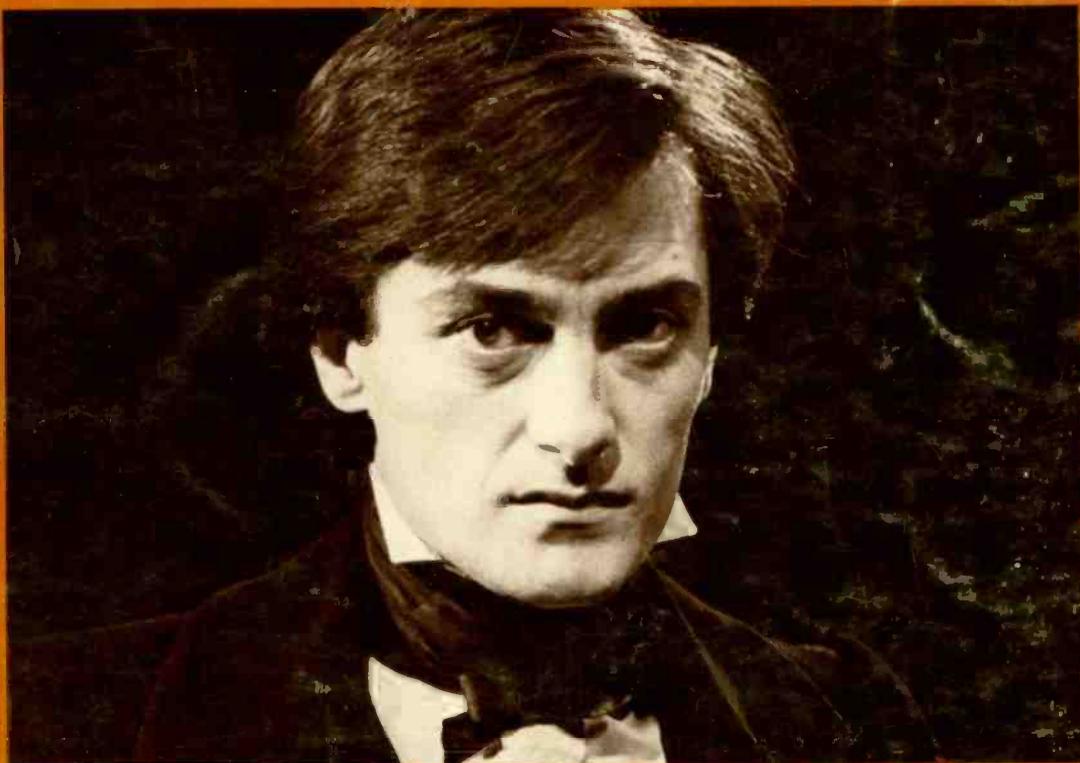


# TELEVISION QUARTERLY



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THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF TELEVISION ARTS AND SCIENCES



**CULTURAL TV: "NICKLEBY" IS A HIT,  
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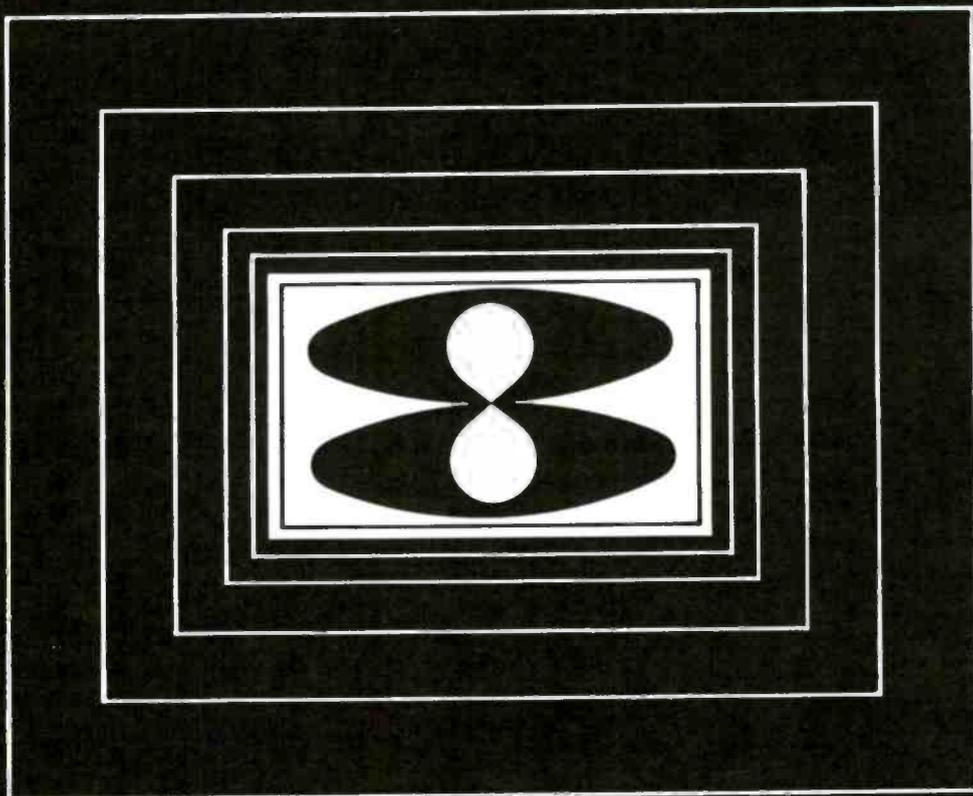
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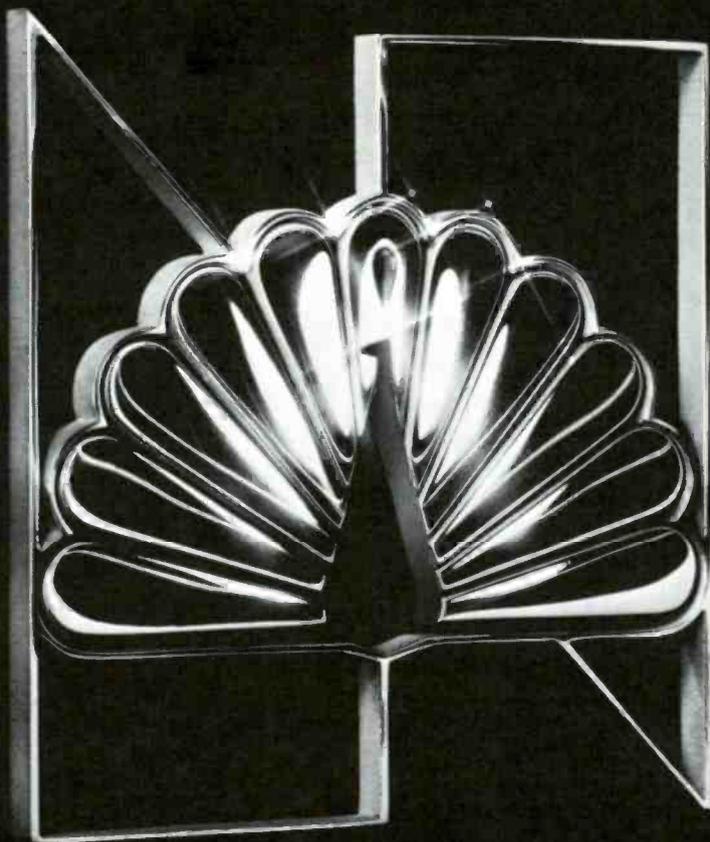
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# THE MORNING AFTER: CULTURAL HANGOVERS ON THE TUBE

What's the future for cultural programming, with CBS Cable gone and public TV in financial trouble? Will more sponsors take the *Nicholas Nickleby* route on commercial outlets?

**BY SCHUYLER CHAPIN**

**C**ome on, friends, let's face it: The television season for 1983 continues to be a shining sea of mediocrity, relieved from time to time, as a shooting star in a summer sky, by an occasional glimmer of truth and beauty. But one of those truth and beauty moments, born bravely almost two-and-a-half years ago and known as cultural programming on cable has, sadly, almost gone the way of all such ventures in commercial broadcasting. Oh, here and there scattered bits can still be found — ABC Hearst ARTS lingers on some cable systems; BRAVO, the arts service of Rainbow Program Services, continues its modest formats for its sixty-odd thousand subscribers, but basically the great adventure seems about over.

CBS Cable, the greatest cultural display yet assembled on American television, gave us stunning moments of what might have been a steady and brilliant participation in all the arts, but it was snatched away less than a year after its debut; Rockefeller Center Television's Entertainment Channel, which went to great lengths to out-negotiate public broadcasting for BBC product, seems to have been stillborn.

Back in 1981, in the spring issue of this magazine, I wrote that I feared such a thing would happen and I was thoroughly scolded for my pessimism, even partially boycotted (or so I was told)

from being considered as a participant in some cable shows. But I saw nothing then — and see nothing now — to prevent recurrence of what seems to be the absolute rule of American commercial broadcasting: Cultural programming equals economic disaster.

Lest you think me totally negative, however, there is creeping slowly across the communication horizon the fact that there *is* a quality audience out there, largely developed by public broadcasting, which has a strength and profile of its own. By mass market standards the numbers may be small, and up until now not deemed worthy to cultivate, but recently this audience was brought to the front by the Mobil Corporation for the Royal Shakespeare Company's eight-hour production of *Nicholas Nickleby*. *Nick-Nick*, as it is affectionately called by theatre buffs, was not seen on public broadcasting but on a special prime-time commercial group of independent stations organized in sixty-one cities under the generic name of the Mobil Showcase Network.

This was not the first time such a group of stations was organized for cultural purposes, but it was by far the most prestigious and according to Herbert Schmetz, the Mobil vice president in charge, the company was more than pleased with the results. The Nielsen estimates for the entire series came to seventeen percent of the audience, more than fifteen-million viewers.

"There is clearly a hard-core audience — a very large number of people

who are willing to watch something different from what they normally get." Mr. Schmertz is quoted as saying. "The television industry has to think about what its obligations are to these people and find a way to satisfy them."

When I read Mr. Schmertz's remarks the fifteen-million figure leapt off the page at me. That is the number most often heard by public broadcasting officials as the beginning of their hard-core audiences, an overall figure that generally ranges between fifteen and twenty million — a figure usually considered by arts administrators to be the base for their television adventures. Once in a while a special musical program, these days starring Luciano Pavarotti and a few other operatic superstars, might be rated as reaching twenty-three million, but that would seem to be the penultimate. Here we have a commercial network carrying what must be called cultural programming (although Charles Dickens might blanch at the phrase) and fifteen million people seem to be around to watch it. Is that an audience taking time away from PBS — or a whole new one or, as is probably the case, a mix of both? And how important might that figure be in the overall planning for television's future?

**P**erhaps now is the time for commercial television executives to really address these questions. A look at the current entertainment season, coupled with constant comments and criticisms concerning the industry in general that have been appearing over the past few years, should move even the most hard-bitten mogul to take stock, "take a meeting," and look at what that hard core might mean to both the present and the future. During the soul searching, some underpaid researcher might bring to our mogul's attention the extraordinary success story of the good music station WFMT in Chicago or a magazine like the *New Yorker*. Both these organizations have aimed at and stuck with the quality market both locally and nation-

ally and have prospered splendidly while doing so.

The *New Yorker's* history, going back to the 1920's, has been a model of content, marketing and merchandising. Its advertisers, many of them clients for over forty years, have complete faith in what the magazine delivers even though each issue is laid out for the convenience of the writer and the reader rather than the businessman. Part of the secret lies in the consistency of product and purpose, the adventure of seeking and publishing good writing on myriad subjects and surrounding the articles with crisp comment, funny and elegant cartoons and literary vignettes. Through thick and thin, the magazine has never

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**Until recently, a major program of the nature of "Nickleby" couldn't find a place in prime time even with the classiest sponsor.**

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lost sight of its goals, and even though it was alleged in the beginning that the book was not for the "lady in Des Moines", the ladies in Des Moines — and a lot of other places — seem to have taken it to their collective hearts.

The Chicago good music station has long been admired as the perfect model of culture and commerce, and this in a market that is supposed to be down-the-road middle America. WFMT has simply taken advantage of the fact that Chicago is indeed middle America, but a middle America that caused the building of the Chicago Art Institute, encouraged the work of Louis Sullivan, supported the Lyric Opera and created what to many, including this writer, is the greatest symphony orchestra in the world. And perhaps our television mogul also might have a look at what's been happening on public broadcasting.

I'm not now referring to the problems of the public tube; there are plenty of those. I am referring to the audiences, to the loyalty and consistency of those

audiences both locally, regionally and on the network. They have been growing steadily over the last decade, and their effect on public programming is being felt at all levels.

As the dreadfulness of present commercial network prime time nonsense continues, the public sector grows, and the continuing audience disillusion allows for the building of the now-and-then Mobil showcases. Until recently, a major program of the nature of *Nickleby* couldn't find a place in prime time even with the classiest sponsor, unless it was judged to be something that would sweep the ratings. The ratings remain God: I'll never forget a CBS executive in the days of Jim Aubrey's tenancy as president of CBS Television, staring at me across his polished, empty desk and telling me that Lincoln Center, where I was a vice president and producer at the time, was being given thirty million American homes for our then yearly special; given, mind you, as a vast favor from CBS's cornucopia of prime time ratings. His attitude and pomposity were wonderful to behold, and the group of satraps sitting around his office nodding in unison reminded me of *The Huckster* brought to life.

A few years later, when I produced another special for that same network, celebrating the two hundredth birthday of Ludwig van Beethoven, the program was aired a year after its completion, as if to celebrate Beethoven's two hundred and first birthday, because the network was scared to show it for fear of the ratings war. As it was, the program was finally seen on a Christmas eve, far out of sight of trouble.

