females earn from \$1,000 to \$5,000 less than their professional counterparts. Performing artists are also much more likely to experience unemployment than other workers.

The home tape-recording problem, however, affects many other people as well. The audio and video product cannot be distributed without the assistance of recording and lab technicians, camera operators, carpenters, truck drivers, editors, public-relations executives, retail distributors, and many others who perform the great variety of tasks involved in producing and selling programs. Over the past years, numerous record-industry plants, factories, warehouses, and other facilities have closed. Thousands of workers have already lost their jobs, and

most of this can be attributed to the loss of sales caused by home taping.

The taping is not an unmixed blessing for consumers, either. Those who continue to buy records will, in effect, have to absorb some of the loss created by those who get their music free. Similarly, the price of movie admissions and prerecorded video cassettes will go up because those who pay for such products will be supporting the freeloaders.

Home tape recorders are important innovations that can serve many useful functions. But if they are used in a manner that denies rightful compensation to performers, technicians, writers, composers, and others who create the program material being copied, talented people will abandon the field, quality will decline, the price for original programming will increase—the recorder's many benefits will in effect be canceled out.

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*Times* ★ Andrew Pollack, Electronic Sciences Correspondent, *The New York Times* ★ Gary Schober, Vice President, WCI Laboratories ★ George Stoney, Professor of Communications, New York University ★ Suzanne Weil, Senior Vice President for Programming, PBS ★ Thomas Wheeler, President, National Cable Television Association ★ John Wicklein, Journalist, Author of *The Electronic Nightmare* ★

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# How Television Weakens the Presidency

by David R. Gergen



## —It Begins with the Election Campaigns

**I**THINK THOSE OF US who have been involved in this country's political process in the last 15 years have become increasingly concerned about the impact of modern television on our governing institutions. I would argue that commercial television has made it increasingly difficult to govern. It is no accident that with the rise of television we've had a decline in the authority and the respect in which

our Presidency is held. Modern television has had the tendency to inflate expectations about our presidents. Too often, in their first year, we discover they have feet of clay.

There is no doubt that a relationship exists between the rise of television and the weakening of the Presidency. Similarly, there is no doubt that the way the networks cover Congress has contributed to the decline in respect suffered by that institution.

This was well illustrated one day back in 1976 or '77. The Supreme Court ordered Congress to reorganize the Federal Election Commission within 30 days, and David Brinkley said on the air that Congress couldn't make a cup of instant coffee in 30 days. That kind of attitude has been a factor in what we've seen as the

*David R. Gergen, former assistant to the President for communications, is now a fellow at the Harvard Institute of Politics and a visiting fellow in communications at the American Enterprise Institute. This article was adapted from a speech delivered last November at the PBS Program Fair.*

steady decline of trust in Congress.

Similar things are happening in the coverage of our Presidential election campaigns. Of course, television isn't the only culprit. Many different factors have made our campaigns less productive and less constructive than they were 20 to 30 years ago. The campaigns, for one thing, are far too long and monotonous. They tend to bore people. The candidates engage in too much inflated rhetoric. There are all sorts of factors that have made the public less interested, but commercial television nevertheless has played a large role in spawning that disaffection.

Some very good books on this subject are emerging. Tom Patterson, a professor who has written several books on television, studied the 1976 campaign and found that in commercial television about 58 percent of the coverage was devoted to the game: the strategies, the hoopla, the horse race, who's ahead, who's behind, the latest polls, the hidden motives of the campaign strategists. There was only about 29 percent on substance—on the issues, what's at stake for the country, what we are looking for in the next four years.

Contrast those findings with the studies of campaigns before television. One of the best was made on the 1948 election. Two very well-known political scientists found that, in that year, a lot more than half the coverage in the newspapers and magazines was on substance, and less than a third was on the horse race and the hoopla.

I would also argue that commercial television's coverage of the candidates tends to be negative. Michael Robinson, who teaches at Catholic University, looked at the coverage the networks gave the 1980 Presidential campaign, especially CBS, and he found that there were three times as many negative stories about the candidates as positive ones.