That was, after all, in 1971, twelve years ago. Has network paranoia changed? You bet it hasn't. This year the producers of the Grammy Award show had to face a network executive who told them to dump the classical awards because that kind of music lost an audience. Further, when the producers chose to stand firm, the executive pleaded with them to at least translate Leontyne Price's aria into English in

order to save the ratings. The producers again declined and won their battle. Price went on as scheduled and the audience stayed with the show. Such a stupid battle and so unnecessary — but, alas, familiar.

As we all know too well, when an IBM or a Mobil come to a network with an outstanding program, unless that program is deemed ratings-worthy, they

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### **Bit by bit those of us concerned with quality and cultural programs are going to win this battle.**

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can cool their heels in the outer offices forever. Even today, with the ongoing proof of the validity of prestigious audiences, and the loyalty and economic punch of such audiences, a majority of network officials run scared at the thought of culture. England's Granada Television has recently produced what surely has to be one of the major theatrical television events of our time, *King Lear* with Laurence Olivier in the title role, and when first discussed, Granada could not interest CBS, ABC or NBC in buying it. Of course the program will be aired either on PBS or another special showcase network, but it is utterly ridiculous that in this day and age our three commercial networks should continue to ignore major artistic events on the motheaten theory that in some undefined and ectoplasmic way they will be permanently injured by pandering to good taste.

However, bit by bit those of us concerned with quality and cultural programs are going to win this battle. Cable was our obvious immediate hope and CBS's leadership position in the field a miracle that could not — and did not — last. But out of those ashes, and out of the experience of determined producers who recognize the quality audience for what it is, and out of the machinery of public broadcasting, modified and strengthened as it will be — despite

neanderthal attempts to choke off government funds — the quality-carers will be heard!

Perhaps, being heard will mean less network presentations and much more regional and ad-hoc station groups put together to reach specific audiences. One can think of marvellous opportunities here for young artists given a chance in their local cities or regional communities. On the "ad-hoc" theory, costs can be kept to a minimum and promotion geared to focus on the public service aspect of broadcasting, thus solving several problems at once. There are many other possibilities once station executives begin to use their imaginations to serve their cities. The opportunities are limitless.

**O**ne final note: All present cultural programming, whether hanging on to the scattered cable outlets or seen on public broadcasting, is by no means perfect. There are sins galore. As an example: The big underwriters for PBS understandably tend to look for programs that are going to reach the largest possible cultural audience and in so doing have, probably unwittingly, squeezed out important repertoire.

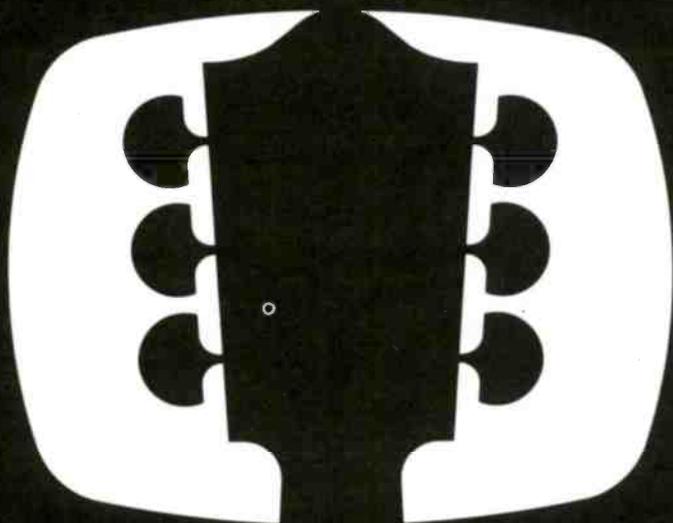
This is particularly true in the presentation of musical events. The symphony orchestras and ballets and opera companies, abound, but almost fifty percent of the musical literature is ignored — ignored, what's more, by a medium made to order for it. I refer, of course, to chamber music and the solo recital. What more perfect way of enjoying this vast repertoire than in one's own home with the intimacy of the tube combining with the intimacy of the performer? Here again you don't need superstars; the quality of young virtuosi in this country has never been higher. What is needed — and what television can do better even than the concert hall — is to allow these talents to seduce us with their versatility.

But I must not cavil; there is greater work to be done, and we must pick

ourselves up from our first real brush with culture and cable and commerce and press on with new imagination. We know the audience is there and growing. We know that audience is loyal and intelligent and commercially viable, and we've just got to continue to match the various pieces together until we emerge victorious. ■

Schuyler Chapin is dean of the School of the Arts at Columbia University and former general manager of the Metropolitan Opera. He has been in and around radio and television as producer, writer and commentator for more years than he can remember. He is the winner of Emmy Awards in 1972, 1979 and 1981 for cultural programming.

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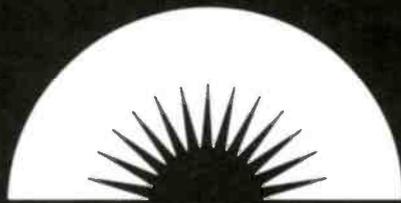
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# FADEOUT ON TELEVISION AS A MOVIE VILLAIN

The focus here is not made-for-TV movies, but movies *about* television. Among others: *My Favorite Year*, *Network*, *Face In The Crowd* and *Callaway Went Thataway*.

**BY DOUGLAS BRODE**

**A**utumn 1982 was not a good time for theatrical films. Only one movie clicked at the box-office between September 1 and December 1: the opportunity to see Sylvester Stallone shooting, instead of merely maiming and mauling his adversaries, turned *First Blood* into a surprise hit. Likewise, a single film struck it big with critics and motion picture connoisseurs: *My Favorite Year*, a mellow reminiscence — part fact, part fiction — about the glorious days of live television, as an Errol Flynn style movie-star-on-the-skids (Peter O'Toole) makes an appearance on a Sid Caesarish (Joseph Bologna) variety show.

At the film's end, the two men overcome their initial bickering to defeat a crime boss (Cameron Mitchell) trying to hush the social commentary of their show. This image of a man from movies joining a representative figure of television as they realize, after a lengthy struggle for dominance, their only mutual chance for survival rests in a union of their respective strengths, perfectly captured in its amusing simplistic way the attitude of the two industries in the early 1980s. The increase in pay cable television programming, with its immense appetite for film product, provided an incentive for the production of feature films that could be either released theatrically or sold directly to cable. Films which had failed to find

theatrical distributors also were being gobbled up by ventures like HBO-Cinemax, Showtime, and The Movie Channel. Though supposedly set in the late 1950s, *My Favorite Year* actually projected an image of the ultimate alliance of TV and theatrical films that would not see fruition until a quarter century after the film's story takes place.

Initially, the two forms existed in a state of mutual hostility. Even before commercial television entered its pioneer stage in the late 1940s, movies had zeroed in on television as a possible subject. One of the oddest motion pictures ever released by a major Hollywood studio, Paramount's 1933 opus *International House*, concerned an early, fictitious attempt to broadcast entertainment via television, as people from around the world check into a huge Oriental hotel to participate in the event. Among those present: W. C. Fields, Burns and Allen, Bela Lugosi, and Cab Calloway — who uses the new medium to sing an ode to drug addiction called "Reefer Man"! This quirky, iconoclastic comedy argued in favor of television emerging as a kind of radio-with-pictures.

Already there existed, however, the hint of a threat to Hollywood. Television could, after all, do what the radio medium could not do: allow viewers to see and hear movies without going to a theatre and buying a ticket. No wonder, then, that cryptic suggestions set in almost immediately. *Television Spy*, for example, implied the emerging medium

could transmit government secrets to potentially malevolent forces, and *Murder By Television* warned that a villainous force could warp TV's immediate impact for lethal effects. Those films may have been mere exploitation flicks fashioned to cash in on the public's interest in an emerging novelty. Still, they did (however unconsciously and crudely) program viewers to perceive the new medium as a potentially dangerous one.

With America's entry into World War II, the question of TV became a minor issue. Yet it was the breakthroughs in communications established during the war years that shortly thereafter allowed commercial television to become a reality. In 1946, the first regular broadcasts were being programmed by NBC and Dumont; two years later they were joined by CBS and ABC.

**T**he movie business entered a period of economic depression, as people stayed home to watch Ed Sullivan, Milton Berle, and — irony of ironies — very old Hollywood movies. The major studios at first joined together to fight back by agreeing not to release recent films, relinquishing only the oldest pre-1948 product to TV. Meanwhile, they revamped their pictures, turning out films in widescreen, color, stereo sound, even 3-D — making the 'modern' motion picture a unique experience which could not be duplicated by television's broadcasting of old movies.

Still, the box office receipts for theatrical films continued to slump. And in subtle ways, something in our society changed as a result. This situation was captured by Larry McMurtry in his novel *The Last Picture Show*, filmed in 1970 by Peter Bogdanovich. In the motion picture version, our first glimpse of the small Texas town that will provide the setting for a series of interrelated soap opera relationships reveals everyone going to the movies; the theatre has replaced the church as the center of social activity, the single icon with the capacity to bring everybody together.

But as the story progresses, fewer and fewer people attend the theatre regularly. Instead, we see them at home, watching television. As they get hooked on the new medium, they communicate less and less with each other. Thus, movies are here portrayed as the mass medium that creates a sense of community in a secular society; television fosters the lonely crowd.

In the final moments of the film, everyone in town sits at home watching TV, while the two young heroes (Timothy Bottoms and Jeff Bridges) attend the theatre alone, watching the last film that will play there before it closes forever. In McMurtry's novel, what they see is an awful 'B' western starring Audie Murphy, which they eventually walk out on. But in Bogdanovich's film, they watch Howard Hawks' monumental western *Red River*. The sequence we see them viewing is that famous moment during which John Wayne begins the cattle drive north, as his cowboys operate out of a strong sense of community. Yet later in *Red River*, that initial sense of community dissipates, just as the sense of community does among the townsfolk in *The Last Picture Show*. In reality, the McCarthy witch hunt mentality and the growing fear of atomic holocaust had as large a role in creating the mood of post-war America, but according to Hollywood's version in *The Last Picture Show*, television was at fault.

That film stands as the last major variation on Hollywood's first approach to television. One of the earliest pictures to assume this attitude was *Callaway Went Thataway*, a little-known 1951 comedy inspired in part by the career of William Boyd, whose Hopalong Cassidy programmers — modestly popular with moviegoing kids a decade earlier — turned him into TV's first Superstar. Fred MacMurray and Dorothy McGuire were cast as TV publicity people, assigned to locate a forgotten actor named "Smokey Callaway" whose old "B" pictures, now on television, are the current rage. Unable to locate him, they instead find a young double (Howard

Keel) for the cowboy hero of America's children, and begin grooming him to be the 'new' Callaway, even as the original — an embittered alcoholic — returns to claim his share of the television jackpot. *Callaway* was the first Hollywood film to warn the moviegoing public of a possible danger of television: electronically transmitting into our living rooms an image of a folksy American hero whose grinning goodguy image is only a cover for his essential corruption and cynicism.

**O**f course not all the Hollywood portrait of TV were so severe. Indeed, during the first era of movies-about-television, filmmakers just as often tried to defeat TV by ridiculing it. Vehicles for every comedy star from Marilyn Monroe (*The Seven Year Itch*) and Jayne Mansfield (*Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*) to Doris Day (*The Thrill Of It All*) poked fun at TV as a medium not of art or even entertainment, but *commerce* — run by an eclectic combination of nervous censors, pushy salesmen, self-important executives, pseudo-celebrity stars, and greedy stockholders. Yet even in these light-weight vehicles, there was a bit of bite; as "Rock Hunter," Tony Randall's job was to seduce movie star Jayne Mansfield into appearing on a TV lip-stick ad. Though played for laughs, what the film spoofed was television's hunger at the time for the respectability leading Hollywood names could lend it.

Failing to attract many major stars in its early days, TV instead found its own stars. True, some came to the medium with prior experience in feature films (Groucho Marx, Red Skelton) while others had clicked on radio (Edgar Bergen), night clubs (The Ritz Brothers), or even print journalism (Ed Sullivan). Their personalities proved effective on television's non-filmic experience of talk and variety shows.

Motion pictures of that era sometimes portrayed television stars as moral monsters: people who appeared to be entertainers, but in fact were mass-media

mystics, able to exert heretofore unimaginable spellbinding powers over the hearts and minds of the nation. Elia Kazan's *A Face in the Crowd* (1957) which still stands as Hollywood's epic on the subject — though perhaps tragedy would be the proper description — chronicles the rise and fall of an arrogant, ambitious television personality many insiders believed to be modelled after the late Arthur Godfrey. "Lonesome Rhodes" (Andy Griffith) is a sweet-faced, smiling country-boy who accidentally enters the Radio-TV industry and immediately becomes a sensation — an institution, thanks to his folksy appeal.

Beneath that surface, though, he is a power-hungry cynic who plans to subliminally manipulate the public's political attitudes through his show. But if TV makes Lonesome Rhodes, in the end it breaks him; the woman he has loved and discarded (Patricia Neal) turns up the sound during the closing credits, allowing a shocked public at last to hear the nasty comments Rhodes quips under his breath ("Goodnight, you little fools. . . I've got you right where I want you!")

**I**f TV was often portrayed as an electronic-age Satan capable of creating modern mass-media deities out of dangerous men, its potential for redemption rested in the possibility that honorable men might seize control of the mechanism. In Jose Ferrer's *The Great Man* (1957), a beloved radio-TV personality (also modelled on Godfrey) dies, and a sincere broadcast journalist (with more than passing resemblance to Edward R. Murrow) is asked to prepare a massive documentary honoring him. During his research, however, the journalist comes to realize the dark, despicable side of his subject. At the last possible moment — as the "live" broadcast begins — he throws away his script and instead delivers an impromptu study of the "great" man's true nature.

During the 1960s, such striking attacks on TV by the movies began to wind

down, not coincidentally at the same time that the makers of theatrical films were learning to accommodate the TV medium.

**D**uring the 1950s, old movies had been widely syndicated, and local stations all over the country gobbled up as many vintage vintage films as they could buy, stripping one, two and even three movie programs across-the-board, five and six days a week. (Everywhere: an *Early Show*, *Late Show* and even a *Late Late Show*.) As for the networks, even if the newer films had been made available, for policy reasons, they choose not to make motion pictures part of their schedule. In fact, at an NBC affiliates meeting in 1956 General Sarnoff delivered a stern sermon, warning stations of the perils of programming movies: in effect, Thou Shalt Not make television merely a transmitter of movies, a film grind house! Yet it was Sarnoff's network with *Saturday Night At The Movies* that finally opened up an era during which contemporary features for the first time would take up increasing blocks of network time prime time on all three networks; in the fall of 1961 20th Century Fox became the first major studio to sell a package of comparatively recent pictures to a network. The other networks soon followed NBC's lead.

It proved to be a two-way stretch: by mid-decade, most all Hollywood features were being shot in color, not so much for aesthetic reasons but because this increased their resale value to the TV networks.

Movies might still occasionally employ television as an easy symbol for isolation and loneliness: in Billy Wilder's *The Apartment*, Jack Lemmon sits by himself, unable to enjoy a late night telecast of *Grand Hotel* because of the constant intrusion of commercials. In that same film, a woman refuses to meet her lover for an evening of sex on Thursday night, owing to her addiction to *The Untouchables*. Television is the medium that interferes with real life;

television is the promise of entertainment and the reality of advertising.

As American filmmakers learned to accept TV as the ultimate link on the distribution chain, the most effective satires on the subject of television turned up in imported films. Richard Lester's British comedy hit *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) poked fun at TV production, portraying the Beatles as antic innocents in a world of superficial phonies who run the TV studio where they are to film a performance. Victor Spinetti stands out among the characters (caricatures would be more appropriate) as representative of the lot: pompous asses worthy of comic deflating, though not particularly dangerous. A few serious studies of the distinction between TV images and the very fallible people behind them also came from England: *The Killing of Sister George* (1969) based its drama on the gap between a lovable soap opera character and the troubled lesbian who plays her. Notably missing from both the comedies and the dramas, however, was the edge of anger that had marked *A Face in the Crowd* and *The Great Man*.

**I**n fact, positive images of television began to appear in American films even before the decade's end. *Seven Days in May* (1964), which dealt with an attempted military takeover of the government by a disenchanting Mac-Arthurish general (Burt Lancaster), concludes with an image of the President (Fredric March) reassuring the public, through a television broadcast, that order has been restored. During the transition between decades, *The Last Picture Show* served as a watershed film, closing off the first era of Hollywood's attitude toward television. The same year that film was released, numerous movie stars who had previously avoided television — Anthony Quinn, Kirk Douglas, Glenn Ford, Shirley MacLaine, James Stewart — all acted in TV series of made-for-television movies, even as the kinds of motion pictures they had previously ap-

peared in ceased to exist. Clearly, TV was absorbing the movies and, instead of striking back, movies began to accept the situation, approaching the subject of TV in a new light.

**P**addy Chayefsky's *Network* (1976) was the most significant of this New Wave of movies about television. The film is critical of TV only insofar as it attacks a supposed tendency of network news chiefs to be subservient to the entertainment departments. The villainess of the piece is Fay Dunaway (in a role generally supposed to be modelled after an NBC executive of the time), playing a woman so obsessed with high ratings that she eventually allows an insane newscaster to broadcast his diatribes.

At the film's end, when his ratings begin to falter, Dunaway and her executive colleagues hire a hit man to kill him: "Howard Beal," Chayefsky concludes, "the first man ever to die of low ratings." But even in the midst of this unsavory vision, *Network* simultaneously assumed a positive approach toward the medium itself — if not to the men and women who run the machinery.

Before *Network*, no one took much exception to Marshall McLuhan's motion of TV as a 'cool' medium. Cinematographer-turned-director Haskell Wexler even titled his 1969 film *Medium Cool* after McLuhan's dictum. The film, a kind of American Neorealist picture about a fictional TV reporter covering the tumultuous events of 1968, was improvised around those events as they happened.

The point of the picture is that viewing even the most violent events on television makes them less able to move us, less able to anger us, less able to upset us. Putting images of race riots on TV reduces them to the level of the cartoons that precede them, or the sitcom (replete with laugh track) that follows. The Medium itself — to Wexler as to McLuhan — is the message; television serves as the opiate of the people, and even the most exciting subjects — when broadcast on TV — are reduced to the

level of TV shows.

In *Network*, Chayefsky argued otherwise. The image of Howard Beal (Peter Finch) bellowing over the airwaves "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" led, in Chayefsky's vision, to the entire nation following suit. Television is depicted as a medium of possible social change, a force for revolutionary agitation, a hot medium that sparks viewers to act, rather than a cool one which turns us into passive zombies.

Only a few years later, *Being There* provided a parallel approach. Chauncey Gardiner (Peter Sellers) is a man who has remained apart from the world all his life, spending his time watching television and tending his garden. But when he finally wanders out into the real world, his attention to small detail, coupled with his mastery of the TV techniques practiced by game show hosts, allows him immediately to rise to prominence in Washington. A man who is all style and no substance, Chauncey has perfected the favorite pastime of the country: he is brilliant at watching television. A public that derives most of its ideas and information from the tube cannot resist raising him to heights of power.

**A** dangerous situation? To be sure, though not presented in a totally negative light. Much of the dark tone that dominates Jerzy Kosinski's cryptically comical novel is replaced by a bright, charming atmosphere in Hal Ashby's 1979 film. The difference in approach may be attributed to the differing attitudes of the novelist and the director, or to the change in the country's mood between the time when the book was written and the release of the film. Ashby's humor is comparatively softspoken and subdued: while lambasting the superficiality of the world-image it shares with us he calls our attention to the way in which television has become the centrifugal force of our society. But he stops short of saying (as earlier filmmakers did) that this is potentially a force of evil.

Since then, television has been depicted as a positive force in almost all movies touching on the subject. In *The China Syndrome*, newscaster Jane Fonda brings word to the people of potential nuclear threats, thanks to her role as a television news personality; in *The Electric Horseman*, Fonda's newscaster is able to justify to the public the reasons why a modern day cowboy (Robert Redford) chose to steal a mistreated horse. In *Eyewitness*, TV reporter Sigourney Weaver solves a conspiracy-crime by becoming romantically involved with the only witness (William Hurt). In *The Howling*, an Anchorwoman (Dee Wallace) reveals the danger of a werewolf coven to her audience by transforming herself into one on the eleven o'clock news — how's that for a rating grabber!

What's remarkably consistent about the attitude taken toward television in these diverse pictures is the rejection of the pre-1970 notion of television as an electronic age villain, and its replacement by the vision of TV as the possible source of our salvation.

After all, in *Tootsie*, it is the spontaneous quality of live TV that allows Dustin Hoffman to reveal to Jessica Lange, and to the nation, that Dorothy Michaels is actually Michael Dorsey. For a moment, it appears as if he may have destroyed himself by doing so, but by that film's final frames, we see he has been redeemed by his positive use of TV's potential.

**T**he one aspect of television that moviemakers have been unable to applaud is *craft* — professionalism. While a movie like *Tootsie* portrays the potential of the television medium in a positive light, it has nothing nice to say about the production side of TV. Indeed, Dabney Coleman — as the guiding force behind the soap opera Dustin Hoffman and Jessica Lange "star" in — emerges as *Tootsie's* representative figure for the mentality of TV producer-directors: a

lecherous philistine, devoid of either intellect or emotion, without taste or talent.

His lack of artistry and integrity can be viewed, beyond the confines of this one film, as symbolic of the way in which movie people portray the craftsmanship (or lack of it) of their TV counterparts.

On the other hand, movies about movies (such as, say, the classic *Sunset Boulevard* of 1950) have, while self-critically attacking the mythology of Hollywood, simultaneously enshrined the notion of competency and craftsmanship among cinema-artists. Perhaps there is a touch of vengeance in Hollywood's satiric jibes at TV's creative people and craftsmen: after all, the annual Oscar telecast may be a ceremony designed to honor the highest level of technical accomplishment in motion pictures, but its TV broadcast is, ironically, usually marked by the most embarrassing technical goofs. So while Hollywood has reached a point where it sometimes can portray TV as a positive force, it apparently still maintains that for true technical craftsmanship, television must rely on the motion picture product.

And why shouldn't this be the case? After all, in the 1980s, many films are financed by pay TV, and could not be made if their pay TV broadcast hadn't been planned even before the first frame of film was shot; without an HBO deal, for example, Ray Stark probably would have had trouble financing *Annie*.

These days for a motion picture to depict television — even humorously — as the possible salvation of its heroes makes sense, of a sort. Sales to TV networks, syndication and to pay cable and other forms of new video are helping to salvage some floundering film companies and to strengthen the prosperous ones.

Not surprisingly, then, in *My Favorite Year* film-makers offer an image of the men who represent television and the movies arm-in-arm, accepting each other after an initial feud. Although the story is fancifully set in the 1950s, it is, after all, a projection of the 1980s onto

that earlier TV age. Perhaps we shouldn't take it too seriously, but somehow it is a fitting symbol of change.

So now...who will be the first to make a motion picture about cable? And will it be science fiction, sob story or farce? ■

A frequent contributor to this magazine, Douglas Brode is an educator, film critic and media historian. He is also the author of several books on the movies. His biography of Dustin Hoffman will be published in October of this year.

## V I E W P O I N T S

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*LEONARD H. GOLDENSON, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer, American Broadcasting Companies, Inc. Address at Kennedy School of Government.*

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# DOCUMENTARY AS A SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY

A distinguished producer and historian examines the documentary as a threat to society's myths and assumptions. It's a more difficult "propaganda" medium than pop fiction.

**BY ERIK BARNOUW**

**S**ome years ago my wife and I had an unusual experience — the sort of opportunity now harder to come by, what with the trickling away of grant funds. We were able to spend eight months going around the world visiting film archives and studios, looking at films, talking with film makers. Our focus was on the documentary, in preparation for a history of that genre. We were able, in those eight months, to look at some eight hundred documentaries in eighteen countries. It was a heady experience.

There were many surprises. One was Yugoslavia. We were enchanted with much of its work. Each of the Yugoslavian states apparently had its own studio, functioning as a cooperative. The studios concentrated on short films, mainly documentaries, which went into theatres and television in a number of countries, and won many international awards. They were fine technically, inventive, often witty, and sometimes critical and even satiric about their own government. This seemed to be a prideful Yugoslavian tradition. The critical films were called "black films." Some film makers were especially proud of their black films, and of having the right to make them.

During our 3-week stay in Yugoslavia we looked at about one hundred short

Yugoslavian films. Then, a few days before our departure, one of the archivists said to us, "I think you've seen about all the Yugoslavian films you need to see. But before you go — if you like — we can show you some Hungarian films they won't show you in Hungary; and we can show you some Czechoslovakian films they won't show you in Czechoslovakia." This surprised us, and we jumped at the offer; so, unexpectedly, we spent the last days in Yugoslavia looking at Hungarian and Czechoslovakian films.

Later, in Poland, we talked at length with documentarists who had been involved in the upsurge of Polish filmmaking in the mid-1950s, a period sometimes referred to there as the "springtime thaw." One of the men said, "There are some films of mine, of that time, that I would like you to see, but which they will not show you here. However, you will be able to see them in Brussels, at the Belgian archive." He mentioned several titles. We asked for them at the Warsaw studio, and found he was right; the films, it was explained, were "no longer in circulation." But we did find them in Brussels, as well as in Amsterdam. So in both those places, again to our surprise, we found ourselves looking at Polish films.

Meanwhile, in East Germany, at its huge and well-organized film archive, we looked at many East German documentaries. After a week or so the archivist said to us, "By the way, did you read about those Cuban documentaries that were not allowed into the United

States?" It so happened we had just read about them in the European *Herald-Tribune* — Cuban films seized by American customs officials, preventing a scheduled New York showing. "Well," said the archivist, "we have them here, in case you'd like to see them." So, in East Germany, we looked at Cuban films. Later, in Sweden, we found that the Swedes had developed a special archive of Vietcong and North Vietnamese films, a unique kind of treasury. These took up part of our Swedish time.

All this did not follow our expectations. We had assumed we would, in each country, be looking at its achievements; we learned that each archive also took special pride in items suggesting somebody else's foolishness.

Perhaps our experience also reflected something else: the extraordinary anxieties that tend to surround the documentary and its supposed propaganda impact. Many establishments seem to quake at the thought of documentaries, especially by independents. These seem to be regarded as a kind of subversive activity. Well, perhaps that is one of their functions. And perhaps that is why they are so important. I would like, for a moment, to pursue that thought.

**T**hough associated with the dread word propaganda, the documentary is actually a very difficult propaganda medium — precisely because it confronts its subject matter openly. It announces its topic. It alerts our critical faculties. A far more potent medium of propaganda is popular fiction, precisely because it is generally received as "entertainment," a word associated with relaxation, with having "more than one," a word that lulls our critical faculties. We speak of our popular fiction as "mere" entertainment, which means it is assumed to be without messages. But behind this mere entertainment lie, inevitably, unspoken premises, which we are maneuvered into accepting.