The University of Michigan has been looking at this kind of question pretty closely for the last 30 years and finds that the public's impressions of the candidates have been changing. The number of people who think positively about the candidates has gone steadily downward since 1952, the advent of television. The negative impressions have gone steadily upward. The study found that in 1980, for the first time, more people thought negatively about the candidates than positively. That's the kind of burden the campaign winners carry into the Presidency.

I attended a 1981 symposium at Harvard's Institute of Politics, where people from the networks came together with campaign managers and others to talk about the way elections are covered. The

David G. Klein

meeting was almost confessional in nature.

Roger Mudd, who sat out the 1980 campaign because he was between jobs, watched the coverage on commercial television. He commented at this symposium that he felt very dissatisfied, not very proud, and not very well informed. Indeed, he and Tom Brokaw talked about the problem of so-called "closers" on political clips in the news. A closer, a two-line ending on a news spot, gives it a sort of personal signature. Both Brokaw and Mudd said they feel a compulsion to make gibes about candidates in their closers because they don't want anyone to think they've been taken in by the campaign.

One of the most damning indictments of the way campaigns are covered today came from Tom Patterson's look at the 1976 campaign. He asked a big sample of voters how much they really knew about the candidates and where they stood on the issues. About 30 percent of the people in that sample knew where the candidates stood. He compared that to the 1948 election, which was covered solely in print. More people—37 percent—knew where the candidates stood.

Furthermore, television—combined with a number of other factors—has contributed to a 10 percent decline in voter turnout since 1960. During that same period, we have seen an incredible increase in cynicism towards government and those who govern.

The University of Michigan takes a poll

## In a 1958 poll, 58 percent of us trusted the govern- ment. By 1978, only 19 percent did.

every year about trust in government. In 1958, 58 percent trusted government, and 11 percent were cynical. In 1978, the number who trusted government was at 19 percent and the number who were cynical was up to 52 percent. Of course, the behavior of those in government over that 20-year period has had a lot to do with this shift. You cannot ignore Vietnam, Watergate, and the economic turmoil of the 1970s. But I also argue that television had something to do with it.

In fairness, one has to say that the networks understand these problems and are trying to do what they can to deal with them. For instance, this year they are paying less attention to straw polls as the 1984 election approaches. We should give them credit for being responsive—and responsible.

But let us recognize that in 1984, public television has a golden opportunity to im-

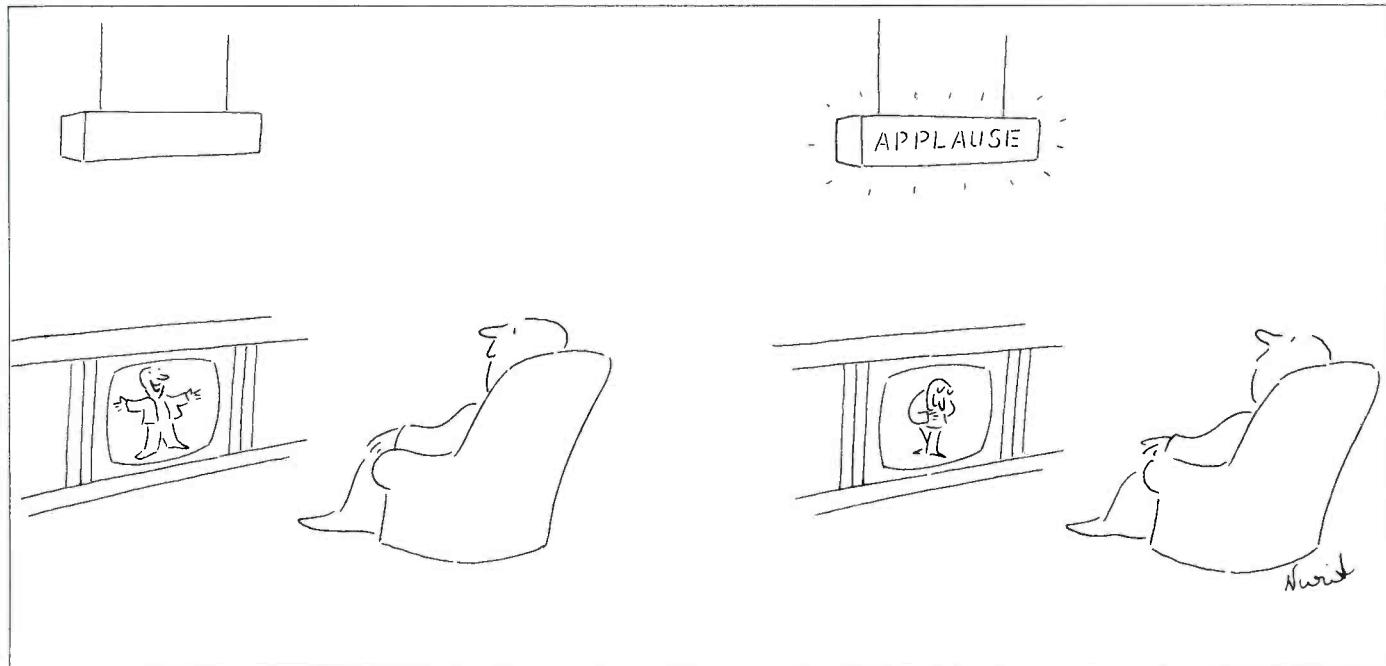
prove on the commercial networks' coverage.