Virtually all our spy and outer space

series and films are based on the premise that we are surrounded, on earth and throughout the universe, with enemies poised for diabolical villainy, who must be countered in kind before they inflict their havoc on us. Somewhat similarly our police dramas suggest, again and again, that social problems are solved by the violent defeat of villains by individual heroes, in heroic action climaxes.

In our television formula fiction, social problems are almost always "solved" in that way. Our series built

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**Documentarists too try to make us aware of, and able to face, problems to which we have somehow been kept oblivious, or which we may have deliberately avoided.**

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around superpersons involve the unspoken premise of our ultimate invincibility, based on an assumed ability to solve all technical problems. After all, Superman can swallow a pill that makes him immune to atomic weapons. In a subliminal way, one has to accept such premises for the drama to work. The unspoken premises are never confronted — they don't have to be. That is the propaganda power of fiction.

I am suggesting that the assumptions and myths of a society are so constantly recycled in its popular fiction that its audience ceases to notice the assumptions. They become elements in the media air we breathe without noticing it. Other people's fiction we readily recognize as propaganda — and they, ours. But our own is "pure" or "mere" entertainment.

A reason for its seductiveness is that it pictures a world that makes sense, in terms of cause and effect. It is internally consistent, in contrast to the world so often reflected in news and other non-fiction programs — including many good documentaries — a world that sel-

dom makes sense, and is full of contradictions and loose ends. Is it any wonder that many people lean toward the substitute world of fiction: a world that, nowadays, begins to seduce us in cradle or playpen — since television, unlike the book, requires no learning process, no coaching by parents or others. Getting at people long before school, it begins to form patterns in our minds — about the world that awaits us — patterns that may, for years and perhaps forever, determine what information and ideas will stick, and what will go down the drain. If it fits the pattern, it will stick. If it doesn't, it probably won't.

Our mythologies, with all their cliches, permeate our atmosphere in many ways besides those I've suggested. They are recycled also in advertising, political speeches, and school textbooks. Even for the habitual dissenter, it is difficult to disentangle oneself from them. They become part of our mental circuitry.

I am trying to suggest the hugeness of the task this imposes not only on dissenters — purveyors of offbeat information and ideas — but on the whole educational process. Students arrive at school saturated with mythologies. Education must somehow cut through deeply embedded notions and attitudes, which are often locked into the very words and phrases of current speech. Dr. Neil Postman of New York University has pointed out that education therefore has to be, to some extent, a subversive activity — a crucially important one.

The same can be said of the documentary. Documentarists too try to make us aware of, and able to face, problems to which we have somehow been kept oblivious, or which we may have deliberately avoided. They too confront endlessly recycled assumptions — assumptions which may have helped to produce the problems.

In Europe recently I attended a recent meeting of television newsmen and documentarists from various countries at which the subject was "Drawing the Line." Who draws the line — and

where? — between what can be said, and not said; what can be shown, and not shown?

In testifying on this from various national vantage points, the conferees cited fascinating examples and case histories of things not permitted — and then, in the end, came to an even more fascinating consensus: that throughout history and today also, establishments are mainly upheld by lines that are drawn much less visibly than those we were able to identify; upheld by processes subtle enough to keep them generally out of sight and out of mind, beyond discussion. The choice of items on newscasts, of topics of documentaries, of crises on daytime serials, of guests on talk shows, are all affected by guidelines which, by force of habit, we scarcely ever examine.

**A**ll this brings me finally back to the documentary, and the hurdles and challenges it faces. Throughout history, establishments have been fortified by media monopolies. Fortunately these have some tendency to self-destruct. In trying to maintain the status quo, they seek to suppress the very ideas they need for their own renewal. Every film archive, as I have suggested, includes works exemplifying censorship actions that were foolish and counterproductive as well as reprehensible. United States moves against Canadian documentaries on acid rain and the nuclear arms race were an eloquent, more recent example. All these suggest that every establishment needs the dissenter, to rescue it from its own foolishness. For bringing submerged topics into the open, nothing can rival the documentary.

It has at this moment of history a special opportunity in the rise of video. With video, the documentary may well enter a new era spearheaded not by large units but by independent artists. It is, above all, a democratizing medium.

Of course I am not talking about so-called "objective documentaries", a fictional animal that is part of our myth-

ological apparatus, and that was invented, I presume, for propaganda purposes.

Of course the documentary involves propaganda. I can't think of any documentary, or any film, or any other kind of communication, that is not propaganda, in the sense of trying to convey some view of the world, narrow or broad, in a way that would get an audience to share it. The propaganda aspect begins with the selection of a topic, and continues with every selection made in presenting it — of words, shots, ideas, facts. A film maker may not think of his own selections as propagandistic. He may be tempted to think of them as the very essence of objectivity. But that is only a reflection of his own self-esteem, or perhaps of his limited vision.

You will note that in using the term propaganda, I do not decry but rather rejoice in it. I am saying that communication is not without a purpose. Most people, I realize, use the word propaganda differently, generally in a hostile way. There is an irony in this. When a film maker has so foolishly rigged his presentation that he raises our hackles, so that we feel compelled to declare our independence, our determination not to be brainwashed, then we are inclined to invoke the word "propaganda." The

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### **Fiction is beguiling. Some documentarists in trying to rival the attractions of fiction, try too hard to imitate it...**

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irony is: we tend to invoke the charge of propaganda just when a film has *failed* as propaganda. When the selections please us, we do not invoke it.

A few more ironies:

The young learn about the world mainly from fiction, which serves as their form of documentary. That is one reason why the documentarist has an uphill task.

Fiction is beguiling. Some documentarists, in trying to rival the attractions of fiction, try too hard to imitate it, just as newscasts try so hard to become sparkling variety programs. Fiction and non-fiction become increasingly scrambled in the process.

But all is not lost. For some, the problems and contradictions that surround us become, in due time, even more fascinating than the neat certainties of fiction. For these people, the documentary remains an obsessive challenge.

The documentary task is, of course, one of propaganda, done under difficult circumstances — because openly, not camouflaged by a cover role.

We all learn to be afraid of words, and "propaganda" is one of the words we are taught to be afraid of. But let us, nonetheless, rejoice in the documentary mission — that of presenting evidence that may change ideas.

A few disclaimers may be in order. The ideas here expressed are mine, and should not be blamed on the *Television Quarterly*. And they are random ideas, not based on scientific research or objective analysis. I have collected no quantitative data. I have not sent out coded questionnaires. I have not fed data into a computer. I have no printouts or graphs to offer. These are just some ideas. Worse than that, they are propaganda. They may even be subversive. One can hope. ■

Erik Barnouw is Professor Emeritus of Dramatic Arts, Columbia University, and former Chief of the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress. He is the author of eight Oxford University Press books on the mass media including *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*; the prize-winning 3-volume *History of Broadcasting in the United States*; and the one-volume condensation *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*.

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# TELEVISION VIEWERS VS. MEDIA SNOBS

A scholarly blast against those who blame television for many of the ills of our times. A challenge to critics who refuse to understand how the medium works.

**BY JIB FOWLES**

**D**uring his years as a Commissioner on the Federal Communications Commission, from 1966 to 1973, Nicholas Johnson was the most prominent Media Snob in America. He perceived television as "one of the most powerful forces man has ever unleashed upon himself," and he was determined to do battle. What was wrong with the medium? In a 1970 interview with Mitchell Kraus, Johnson talked on about "a most serious subject in our country today, and that is what commercial television is doing to mess up our heads in the way we perceive ourselves, and the world about us, and our lives, and preaching at us constantly standards of conspicuous consumption, and hedonism as the sole salvation; a sense of one's worth as an individual to be measured by the number of products he buys; the suggestion that all of life's problems can be immediately dispensed by taking a chemical into the body, or spraying one on the outside of the body." Television was deeply immoral in the way it goaded people into spurious views and unnecessary purchases. The manipulation of humans was most sinisterly done in the case of children, he held. Many people were distressed about television for youngsters, but none of them phrased it quite as Johnson did. The networks, he preached in 1972,

have "molested the minds of the nation's children."

It was odd that Nicholas Johnson ever came to be an FCC Commissioner, for customarily (with the possible exception of Newton Minow) these offices have gone to people with ties to the communications industries — people with some promise for mediating between the goals of high-minded legislation and the realities of the broadcasting business. Until Johnson joined them, the Commissioners had never turned down a license renewal application. In the habit of acting more as trustees than regulators, they wanted to see that everything went agreeably, something Johnson did not care about. Sparks flew. An unnamed Commissioner was later quoted in *Broadcasting* as recollecting about Johnson, "His positions were so extreme, so vitriolic, that he lost the confidence of his colleagues. Whatever he brought up was looked upon with distrust and suspicion. I didn't trust him. I did not think his intent was to find constructive solutions." Another Commissioner, Kenneth Cox, reported on Johnson's explanation for being a publicity hound: "Nick said that the minority on the FCC had always carried on their battle in a closed manner, writing dissents that are listened to only by broadcasters. He said he wanted to break out of that. He wanted to create a public base."

Nicholas Johnson's appointment to the FCC can be seen as a whim of Lyndon Johnson's. Although not a Texan (he grew up as the only child of an Iowa

speech professor), the young Johnson attended the University of Texas, graduated Phi Beta Kappa, and went on to law school there. He came to the President-to-be's attention when he served as a law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black. When LBJ had to fill the position of Maritime Administrator in 1964, he tapped the up-and-coming University of Texas graduate, making him at the age of 29 the youngest Administrator ever. It took Nicholas Johnson very little time to reveal a penchant for stirring up dissension. By meddling with federal subsidies for shipbuilders and maritime unions, Johnson precipitated an outcry from the industry which was long and loud. The only way for LBJ to make peace was to transfer the Administrator. An opportunity appeared in the form of an open seat on the FCC, and there the young lawyer was sent in 1966.

Once at the FCC Johnson began his assault on television. He restated the opinions of those experts who felt that the medium was at fault for the violence in America. Speaking at the 1969 hearings of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, he quoted Albert Bandura (the researcher behind the famous Bobo doll experiments): "It has been shown that if people are exposed to televised aggression they learn aggressive patterns of behavior. There is no longer any need to equivocate." Johnson's speeches and articles were bound together in a book — *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set* was the title of it — and in it are found Johnson's own words on television and violence. "One cannot understand violence in America," he wrote, "without understanding the effects of television violence upon that violence."

**I**t was not just violence that was traced to television in *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set*. It was many of America's social ills. "How many more crises must we undergo before we begin to understand the impact of

television upon *all* the attitudes and events in our society?" Johnson pleaded. "How many more such crises can America withstand and survive as a nation united? Are we going to have to wait for dramatic upturns in the number and rates of high school dropouts, broken families, disintegrating universities, illegitimate children, mental illness, crime, alienated blacks and young people, alcoholism, suicide rates and drug consumption?"

Such failings, in Johnson's perspective, were due to the outsized, profiteering television industry. Its greed led it to beam numbing, belittling messages at the audience — a state of affairs that continued because of the lack of proper controls on the media. The networks were being allowed to undermine all that was good and constructive in American life. "What right has television to tear down every night what the American people are spending \$52 billion a year to build up through their school system?" he implored.

But the situation was not beyond repair. Johnson envisioned a much altered media system, in which television would be charged with carrying out nobler functions. The waywardness of the past little while could be corrected. "The media must mold the opinion of tomorrow's polls — not, like the calculating candidate, simply mirror the passion of yesterday's mobs. They must educate," he urged.

This didactic role for television would receive much guidance from a proposed "Citizens' Committee on Broadcasting," composed of between 50 and 200 specially selected experts. As Johnson imagined it, the Committee would operate apart from both the government and the broadcasting industry. It would monitor broadcasting and investigate prevailing practices. The vigilance of the Committee would result in program standards which would help shape the content of television.

Whether or not this is a potentially dangerous proposal, it is one that might be expected from a Media Snob. A

Media Snob is someone who is scornful about television, and who refuses to understand how the medium presently works and what the benefits are that it brings its enormous audience. A Media Snob is also capable of being condescending about people who do watch the shows. As mentioned before, there is a bit of Media Snobbery in everyone, and from time to time it rises to the surface when we chastise television programming. But we should be aware of where these sentiments often come from and what they truly signify.

**F**or years Media Snobbery has been the most spelled-out response to the coming of television plowed into American life, it is not surprising that this response has been largely reactive and negative. If Americans were bowled over, Media Snobs were at least trying to get to their feet and fight back.

Nor, as we'll see, is it surprising that Media Snobbery would issue from that stratum of society which most sensed itself to be challenged by the onrush of television. It is only reasonable that the more privileged groups would feel resentful toward an upstart medium which in their eyes was outrageously plebeian. People should not have been startled when in 1961 President Kennedy's newly appointed Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Newton Minow, a wealthy lawyer, lashed out at a national convention of broadcasters, "I invite you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air and stay there without a book, magazine, newspaper, profit and loss sheet or rating book to distract you — and keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland. You will see a procession of game shows, violence, audience participations shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, western bad men, western good men, private eyes, gangsters, more

violence, and cartoons." (And people probably should not have been puzzled to read some time later that Minow confessed he himself enjoyed watching television, especially one favorite show, *Get Smart*.)