Now that the MacNeil/Lehrer program has become an hour long, it can overcome some of the problems intrinsic to commercial television and offer a true alternative. It can do a fuller job of presenting the candidates' views, so people can really hear their messages. This could produce a different and more serious dialogue in the country, which would be healthy for everybody.

Public television's second opportunity in 1984 is at the convention. There's no doubt that CBS, ABC, and NBC are moving away from gavel-to-gavel coverage. They argue that full convention coverage represents a \$10 million investment by each network in an event with a shrinking audience.

The conventions are a form of political expression that deserves to have a national airing. Some people in this country are very deeply concerned about the state of our parties, and the conventions provide the major opportunity for party members to speak out, tell what they think, and then let the public make intelligent, informed choices. If the commercial networks are not going to air the conventions gavel-to-gavel, then public television has a very important role to fill.

In this particular Presidential year, public television has the opportunity to bring things better into view, to bring us not only a better-informed public, but a better-governed republic. ■





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# Badger Watch

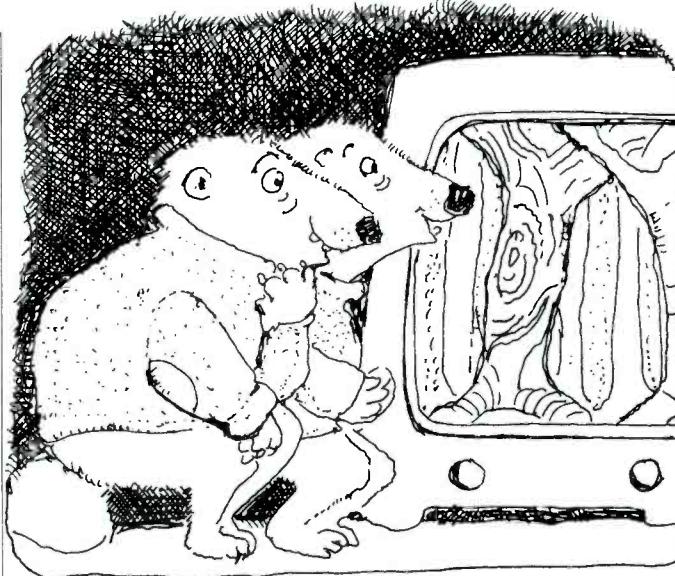
**Y**OU PASS THEM ON the street, you brush shoulders in elevators, you catch their eyes, and you know. They were watchers of *Badger Watch*. Nobody has to speak of it, even to this day; it's not necessary. If you meet in other worlds, fleecy or fiery, the bond will remain.

*Badger Watch* is unquestionably the greatest cult series ever produced for television anywhere. It was produced by the BBC, circa 1977, not on tape, not on film. Live. The format was deceptively simple. You watched badgers. Or not. Depending on the whims of the badgers. For these were not professional animals with hairy stage mothers. These were the unpaid amateurs, ordinary badgers in the wild.

The show opens with a panoramic shot of a van parked in a forest somewhere in England. Two young men sit in the van wearing terrific sweaters. They are both named Brian. There is much state-of-the-art equipment in the van. The sweaters are certainly state-of-the-art. The program is decidedly art-of-the-state.

We learn straight off that Brian and Brian are there to watch for badgers, to show these badgers to us, and to comment on their lifestyles. Theirs or the badgers'. Suddenly infrared light illuminates a patch of forest. The main action is the Brians sitting, watching. "That's a fabulous sweater you've got on," says Brian. "Thanks very much,"

*Harvey Jacobs's latest novel is The Juror, published by Franklin Watts Inc.*



by Harvey Jacobs

says Brian, "yours is smashing too." "Ta," says Brian. "I think we should point out to the audience that the reason the forest seems an eerie silver-white is that we are using infrared. Actually the grass and leaves are green." "Yes," says Brian. "We are. It is. They are. Indeed."

Nothing moves in the forest. "I do hope a badger appears," says Brian. "It would be such a treat for the millions."

"What I would like to see is badgers setting scent on one another. Wouldn't that be wonderful?" says Brian.

"I don't know," says Brian, blushing.

"Oh, really, do stop that," says Brian.

The first program in the series ended with no badger in view. It ran only an hour, but to many it seemed a lifetime. The second episode went much like the first until the final minute or two when a

snowy owlet appeared, toddled along a branch, and fell to the ground. "I wouldn't give a shilling for its chances," said Brian. "Nor I," said Brian, "for this will bring out a hungry badger." And even as he spoke, a hungry badger appeared, sniffing toward the baby owl. "Trouble," said Brian. "Trouble for the owl." "Undoubtedly," said Brian. "Well, we've got to sign off now. Until tomorrow then."

All England was on edge the entire next day. A child owl in jeopardy. A genuine badger on view, hungry. The badger watch had borne triumphant fruit, but perhaps tragically. What had been the owlet's fate? And was the badger stricken with stage fright? London's streets were deserted the third night of *Badger Watch*. Everyone, simply everyone, tuned in.

"You're wearing your shetland," said Brian. "And that's

a Pringle, if I'm not mistaken," said Brian. No word of the owlet; no new badgers.

And so this lovely nature series became the center of controversy. The BBC was swamped with letters and phone calls.

It disposed of the owlet controversy by announcing to the press that the little creature had found a hole in a tree trunk just in the knick of time. But the problem—an absence of badgers on *Badger Watch*—remained. There was always video tape, but the press gave warning that the public would brook no editorial additives. It had to be the real thing or nothing. And so it was the real thing: nothing.

"It's difficult to anticipate the appearance of badgers," said Brian, in winding up the final episode.

"Like your fisherman's knit," said Brian.