Media Snobs hold two apparently contradictory opinions about the damage television is supposed to be doing. The first is that television speeds viewers up, and the second is that television slows them down. As *Washington Post* television writer Tom Shales puts it, "Some say TV has created a generation of snarling vicious dogs who rape and maim willy-nilly, and some say it has created a culture of benumbed ciphers drained completely of the will to fight back." Books by Media Snobs often put forth both positions simultaneously.

Regarding the first issue, that of violence, college professor Rose Goldsen writes in her *The Show and Tell Machine*, "Many people of good will find it hard to believe that a national menu specializing in shows centered on killing has no ill effects." The bent toward violent shows is in the very nature of the machine, states Jerry Mander in *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*. Since television has such poor picture quality, he argues solemnly, it is best suited to the depiction of overblown emotions of the rock-'em sock-'em sort.

In the second, contrary tenet of Media Snobbery, television does not so much stir people up as knock them out. Rose Goldsen refers ominously to "a single massive desensitization session conducted daily and nightly via coast-to-coast hookup." Jerry Mander proclaims, "Television suppresses and replaces creative human imagery, encourages mass passivity, and trains people to accept authority." Media Snobs frequently declare that viewers are being drugged into submission by the medium.

Actually, both Media Snobs and the rest of the public agree that television tranquilizes people. "Relaxed" and "restful" are what viewers say they feel after watching a few shows. There may be lit-

tle agreement about the relationship between televised violence and real world violence, but on this second issue there is consensus regarding effects. The question is whether or not tranquility is good. In his book Jerry Mander relates about his own viewing: "Even if the program I'd been watching had been of some particular interest, the experience felt 'antifeel,' as though I'd been drained in some way, or I'd been used. I came away feeling a kind of internal deadening, as if my whole physical being had

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**A Media Snob in the words of Gilbert Seldes "talks about 'the art of fiction' or 'the dramatic art' as if 90 percent of the books and plays offered to us each year weren't unmitigated trash."**

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gone dormant, the victim of a vague soft assault." He is describing in pejorative terms that same sensation that most viewers are actively seeking.

One thing that authors Goldsen and Mander share with most other Media Snobs is an adoration of the printed word and a conviction that television is undercutting it. "The literacy that goes with books and literature can free the mind, stretch the imagination, liberate the reader from his bondage to the present, linking him back to all of human history, all of human culture, all of human experience," proclaims Rose Goldsen, but: "Television now holds a virtual monopoly on whatever artistic and symbolic forms have a chance to be widely shared throughout the society." Mander agrees that print is the preferable means of communication, and maintains, "With books you are at least able to stop and think about what you read. This gives you some chance to analyze. With television the images just come."

This is as good a point as any to begin countering the notions of Media Snobs.

Their comparison of print media and electronic media is a jaundiced one. The truth of the matter is that as television-viewing has increased over the last three decades, so has book-reading. There are more members of book clubs, higher circulation of library volumes, a larger number of books sold per capita. Americans are reading as never before.

It is misleading to suggest, as Mander does, that a book-reader is in control of his situation while a television-viewer is not. Sets can be turned off as easily as books can be put down. But more generally, people watching television regulate their intake by simply letting their attention wander or by starting up another activity. John P. Robinson, the social scientist who established how Americans use the hours available to them, reports that for about half the minutes spent with television people confess that they are also doing something else — visiting, cleaning, eating, dealing with children. The viewer, not the set, controls the process. If anything it is probably books, coming with the cachet of authority, which are the better candidate for the accusation of forcing their way into people's brains.

When Snobs compare books and television, they frequently are not comparing typical examples of each. For them all books may be symbolized by the exceptional one which illuminates truth and beauty through the eloquence of its prose. A Media Snob, in the words of one thinker on popular arts, Gilbert Seldes, "talks about 'the art of fiction' or 'the dramatic art' as if 90 percent of the books and plays offered to us each year weren't unmitigated trash." Conversely, all of television is supposed to be equivalent to the shoddiest content ever sent over the airwaves. Instead of upholding these stereotypes, if Snobs were to take an average book — a mediocre piece of detective fiction, for instance — and compare that to middle-range television, the qualitative differences might even out.

Why do Media Snobs insist that the printed word is succumbing to the televised image? A hint comes from Rose

Goldsen, who writes ingenuously, "I confess I find it frightening to see control of access routes pass out of our own hands, out of the hands of artists, craftsmen, and lovers of art whose primary allegiance is to a work's authenticity, and into the hands of a small group of anonymous men and women ill equipped to take charge, unaware even of the extent of their responsibility." She is dismayed that management of communication channels is no longer exclusively in the hands of her sort of person, but now must be shared with others alien to her. This is a waspish but very human sort of reaction, experienced to some extent by everyone who is forced to shove over and make room, no matter what the context. The unfortunate thing is that in this instance a whole set of outlooks, and entire philosophy, as been constructed by Media Snobs on the base of what seem to be peevish feelings.

**T**here is more to the heated reaction of Media Snobbery than the competition between an older and a newer mode of communication. Partisans of these two modes are found at very different layers of the social hierarchy. Media Snobs are at home in the small patrician strata at the crest of society; literacy and literature are the markers of their membership. Naturally they are reluctant to let go of their favored position, and so set themselves in opposition to the social changes which they feel are benefiting the larger number of people at their expense. Because the popular culture which television carries is emblematic of these detested changes, it catches the brunt of their resentment. At bottom, Media Snobbery can be anti-democratic, embraced by those who dream of old modes of life where their social station was more hallowed and certain.

The underlying issues in the debate over television are those of social power. Sociologist Herbert Gans of Columbia University has observed that anti-television sentiments originate in class antagonisms, and in aristocratic longings

and attitudes which have yet to die out. What here is being called Media Snobbery, Dr. Gans concurs in his *Popular Culture and High Culture*, is "a plea for the restoration of an elitist order by the creators of high culture, the literary critics and essayists who support them, and a number of social critics — including some sociologists — who are unhappy with the tendencies toward cultural democracy that exist in every modern society."

In Gan's analysis, those who make the anti-television critique today belong to a class that a few centuries ago dominated cultural life. These were "the city-dwelling elites — the court, the nobility, the priesthood, and merchants — who had the tie, education, and resources for entertainment and art." With the advent of industrialization, changes in employment and the distribution of wealth brought about the rise of a huge market for the popular arts. Threatened and resentful, the precursors of Media Snobs were "fearful of the power of popular culture, rejected the desirability of cultural democracy, and felt impelled to defend high culture against what they deemed to be a serious threat from popular culture, the industries that provide it, and its publics."

Just as Gans implies, history reveals there is little new about Media Snobbery. The basic beliefs of a Media Snob are not original in the television era. They have been around as long as there has been a popular medium which has perceived to challenge the established social order. As soon as the patricians felt their position weakening, they fought back by deriding the culture of the plebeians. In England this began during the 18th century when popular literature was first appearing. In the United States in the 19th century it found its target in the penny paper and the dime novel, and in the first half of the 10th century it was radio and the movies. A minister wrote in 1919:

*The tendency of children to imitate the daring deeds seen upon the screen has*

been illustrated in nearly every court in the land. Train wrecks, robberies, murders, thefts, runaways, and other forms of juvenile delinquency have been traced to some particular film. The imitation is not confined to young boys and girls but extends even through adolescence and to adults.

And a prominent critic in 1930:

*The movies are so occupied with crime and sex and are so saturating the minds of children the world over with social sewage that they have become a menace to the mental and moral life of the coming generation.*

Television has simply become the focal point for a traditional disparagement. The less stratified society becomes, and the larger the middle class grows, then the more vitriolic the dislodged elite wax.

If Snobs cannot be outrightly hostile to the growing majority, they can be condescending. Snobs are liable to look down their noses at people who freely enjoy what television brings. Studies confirm that those who have reached high educational levels are the most critical of television, and the most likely to believe it's intended only for the less educated. Snobs will say patronizingly that television shows are designed for "the lowest common denominator." The use of this term, in fact, is one thing that marks Snobs off from everyone else. Seventeen years after he had described television as a "vast wasteland," on the day that he became chairman of the Public Broadcasting Service, Newton Minow was asked how commercial television had changed over the interim. "There's not been much improvement," he replied, "particularly on the entertainment side. There has tended to be an almost regular sinking to the lowest common denominator."

Let's consider this term, "lowest common denominator." In mathematics, where it came from, it is positively conceived of, and something to aim for.

For a group of fractions, it is the numerically lowest base which they all can be converted to, so that calculations can go on readily. Snatched from this application and applied to society, its implications change radically from positive to negative. The words "low" and "common" become derogatory, at least for a class-conscious Media Snob. Shows for the "lowest common denominator" are supposed to be churlish and tasteless, although in truth they are nothing more or less than shows for the majority. There is nothing wrong with "the lowest common denominator" in mathematics, or in an egalitarian land. Former FCC Commissioner Leo Loewinger has dealt thoughtfully with this term: "The cultural denominator of popular programs may be the *highest*, not the lowest that is truly common. The important point is that as television lets us share daily a common reflection of society and helps us see a similar vision of our relationship to society, it builds a common culture to unite our country. This appears to be its natural function and highest ideal."

**A**s much as Snobs may publicly belittle television viewers, it appears to be the case that privately they watch as much video fantasy as anyone else. George Comstock, chief author of the compendium *Television and Human Behavior*, summarizes the 1960 Steiner survey and the 1970 Bower one when he writes, "Despite the more frequent declarations of a desire for more informational and educational programming, the television diet of the better educated was about as heavily weighted with entertainment as that of the less educated." More explicitly, Bower had constructed what he called a Culture Index, calibrated by such activities as listening to operas and going to ballets. When he compared the television habits of those high in the Index with those at the low end, he discovered that the high spends 25 percent of their viewing time with comedies, while those at the low end

spent 26 percent. Time with action/adventure shows was equally close: 17 percent for those high in the Culture Index versus 16 percent for the lows.

Whatever differences in viewing time and choices there once may have been those of higher and lower status, the gap is closing. This is Comstock's conclusion as he looked back over thirty years of studies on audience behavior. The viewing habits of the less well-off had begun earlier and crested sooner, but the elites' time with television has continued to rise toward parity. By the mid-1970s the average viewing time of the affluent had approached the figures for the rest of society.

Every minute that Media Snobs spend ingesting television undercuts the idea they wish to spread about the poisonous effects of viewing, for they are not converted into ogres or reduced to being slugs by the experience, any more than anyone else is. If they truly believed that rousing or sedating content were a bad thing, they would have more than enough to attack within their own high culture. But operas do not get berated for raising passions, nor symphonies for soothing them; novels are not criticized for their turbulent action, nor poetry for its calming rhapsodizing. It is only when the greater number of people experience the same results through the popular culture of television that Media Snobs sally forth. Their barrage of criticism is loosened not to stave off the downfall of their fellowman or for any other glorious purpose but to save themselves from being swamped by the rapid expansion of the middle class and its culture.

**A**s Media Snobs, Nicholas Johnson, Rose Goldsen, and Jerry Mander have much in common. They each identify closely with the loftiest traditions of education and literacy, and they each are repulsed by the swift incursion of televisions. They also share in two deeply flawed conceptions about the nature of the new medium: they

think that messages flow only one way in the television system, from networks to viewers; and they think that what television delivers is instruction.

Media Snobs close their eyes to the fact that the television system is circular, and that messages are also sent back from the audience to the broadcasters. The importance of the feedback that comes via the ratings is not something that Snobs care to admit. They find it convenient to ignore that the senders and receivers of television programming are very much in tune with each other, just as senders and receivers are in any successful communications situation. Snobs would be right to infer that the networks and the viewers were not linked together by a two-way flow of communication if the audience turned away to paperbacks, movies, radio shows, live sports, comic books, or other fantasy sources, and if the television system collapsed as a result. But since the system has endured, then the feedback which brings stability must be pumping through it.

It is a one-way model of mass communication which underlies the thinking of Media Snobs. Television forces itself upon people whether they like it or not, Snobs suggest. This conception of television as bully is implied in the title of Johnson's book, *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set*. He is pretending that the public does not presently respond to the broadcast industry, and is not the most picky participant in the process of television programming. Jerry Mander refers to television as "the most powerful mind-implanting instrument in history," and Rose Goldsen is even more graphic when she calls the medium a "cattle prod." Snobs misperceive the loop as a lance.

The lance-throwers, in Media Snobbery's version of the mass media, are monolithic broadcasters. The television industry is conceived of in the way that giants are described in myths and fairy tales — all-powerful, towering, up to some horrendous business. Johnson described it as "without question the single

most economically and politically powerful industry in our nation's history." Rose Goldsen too views it as oozing power: "The power to dominate a culture's symbol-producing apparatus is the power to create the ambience that forms consciousness itself. It is a power we see exercised daily by the television business as it penetrates virtually every home with the most massive continuing spectacle human history has ever known."

In *Understanding Media* Marshall McLuhan came closer to the truth when he subtitled his chapter on television "The Timid Giant." Timidity does characterize the industry, for it is terrified of doing anything that might cause the audience to waver in its affection. As to whether or not it is a giant, television does not appear gigantic when stood up alongside other industries in American life. It is smaller in financial size than the tobacco industry, or the antiques business. Much of the gigantism a Snob sees in television is in the eye of the beholder.

The viewers in Media Snobbery's one-way model of television are thought

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**Media Snobs mistaken view of the media may derive from their outmoded sense of the nature of social life. Worshipping the past, they appreciate the world as it was.**

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of as if they were staked-out victims of the broadcasters' lances. Into their heads can be drilled all matter of content, according to this uncomplimentary view. Television images penetrate Americans' brains and refashion them according to its own liking, says Rose Goldsen: "It is minds they Make — and minds are always in the making." Jerry Mander agrees that Americans have succumbed to television, crying, "We have lost control of our images. We have lost control of our minds." Nevermind

that the likes and dislikes of the public determine programming, and that very few of the networks' hopeful offerings will pass muster with the fussy audience; as Snobs tell of it, it's viewers who are the supplicants.

**W**hy do Media Snobs insist upon a simple-minded rendition of the reciprocities involved in mass communication? Why are they reluctant to acknowledge that the content being broadcast is pretty much the content the audience is ordering up? There are several possible reasons.

Media Snobs' mistaken view of the media may derive from their outmoded sense of the nature of social life. Worshipping the past, they appreciate the world as it was, and insist that's how it still is. They are inclined to perceive a society that is more stratified than America's is today, more rigid, more governed by conventions of dominance and deference. Having an authoritarian's perspective on things, seeing the world in terms of higher and lower ranks, they peer into the dimly visible mechanisms of mass communication and manage to find there the same sort of pattern, in which a looming television industry beams images at a hapless audience. Inferiors are under the control of superiors, just as in their reveries. Their antiquated model of the world — valid decades ago, yet still saluted by Snobs — is a deficient model of how communication works today.

It is possible there are psychological factors bound up in Snobs' choice of the one-way model. Their particular mental image of television might be telling about the nature of their own deepest feelings. When Snobs look at a communications situation which they are unable or unwilling to understand, one as vague to them as an ink blot, they may ascribe to it sentiments which lie deep within themselves. If they sense subconsciously they are being edged out of their rightful place in society, they could be experiencing strong and vengeful

emotions. They may insist that television is doing what they themselves secretly want to be doing — gunning down the common man, blowing the majority to smithereens.

If Media Snobs were to concede that television is best described as two-way and transactional, then they would have to concede that the system was sound in that the senders and receivers were attuned to each other and communication was taking place. This is an admission Snobs would be loath to make, for their interests are best served by an insistence upon a broken, discreditable system. In the teeth of tall evidence to the contrary Nicholas Johnson feels compelled to assert, "To say that current programming is what the audience 'wants' in any meaningful sense is either pure doubletalk or unbelievable naivete." He's the one guilty of doubletalk and naivete here, but if he reversed himself and admitted that current programming is what the public wants, his condemnation of television would be robbed of much of its indignation.

The second misconception of Media Snobs dovetails with the first. Not only do Snobs blindly misperceive the television system, they also misunderstand its content. The messages which would best suit Media Snobbery's lame model of mass communication would be what Gerhardt Wiebe called *directive* messages — those which impart new information and call for learning and adjustments. Such messages depends more on the force of the transmission than on the willing reception of the audience. And these are just the messages Snobs contend television carries, for they believe the medium's prime effect is to teach. They talk as if television trafficked in information or instruction for the greater part, not in fantasies.

"Consider what we learn about life from television. Watch for yourself, and draw your own conclusions," urged Nicholas Johnson, proposing a kind of intense viewing done with all one's critical and conscious faculties at the fore. But people don't watch television

that way, and so they don't generally learn from the medium. At another point Johnson remarks, "By the time the average child enters kindergarten he has already spent more hours learning about his world from television than the hours he would spend in a college classroom earning a B.A. degree," in the belief that these are the same kind of experience, instead of the opposite. Compounding his error, Johnson wants television to stop doing what it's doing

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**A study on viewers comprehension was done in 1980 for the American Association of Advertising Agencies, and the result could only be surprising to someone who didn't understand the functions of the medium.**

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and start up the brand of instruction he favors, as if the medium could.

Rose Goldsen as well believes television is instructive, saying vividly that "the United States enjoys the dubious distinction of having allowed the television business to score a first in human history: the first undertaking in mass behavior modification by coast-to-coast and intercontinental electronic hookup." As Jerry Mander sees it, "the viewer is little more than a vessel of reception," and television trains people to accept authority."

However, television could hardly be worse at putting information into brains or causing viewers to change the way they are. Considering the enormous size of the audience, and the extraordinary number of hours spent viewing, the most astounding feature is that so little is absorbed. Only a very few of the countless images which television sends the audience's way stick in brains; all the rest come and go, ripping on. Television pulses through the unconscious, cleaning it out, and has remarkably little effect

upon the conscious mind or upon memory. A study on viewer comprehension was done in 1980 for the American Association of Advertising Agencies, and the results could only be surprising to someone who didn't understand the functions of the medium. More than 90 percent of viewers misperceive at least part of whatever kind of programming they watch. People routinely misinterpret between one-fourth and one-third of any broadcast, whether it's entertainment, news, or commercials. Would the figures have been even higher if the study hadn't been commissioned by an organization with a vested interest in maintaining that television can teach? Perhaps. For television can't, or more precisely, can't very much.

**I**n the modern era, instruction continues to come from where it always has — the real world. The family, the schoolroom, and the workplace remain the touchstones of Americans. In those situations people learn the sharp lessons in how the world works and in what its tolerances and protocols are. There values are hammered out, attitudes are molded, abilities are honed, ambitions are made reasonable. The potential losses are too disastrous and the potential rewards are too attractive to allow for much misperception and miscalculation. Every functioning human is a person who has been trained and retrained by reality, and who has brought his behavior within the range of the permissible and directed it toward the praiseworthy.

It is true that in the absence of real-world information television can offer some hunches. But for most people these are only provisional and will be discarded whenever they are controverted. For instance, many people do not have close contact with the professional roles that television drama makes full use of. When we actually come to deal with a doctor or lawyer or policeman, our expectations may be shaped by the behavior of video heroes. Then the doctor may be prompted to explain that he is not

Marcus Welby, or the lawyer that he is not Perry Mason. When the policeman scoffs at Kojak, most people will adjust to the newly apparent reality. For it is reality which is the binding lesson. Fantasy does not override real-world familiarity. No high school student expects to enter *Room 222* or be taught by Gabe Kaplan.

In a chapter entitled "The Myth of a Lack of Impact," Nicholas Johnson tries to deny the fact that television does little by way of instruction. One of his counterarguments is that Dr. George Gerbner had proven it does. By far the most conspicuous social scientist digging into the question of television's effects, Gerbner is dean of the prestigious Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. Together with his colleague Larry Gross, he has been keeping close track of televised violence since the 1967-68 viewing season. Annually in the spring Gerbner and Gross release their "Violence Profile," which purports to reveal violence levels for the season just past. The figures are widely disseminated by the wire services, and appear in local newspapers commonly under a headline stating the percentage increase or decrease from the previous year.

**A**long with the Violence Profile comes what Gerbner and Gross call their "Cultivation Analysis," which supposedly measures the social effects of television mayhem. The theory of Gerbner and Gross is that broadcast violence is accepted by certain segments of the public as information about the real world. The two researchers state that the medium "cultivates" fright and anxiety in these wide-eyed viewers. "The prevailing message of television is to generate fear," they say. For proof they claim to have found a statistical correlation between heavy viewing (four or more hours per day) and exaggerated perceptions of threat (gauged by asking people to estimate the chances of being involved in a violent incident, and then

comparing the guesses to known national figures). This is the kind of instruction Nicholas Johnson is referring to.

Assuming for the moment that a correlation does exist between heavy viewing and fearfulness, it is not clear that Gerbner and Gross's theory would provide the best explanation. Recall that, according to Bower's shrewd analysis, heavy viewers are those with the greatest opportunity to view — they are not in the labor force. These are women, the poor, and the elderly — in short, the powerless, and the most likely to actually be victims in the real world. It could be the harsh realities of their lives and communities, and not the unrealities of television fantasy, that lead them to predict high chances of violence. Truth, not misguidance, could be behind Gerbner's figures. And in fact, another study which made allowance for the crime rates in respondents' neighborhoods could find no statistical relationship between the extent of television-viewing and fear of being a victim.

But theories aside, it turns out that Gerbner and Gross's demonstration of a correlation between viewing and apprehension is deeply marred. An examination of their statistics was published in the journal *Communication Research* in 1981 by Dr. Paul Hirsch, a sociologist at the University of Chicago. Hirsch said he found it amazing that work as important as that of Gerbner's, which had exerted such a pronounced influence on thinking about the mass media, had undergone so little scrutiny by other social scientists. A 1978 study had discovered that Gerbner's Cultivation Analysis did not apply to British television or viewers, but no one in the United States had troubled to reanalyze Gerbner's original data. This Hirsch did.

What Hirsch found was at variance with Gerbner's conclusions. Instead of heaviest viewers being the most fearful, Hirsch learned that *non-viewers* were the most frightened of all. And that within the category of heavy viewers, those who watch eight or more hours

were *less* fearful, not more, than those who watch four to seven hours daily. The relationship between viewing and fearfulness was highly inconsistent. Hirsch also discovered that the apprehension of people in such victimized groups as blacks, females, and the elderly was statistically independent of the amount of television seen. All in all, Hirsch ended with scholarly reserve, "acceptance of the cultivation hypothesis as anything more than an interesting but unsupported speculation is premature and unwarranted at this time."

Another leg is pulled out from under the Snobbish conviction that television puts things into brains. I am not trying to say that television does not teach anything, for clearly it does to some limited extent. Television news does bring the public a dollop of information. At election times the medium has a great deal to tell us about the candidates. And commercials alter enough behavior to make the effort worthwhile to advertisers.

But when discussing the instructive capabilities of American television, a sense of proportion is needed. For the five million hours of programming broadcast annually, to an audience of over 200 million people viewing several hours daily, the amount of learning is undeniably miniscule. The reason is that *directive* messages are not what viewers want, so they are not what networks can afford to send. Snobs are deceiving themselves in thinking television steers people around. The audience demands what Wiebe calls *restorative* content — those slight fantasies that sponge minds free of tension ■

This article is excerpted from the recently published book *Television Viewers vs. Media Snobs: What TV Does For People* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers). Jib Fowles is Professor of Human Sciences and Humanities at the University of Houston at Clear Lake City, Texas. He is also the author of *Mass Advertising as Social Forecast* and editor of the *Handbook of Futures Research*.

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# LOOKING AT CABLE: THE HEALTH NETWORK

**R** for programming health 'round the clock: medical news, instant therapy, tips on cooking, child care and lifestyles, and a dash of S-E-X. All this, and Regis Philbin, too.

## BY HARRIET VAN HORNE

**A**s the editor of any Sunday supplement will testify, most editorial matter falls into three basic categories: sex, food and health. Toss in some smart pieces on celebrities & secrets, home decorating and child-rearing and you have all the hooks you'll ever need to pull the crowd under the tent.

If the formula works so neatly with the printed word, might it not send up a shower of sparks on the TV screen? That's the rationale behind the Cable Health Network. It's on the air seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Programs are devoted to diet, exercise, emotional problems, addictions, new developments in medicine and dentistry and — in titillating doses — sex. The mixture is drawing a substantial audience, tons of mail and the respect of a world hard to please — the health care professionals.

As a professional viewer, I am obliged to watch everything that moves, at least once. At my house the channels offering all-sports, all-weather and all-rock or all-country music are instant room emptiers. But the Health Network has had visitors mesmerized. Even if you have no immediate involvement, you are — at moments — almost a participant rather than a spectator.

Besides show business professionals, you will hear, day after day, the wisdom of some impressive medical men. There is no pandering to the 12-year-old mind,

nor do the doctors talk medical school jargon. If you listen carefully you can learn a lot.

Surprisingly, there's a kind of innocence and freshness about these health shows. Everybody seems to care greatly about the well being of that unseen audience. In the group therapy sessions, people seem to care about one another. Out of the 24-hour schedule, only two shows strike me as "painted lilies," not quite straight and deliberately reaching for the sensational.

These shows, which interpret that word "health" very loosely, are *Crisis Counsellor* and *Human Sexuality*. Not surprisingly, these are the network's outstanding hits. Each half-hour segment is run three times a day.

Thomas Thompson is the family counsellor whose mission it is "to find healthy family dynamics and new techniques for communication." The families who slink into his plant-filled set strike one as being far beyond the reach of counselling. They look and sound pathetic. Their problems are as obvious as a dog run over in the road.

At first glance they would seem to need medical treatment, lessons in manners, diction and grammar. Above all, one would guess that they need money. They are, almost always, unattractive. It comes as a surprise to learn that they are all *actors*, improvising scenes based on actual cases in Dr. Thompson's files. They are paid scale and one may say they earn every penny.

A recent program had Dr. Thompson

advising a young couple, Randy and Judy, whose marriage was being destroyed by his jealousy. Judy had a job she loved, selling perfume in a department store. Jealous Randy popped in one day and saw her spray a few drops on a

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### **Her cheery sign-off is "Enjoy your sexuality!" Her guests clearly are not enjoying theirs.**

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male customer's hand. He knocked the man down. Security guards took him away. Charges were filed and Judy lost her job.

"I'm glad I hit him," said Randy.

"Are you an insecure person?" asked the counsellor.

And oh, my, was he ever! Abandoned by his mother at five, he was raised by a father who hated all women. "Nobody ever loved me until Judy came along," he said.

Asked if he understood the source of his belligerence, Randy replied, "This is my woman. Has been for ten years."

Whether these lines are culled from Dr. Thompson's tapes — which seems likely — or improvised by the actors, they ring true. This Randy (the original) was clearly paranoid, a violent man with a deep grudge against women. Therapy with a family counsellor hardly scratches the surface of such defenses.

Sitting there in his plaid shirt and shabby vest — with his absurdly large mustache — Randy looked all too familiar. He's the man who runs amok with a gun on a busy street, the man we see getting into the sheriff's car, handcuffed, charged with rape or homicide. He's probably a psychopath, with an illness requiring custodial care. The home folks may well be confused.