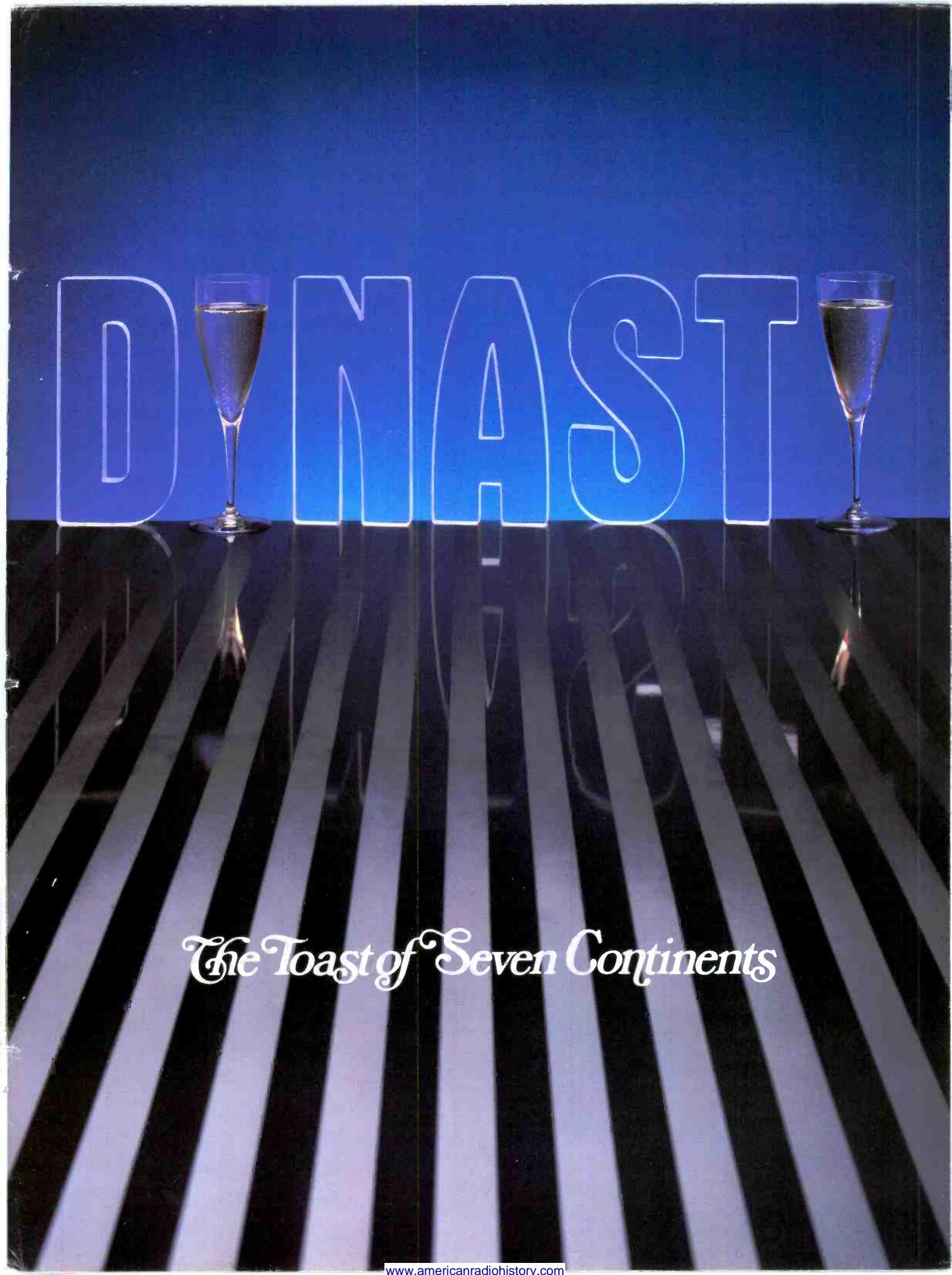
"Thought you would," said Brian.

There were only four episodes of *Badger Watch*. And only eight sweaters. It was mesmerizing and, like any great show, left you wanting more. Someone thought of exporting the format to the States, but for some reason there were no takers.