"Be careful what questions you ask me," Randy threatens.

"It's just these four walls and us," says the doctor — and you wonder if the Joe or Harry or Bill who was the prototype might be watching.

It's an unpleasant program, very much at odds with the mood and style of other CHN shows. What puzzles me is — Where did the producer find such ideally scruffy actors?

Also playing three-a-day on CHN is Sandra Goldsmith, Registered nurse and "certified sex educator." Her session is called *Human Sexuality* and her cheery sign-off is "Enjoy your sexuality!" Her guests clearly are not enjoying theirs. They are real people, not actors. They have all the usual sex problems, plus some born of the hang-loose life style, you may never have heard of before.

Nurse Goldsmith's guests are of two types: the culturally and emotionally deprived and the slightly loony sexual show-off. Whichever type they are, you will be awfully glad you don't know them.

There is something "smarmy" about this sex session, something not really in the interests of healthy sex. Miss Goldsmith, a handsome woman with nicely coiffed gray hair, strives for detachment, and fails. She is too curious, too involved. She comes to TV with two facial expressions: wide-eyed astonishment and wide-eyed anguish. Sometimes you wish she'd say, "I have more questions but I think we should discuss them after the show."

Nurse Goldsmith's guests come on singly or in a pair. Sensibly, she often has on hand another expert who tries to patch up a messy bedroom life with little helpful hints such as, "You must stay in touch with your feelings."

On a recent show the expert was a sex therapist who varied the advice just a little. She recommended staying in touch with one's body. For the supplicant whose sex life was ashes, ashes, the therapist described a procedure for igniting the old sparks. "Stand in front of a mirror naked, just the two of you, and admire each other. Give each other little pats. . ."

When time ran out Nurse Goldsmith hustled her guest off the set with, "Emily, you have given us all a lot to do and we

really should get started. . ."

The only humor on *Human Sexuality* is inadvertent, as when our certified sex therapist said to a philandering male, "You're just a Don Quixote, aren't you?" Somehow, word got to her just before the show went off. "I meant to say Don Juan," she told her guest. Chances are he preferred Don Quixote.

There's apparently no subject Miss Goldsmith regards as taboo. Incest, venereal disease, certain mechanics of sex, even the so-called "G-spot", have come under her scrutiny.

**T**hese two shows, *Crisis Counsellor* and *Human Sexuality*, are the smash hits of Cable Health Network. They are definitely not the best shows, however, no more than *Dallas* and *Dynasty* are the best the networks have to offer. There's no disputing the power of the popular mind.

*Regis Philbin's Health Styles* is a true magazine show, with a daily cooking feature, interviews with authors of health books and physical stunts, such as weight lifting or "roller-skiing." Philbin is quick and funny, particularly when he interviews.

On a day when his theme was "mid-life crisis" his guest happened to be Pamela Mason. She preferred to discuss the many mid-life crises of her ex-hus-

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**Have you a bad habit you'd like to break? June Lockhart interviews somebody who overcame smoking, drinking, gambling, stammering, driving too fast or biting his nails.**

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band, James Mason. "Men do have a terrible time," she confided. "James fell seriously in love. The girl did not respond, so he had a heart attack."

Subsequently, Mason solved the mid-

life crisis, his former spouse confided, by marrying "an Australian contortionist." But he never, she said, "replaced me intellectually."

A glance at the Health Network schedule suggests that the founders have plotted the day with taste and cunning. *The Body Factory* is an exercise program presided over by sleek but muscular Candy Colby. *The Charlie Rose Show* follows the old chat-with-the-studio-audience format. Each day a new topic and guest expert, then a stroll through the audience (very small) to ask, "How do you feel about it?"

Have you a bad habit you would like to break? June Lockhart, still a great beauty, interviews somebody who overcame smoking, drinking, gambling, stammering, driving too fast or biting his nails. Sometimes the habit breaker is famous, sometimes it's an ordinary — and often boring — citizen.

One of the network's best features is *Cable Health World Report*, a news program about new developments in science and medicine. Joseph Benti is the anchor man and he calls in experts representing various disciplines, from otology to nuclear physics. This is a half-hour I try not to miss.

A similar program is *Medical Marvels*, a report on crucial advances in treatment. You will meet handicapped people, people with incurable diseases, and people who have recovered from incurable diseases. The show is filmed on location, not on one of those thickly planted sound stages. New surgical techniques and new drugs figure prominently in the report.

No viewer can say that the Health Network is not educational. It's also — excepting those two smash hits — sensible and pleasant. The network's two founders, Dr. Arthur Ulene, a California gynecologist, and Jeffrey Reiss, an executive vice-president of Viacom until 1981, have blocked out their schedule with keen intuition. They have exploited what they call "The life-saving power of TV."

Before launching the project, the

partners did extensive polling. Their most significant finding: four out of five American adults hunger for TV programs dealing with health and medicine. They see the Health Network's mission as a noble one, i.e., "changing behavior and improving lives."

Can your life be changed by aerobic dancing? An instructor who looks and sounds like Dinah Shore hopes so. Will six inches off your thighs improve your chances of marriage? If you are under 40, maybe so. The program, *It Figures*, will do its best. The work-outs and the cool-downs are briskly handled by Charlene Prickett who wears beautiful leotards.

For parents with small children, actor John Schuck and his wife, actress Susan Bay, discuss life with the little ones. Pediatricians and teachers are frequent guests.

*Reader's Digest Lifetime* puts flesh on the magazine format with a trio of interlocutors conducting inspirational interviews.

Paula and Diana von Welanetz, gourmet chefs with their own cookbook to guide them, cook the kind of nutritious meals you wish you could snatch off the screen and eat. Celebrity guests "help" in the kitchen.

Dr. Tom Cottle, a psychologist who makes people cry, is the whipper-in for *Real Life Stories*. Viewers—like the studio guests—visit homes of people who are coping with formidable problems. Loneliness, financial ruin, sickness and the death of a loved one are standard topics. Cottle is smart and sympathetic, though his probing touch is not always delicate.

The concerns of Americans over 50 are discussed each day in a "rap session" presided over by actor Arthur Hill. The panel, ranging from late 40s to early 60s is in no sense a cross-section of America. One elderly man has recently ended years of drug addiction. An ex-actor and ex-alcoholic talks candidly about old sins in a manner not usually met in your normal salon conversation.

It's the marathon specials that have

brought the Health Network its grandest accolades. Last fall some fairly glittering celebrities joined a panel of cardiologists on an unprecedented symposium on heart disease and high blood pressure. Tab Hunter talked about his heart attack and 15 cardiologists manned a bank of telephones during the four-hour live telecast. They remained on call for four more hours after the show.

Other celebrities with ailing hearts who dropped by for chat included Rod Steiger, Robert Guillaume and Tom Wopat. With 41 million Americans suffering from some form of cardiovascular disease, this program drew a sizeable audience.

**F**rom some 20 pages of notes compiled during two weeks of watching the Cable Health Network, here are some notable quotes, mostly the sort you do not hear on other channels.

Said Sally Struther: "If I don't have chicken almost every day I become hostile."

Question to a dentist: "Does your sex life suffer when all your teeth are extracted?"

Dentist: "Yes. It's like a mastectomy. You lose your normal 'body image'." ■

Harriet Van Horne, a syndicated columnist, is contributing editor of *Television Quarterly*.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *As this article went to press, news came of a proposed merger between Hearst/ABC Daytime and the Cable Health Network. The two networks will probably be combined in a single service. How the two services will be integrated has not yet been announced.*

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network you can spend money on, or time with, and feel good about. Cable News Network. High quality broadcast journalism. Reporting that's as exciting as the world it covers. Television that informs. That contributes. The kind of advertising environment you can be proud to be a part of.

It's television without guilt. If you haven't discovered it yet, come on over. And take a load off your back.



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# THE ARTS AND SCIENCES OF LOCALISM

A veteran broadcaster offers some ideas about ways stations can meet the competition of cable and other newcomers.

**BY MARTIN UMANSKY**

**I**f you ever come to Wichita, Kansas, you can look me up: I'm in the phone book.

That may not sound like a claim to distinction. But general managers of television stations who have a listed phone are a rare breed, especially if they run aggressive stations that are deeply involved in community affairs, and they personally take strong editorial positions on controversial local issues and appear regularly to answer viewer complaints. I have been one of these managers for twenty-eight years.

In my philosophy of station operation, being accessible by telephone, via television or in person, is extremely important for good community relations. A station's success, of course, is primarily measured by the size and quality of the audiences its programs attract — elements that are influenced by its credibility and how well the community recognizes and appreciates the station. Such influence is enhanced by top management's visibility and accessibility — basic ingredients of what in broadcast circles is being called *localism*.

For many stations, localism has become the battle cry of the future — the future of television stations that plan to survive the onslaught of fierce competition for their viewers' attention. In the new electronic alphabet war broadcasters more and more are worrying about sharing audience with multiple cable

services, computers, videotapes, discs and games, STV, LPTV, HDTV, MDS, SMATV, DBS, Teletext, etc., etc.

Some station operators fret and worry as they confront the Electronic Revolution. Others do something about it. Still others, have been doing it for many years; these are the leading stations in the country — those which dominate their markets, maintain the highest ratings, earn the most income and profits — the stations that serve their communities in a superior fashion.

Or as Congressman Al Swift, himself once a local broadcaster, put it in a recent article in *Television Quarterly*:

"Broadcasting has an unparalleled ability to reach and serve an audience with local programming. Most others have no local capability at all. Others have no demonstrated interest in meeting that need."

A simple example of community service relates to an antique-looking violin hanging in my office which often prompts visitors to ask whether I play. Yes, I may quip, I play "Hearts and Flowers" for staff members asking for a raise. Actually, the violin is a gift to me from the Wichita Symphony Women's Society for turning a potential financial disaster into a profitable community success. This remarkable turnabout was accomplished through Public Service Announcements.

We became involved when the Symphony Society Committee came to me out of desperation. Tickets were not selling for a performance of the Black Watch Fife and Drum Company of Scotland, which had been booked to raise money

for the Wichita orchestra. Instead of raising funds, it appeared likely that the Society would lose \$7,000 committed for the event.

With only limited time left to save the cause, we sent overseas for film of the Scottish performers' most spectacular acts (a saber dance and the like), found suitable music, produced two exciting 30-second spots with special appeal to children and scheduled 50 spots over a two-week period.

Happy ending: the show was sold out. Over 10,000 overflowed the field house arena. The Symphony Society achieved its goal, and the station stood a little higher in the public's esteem.

**L**ocal service, in all its ramifications, is the principal element that separates a television station from the awesome competition of the electronic future. Actually, local service is the one area new technologies seem to have little interest in providing. Perhaps they are limited by their very technology. Moreover, up to now at least, they demonstrate little interest in spending the money necessary to develop news, local shows and other services that can compete with local over-the-air TV stations. In all other program areas, the local broadcaster faces growing competition — in entertainment programming, in national and international news, in how-to, self-improvement type programs, and other "narrow-casting" fare, and, of course, in movies. Only in local service does the local station have unique strength and opportunity.

The localism philosophy of KAKE-TV has been to set operating goals to help improve the quality of life in our community and to attempt to correct existing inequities. I confess that I suffer from a self-induced affliction known as "Tomorrow the World Syndrome.": I believe that the community is a microcosm, a miniature of the world. If the problems of the community can be solved, the problems of the world also are solved.

Our principal standard bearer is an

aggressive, dedicated news department. It concentrates on substantive news — but news that is more than the simple coverage of the hard stories and the daily civic events; news of significance, covered thoroughly and objectively. We also believe in investigative reporting that tackles problems of the community and, with editorial follow-up, often helps bring about needed changes.

For example, when KAKE-TV learned about unsanitary conditions in many restaurants, we arranged to follow the health inspector as he checked eating places. Our 45-part series led to a change in the local health laws and a better inspection system. Now restaurants are graded for sanitation — with an A, B, or C rating prominently posted for patrons to see.

The battle for safe and clean dining-out was a tough one. The Restaurant Association, upset, went into action. Sponsors pulled advertising. Secondary boycotts were launched against us. A major order from a coffee company was cancelled. At our staff sales meeting, a burly salesman with tears in his eyes complained to me, "Why are you doing this to us?"

One firm sued us for invasion of privacy and pursued the suit through a jury trial which KAKE-TV won, and then to an Appeals Court judgment, which we barely won. There were plans to take the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the final assault was called off.

It soon became evident the new sanitation regulations were good for the restaurant business, because people now were more confident about eating out. All the lost advertising was eventually reinstated. To this day, several years later, people have strong, positive memories of our restaurant series.

**A**nother series on discrimination in private clubs produced trouble even before it aired — from my own Board of Directors, whom I had notified in advance, because many were members of these clubs.

They objected vigorously to our running the series because of the embarrassment they would face from fellow members. It took desk pounding and firm restating of the station's function in serving the community — including the need to help correct prejudice in high places — before their objections subsided.

Other protests came from advertisers. One local sponsor resented what he perceived as an attack on his country club and has kept his advertising from us ever since. The president of a major local agency called to tell me that he was upset. He had been embarrassed by his teenage son who had watched the series with him and questioned how his dad could belong to a club that discriminates.

I asked the advertising executive whether he had talked it over with his son. He said that he had, quite at length. I said, wasn't it nice that he could have a long talk with his son about something important. He didn't answer for a moment, then said, yes it was. No more complaint!

These are problems worth having, if they result in some enlightenment. As an immediate result of the series, the local Junior League began to accept minorities as members. At a much later date, our country clubs started to accept some minority members, although blacks are still not among them.