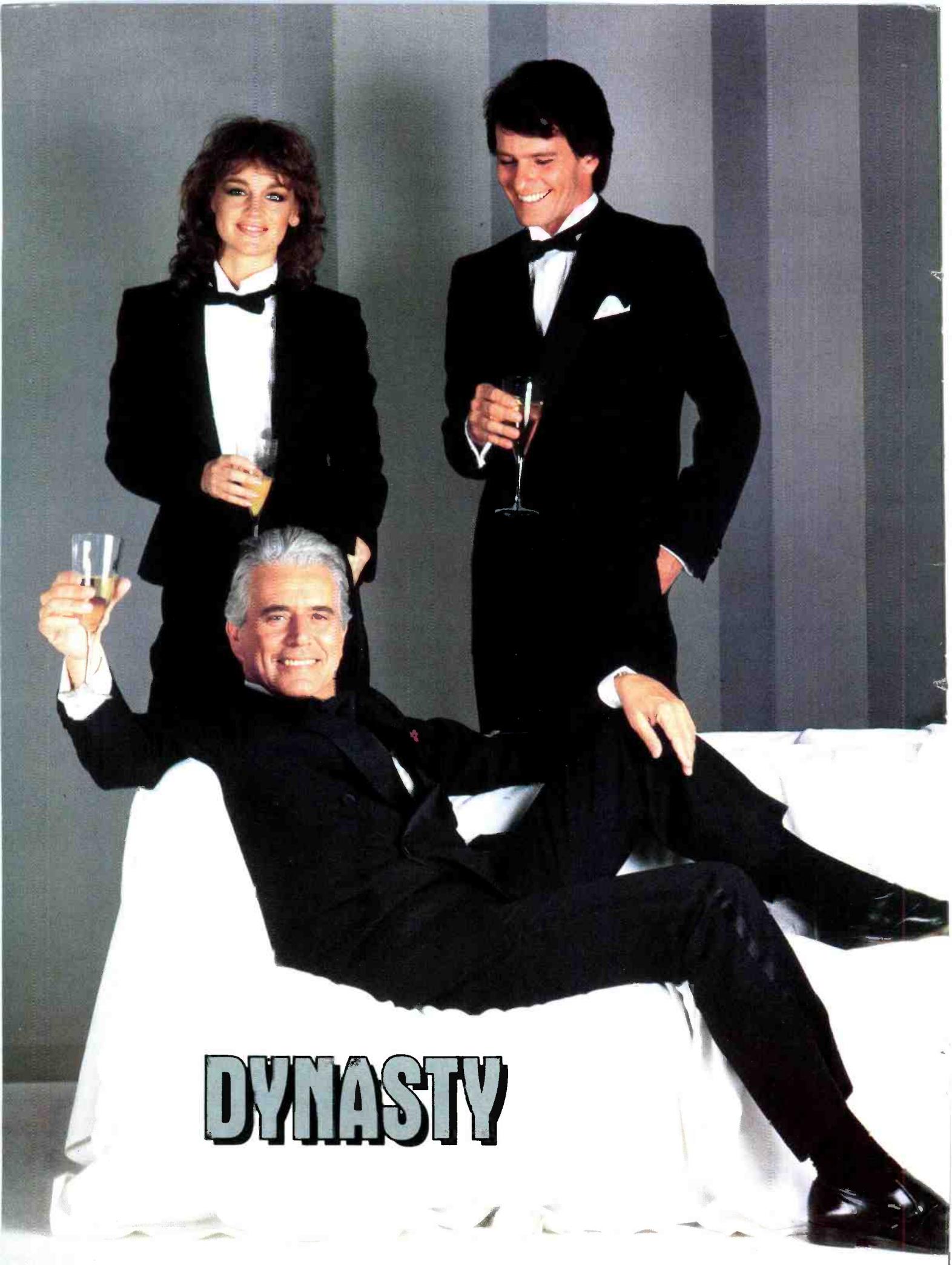
So we are left singularly enchanted, those of us who consumed the whole thing. We are driven to meeting in infrared forests, in our tiny vans and smashing sweaters. We keep up the badger watch, but it is not the same. We all know, deep down, that there will never be a show like it again.

(Note: The name Brian has been used to protect the innocent. Dialogues are paraphrased. The rest happened. I was there.)

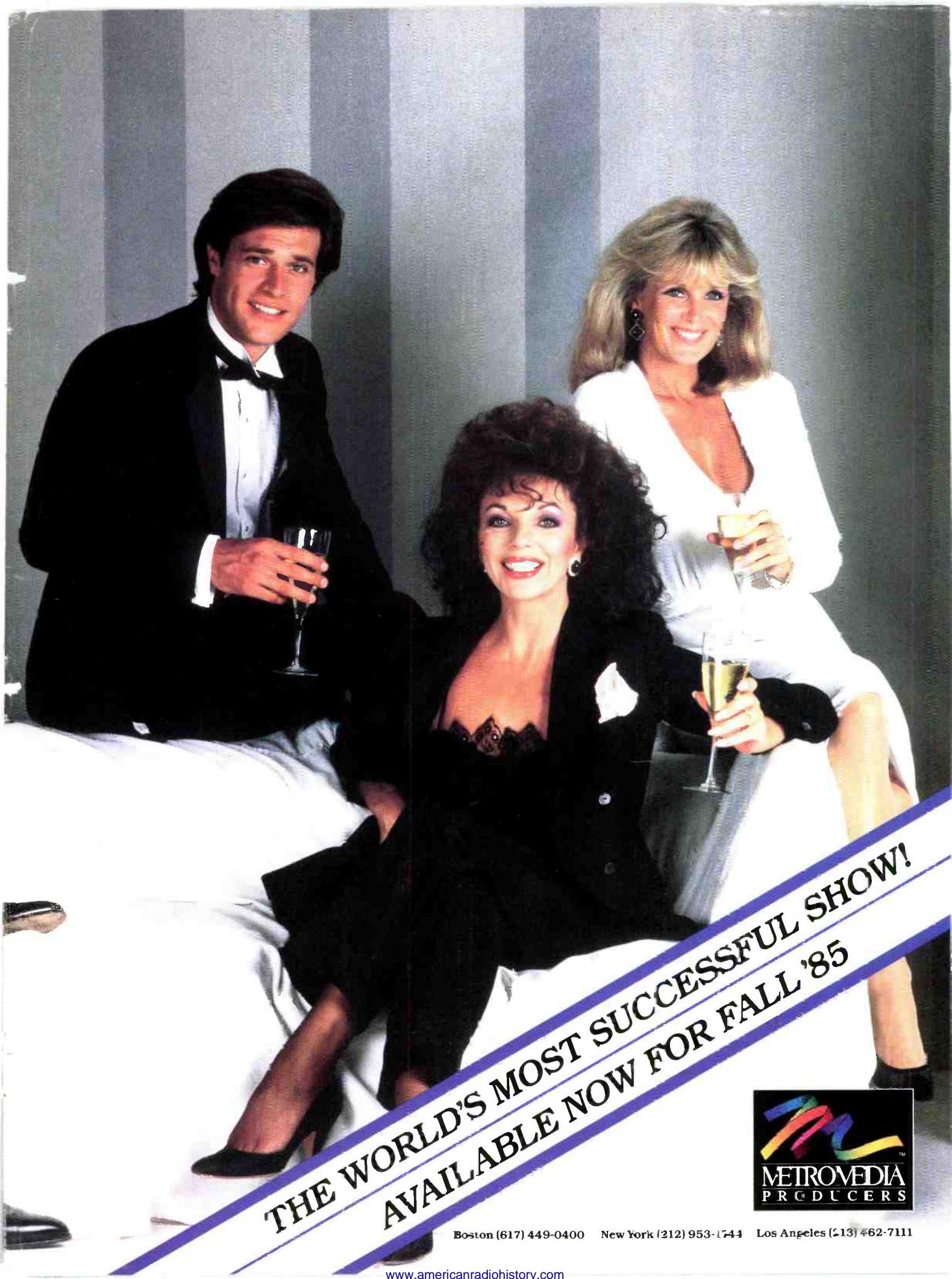
# DYNASTY

The background features a man in a dark tuxedo and bow tie standing in front of a dark, striped wall. Two glasses of champagne are on either side of him, reflecting light. The word "DYNASTY" is written in large, outlined letters across the top of the image.

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SEEING THINGS, the hit 26 episode mystery/comedy series, is playing in 25 U.S. markets and ratings are climbing rapidly. It has been sold to over 30 countries. FRAGGLE ROCK

has already sold to 87 countries by Henson International.

## New Productions

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