A series on prescription drugs revealed that pharmacists often charged different prices for the same drug and dosage, depending on how they felt about their customers, what their moods were at the time or other whims. For instance, women wearing hair curlers offended one pharmacist who always charged them an extra twenty-five cents.

We also learned that when a copy of a prescription was obtained for a customer to take on vacation, many pharmacists coded it so that the out-of-town pharmacist would know what had been charged and would price it accordingly,

rather than charging considerably less, which would let the customer discover the back-home overcharging. Our reporters discovered that this rip-off technique actually had been taught in some pharmacy schools.

To the best of our knowledge, these practices have stopped. The community is more aware of pricing, and many pharmacies are posting prices for the most requested drugs.

A recent KAKE-TV community service project has had national significance. It was undertaken because I believe that Big Government in this nation is in large part the result of community neglect in solving local problems. The current Administration's plan to return to the community such responsibilities is a move in the right direction, in my opinion, provided that local government, business, churches and individuals pick up the burden. (The social responsibility of business has been a continuing editorial subject.)

**W**e developed a ten-part series called *Surviving Reaganomics*. This surveyed how the federal budget cuts would affect our social agencies and their various services, and what was being done to solve the problems. We also checked with many other communities to learn what they were doing, and to see whether Wichita could profit from their experiences.

The series came to the attention of the President's Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives, which was trying to encourage communities to take action. The President called a White House meeting for the heads of 30 broadcast groups and played our editorial and programs. Stations throughout the country received copies of the series and, since then some 40 stations have started similar programs.

Leadership in a market is more than having the top news operation, or some unique local programs, or editorializing regularly, or running PSAs or promoting special events. It is a combination of

all these and more that makes one outlet the "Favorite Station" in town, the station the community believes in, the *credible* station.

I've not mentioned network programs, though network, of course, is important in the success of an affiliate. But I believe it is more what the station itself does that makes the network (and itself) successful, rather than the other way around.

Some evidence of this theory is found in a recent study I requested of the ABC-TV Research Department, undertaken to determine if there is a demonstrable relationship between a station's early local news performance and the station's network news and overall status in the market. Nielsen November 1982 DMA ratings were used to analyze all 94 equal-facilities markets in the country.

The results indicate that when a station has a strong news operation and image, the overall performance of the station is usually above average. Specifically, the prime time performance among all network affiliates that rank #1 with their early local news is 5 percent higher than the overall three-network average. Sign on/sign off levels are 11 percent greater.

Irrespective of their network's national standing in the ratings, for the majority of stations that did best with their local news, their network news also was #1 in the market. It seems that as the affiliate goes, so goes its network.

**I** believe that the "Favorite Station" label relates to certain factors in a station's operation that, over the years, help to build a warm and confident relationship between the viewers and the station. Among these elements are what I call "Participatory Television" and "Growing a Generation of Fans," methods of integrating the station with the community, using programs and activities that physically involve the home audience, have continuity and eventually become traditions.

Television is generally deemed a

passive medium, but it can also be participatory. A simple example is an exercise program in which the home audience copies the host's movements. Another program that combines both participation and the idea of developing a second generation of viewers is our *Romper Room* show for pre-school children. Although it is a syndicated program that is considered rather passe these days (fewer than a dozen stations do their own; another small group takes the canned version), its continued success in Wichita supports my theory.

At our recent special 25th Anniversary *Romper Room* program, fifteen of the parents who brought their children produced childhood pictures of themselves as they appeared on the show years ago. Incidentally, the program is not scheduled in a "throw-away" time period. It is opposite Phil Donahue and *Hour Magazine* in the morning and competes strongly, often equaling or beating both in local ratings. Thousands of children in Wichita are *Romper Room* graduates, with warm memories of their experience and a continuing good feeling about the station.

A number of other syndicated programs both for adults and children such as *PM Magazine*, *Kidsworld* and the new *Newscope*, provide for local inserts and participation by KAKE-TV. I believe that more syndicated programs will be formatted to provide for local identity.

Another community-integrated program is our noontime *Kaleidoscope* program, a mix of news and weather information, entertainment showcasing local and visiting talent, and interviews with newsmakers and how-to experts. Home viewers are invited to call in questions. The program has been on the air for five years now, generally with a 50% share of the audience. Studio audiences or audiences at a major shopping center where the program originates 12 weeks a year are taken to lunch as guests.

There are many other year-round *localism* activities to involve the station with the community that make life just a little more enjoyable or meaningful and

at the same time, bolster the "favorite station" image:

*The KAKE St. Patrick's Day Parade.*

A people's parade featuring several thousand costumed children and adults marching through crowded downtown while thousands more watch on television.

*Celebrate the 4th.* A musical July 4th patriotic show capped with a spectacular fireworks display that draws an audience of 100,000 men, women and children to the stadium and surrounding area.

*KAKE Family Events.* Opening night half price tickets to the *Ice Capades*, Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey's Circus and the new live *Sesame Street* show.

*MD Telethon.* An annual fund-raiser that attracts hundreds of volunteer workers and thousands of donors.

*High Q.* A college bowl type, 15-week competition among the brightest teenagers of 50 area high schools.

*KAKE Health Fair.* A highly organized volunteer project that screens 15,000 adults for high blood pressure and other potential health problems.

*The KAKE Election Party.* A tradition of 28 years, in which community volunteers assist with the gathering and tabulating of election results, then join candidates in the studio for a buffet dinner.

*The KAKE Tele-Vote* that has polled Kansas preceding elections for 24 years, with remarkable accuracy.

Television broadcasters are privileged people, not because they hold the limited number of television licenses, but because they control a remarkable means of communication to which the American public is thoroughly devoted and through which stations can provide valuable community service — if they would. Unfortunately, too many have not done so. There was no need to, or so they thought.

Now that they are losing audience to the new competition, broadcasters must

look to *localism* to hold on to their viewers. But for some changing from benign neglect to active attention to local problems will not come easily. It will take almost a re-education of some American broadcasters to prepare them for this new role in the community and to help win the Battle for Audience.

To that end, a new and extensive program is being developed at the University of Missouri's prestigious School of Journalism, where an Endowed Chair of Local Broadcasting has been established in the name of Leonard H. Goldenson, head of ABC, Inc., by the ABC-TV Affiliates' Association. It is being funded by stations and group owners representing stations of all network affiliations as well as independents. The Hollywood creative community is also participating, as well as other groups related to the broadcast industry.

The academic program will consist of one- and two-week seminars and shorter workshops throughout the year for various levels of station management, including owners. It will be dedicated to developing new, and refining already known, ways station management can improve community service, plan for the future, and sharpen managerial skills.

In addition, a data bank will be established to gather and store the best experiences of participating stations in all areas of their operation — programming, news, promotion, community service, sales, engineering, etc. As strange as it may seem, there has rarely been any exchange of ideas or concepts of operation among managers of television stations. They rule their fiefdoms in an almost isolated condition sharing little or nothing with their counterparts elsewhere.

There are many valuable ideas and methods of operation that can be gathered, collated and made available to those who seek assistance. In simple terms, the strengths of leading stations can help lift the others. If all comes together and it works, stations nationwide will improve and prosper and the viewing public will benefit immensely. And

it may also stabilize — if not reverse — the downward trend of audience levels.

Most important — as a station operator — whether your good efforts are rewarded with higher ratings, more income and greater profits or whether you are gratefully presented with an old violin, nothing tops the special pleasure you get as a dedicated broadcaster when you know you have helped bring about needed change and improvement in your community.

About that violin in my office: I really can't play it. Besides, they never gave me a bow. ■

Martin Umansky is a broadcaster with almost 40 years of experience — as a radio news reporter and editor, continuity writer and producer, disc jockey, salesman and sales manager, and for the past 28 years general manager of KAKE-TV, ABC affiliate which has been #1 in the Wichita market for almost the entire period.

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

### *Vive Les Girls!*

“The latest fad in Paris is not for a new disco, brasserie, fashion or hair-style, and in view of new government restrictions on foreign travel, people are certainly not talking about the latest ‘in place’ abroad. What they are talking about and doing is: exercise. The fitness craze has swept the nation. . .

“Probably the leading force behind getting the French into their leotards is a TV program called Gym Tonic, which is shown at the decidedly unprime time of Sunday morning at ten and has a viewing audience of 7,000,000, or one French person out of eight.

“Gym Tonic is presented by two youngish women, Véronique de Villèle and Davina Delor, who are always referred to by their first names or, fondly by Antenne 2, their TV station, as les filles, The Girls.

Some people have sensibly suggested that Gym Tonic be moved to Saturday night prime time to play opposite Dallas. . . the girls have become France's newest big stars.”

—Mary Blume,  
London Standard.

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## LETTER FROM ENGLAND:

Morning Shows, Channel Four and Other New Dishes on the British Television Menu.

**BY JOHN PUTNAM**

*London*

**W**ith a lifestyle geared to the home (the Englishman's castle, remember?) and a television service that's the envy of most of the world, is it any wonder the British are video addicts? Which makes it all the more odd, then, why they seem to have rejected two promising new supplements to their TV diet — a new vitamin-enriched network which bowed last November, and a more recent move by the BBC and ITV networks into the new frontier of early morning television.

One possible reason for the big turn-off of both is as old as Britain itself — a leery philistine regard for, or even positive aversion to, the new and different, which both developments obviously were.

The new network, a commercial-supported carrier named Channel Four (known for short as C4), is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Independent Broadcasting Authority, which licenses and regulates commercial radio and television in the U.K. An act of parliament authorizing the network also obliged it to provide an "alternative" to BBC and ITV; up to a point, it consistently has done so.

Its most apparent alternatives have been regular minority offerings for blacks and other ethnic groups, labor unions, young people, gays and feminists. Another is Britain's first nightly hour-long newscast, whose other distinc-

tions include regular depth reports on economics and the arts as well as, for the first time on British video, guest "columns" of opinion.

Such programs probably could have been anticipated to have rated low-level audiences; the news too, partly because of its 7-8 p.m. time period, a slot with no precedent in the annals of news scheduling on British video. But C4 has been a boxoffice flop even with shows that were expected to draw — movies like *Network*, dramas like *Nicholas Nickleby*, grand opera by satellite from the Met in New York, and vintage comedy imports such as *Car 54, I Love Lucy* and *The Munsters*, in living black-and-white.

One of C4's few comparative success stories over the winter was American pro football action via edited off ABC tapes of NFL competition, plus live pickups of the Superbowl and Rose Bowl games!

Anyway, when the first low ratings came in the kibitzers couldn't resist. Channel 4 was quickly dubbed "Channel Bore." Fleet Street dailies began working it over for "political bias" and for "bad language" as well; debatable perceptions which could just as easily be applied to the other networks — and which in the past have been — with boring regularity. One commentator accused C4 in print of leaning over backward to curry favor with minorities and called it the "new fascism."

People who never sampled Channel Four were quick to get the message that it wasn't for them anyhow, like the little old lady who told a television interviewer

she'd never watched because — "well, you know, the language and all that." If she still hasn't looked in, she will also have missed *The Weavers: Wasn't That a Time* and reruns of *Brideshead Revisited*. But then again, neither may have been her cup of tea anyway.

From the accumulated evidence, a public consensus seems to have developed that C4 is too talky, too ethnic and too highbrow. In short, too elitist for the great mass of working class British, thus alienating the very audiences some of the network's 60 hours a week is designed specifically to reach; that C4's schedules do not really correspond to this perception is beside the point. The people have simply had their minds made up for them; in time, they may change.

Channel Four's weekly share of audience in competition with ITV and BBC's two networks began with a lowly six percent that quickly leveled down to around four, where it has more or less lodged ever since. Its best-rated shows (like a recent rerun of *Soap*) may attract something over two million viewers; those of ITV and BBC command double-digit audiences which sometimes rise to more than 20 million.

Jeremy Isaacs, a former program executive and freelance documentary producer with a substantial record of achievement, is C4's chief executive, and he refuses to be discouraged. His original timetable projected a commercially-viable share of 10 percent by the third year and "possibly" a six or seven by the end of this one. "I'm reasonably happy," he says.

But whether advertisers are is at least questionable. Nor is C4 exactly a big hit with the 15 ITV stations that are obliged to fund it by decree of the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

**T**his relationship calls for some background. Back in the early fifties, when the BBC still had a monopoly, parliament passed a bill creating the IBA's forerunner known as the Inde-

pendent Television Authority, which was to provide Britain with a commercial service. But instead of doing the job on its own, ITA, at its own discretion, farmed out the programming service by licensing individually-owned regional stations, and thus was born the ITV network.

Those stations (like Yorkshire, Granada, Thames, Central, London Weekend, et al) are not just licensed and regulated by the IBA (as it's been known since the start of commercial radio in the

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### **It may be too soon to talk about Channel Four's lasting impact, but not for praise of its early achievements in stretching the frontiers of programming.**

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early seventies) but also censored by it. That goes for the commercials as well as the programming. News and other live programs, which for obvious reasons cannot be cleared in advance, under the law still remain the IBA's responsibility. The ITV network, in other words, is a service of the IBA — which is where the parallels with our FCC end.

The stations are profitable, and some are very profitable, even after taxes and sizeable rentals to the IBA for its transmitters, and even now with the added obligations of funding Channel Four.

This year those 15 stations will "subscribe" (as the IBA prefers to call it) a total of £137,982,000, or something over \$210 million, to the support of C4, which in fiscal 1983-84 plans to spend £82 million for new programming; all of this will come from outside sources including the ITV stations and independent producing firms. C4 is Britain's first, and possibly the world's purest, carrier network, in that it has neither production facilities nor any "in-house" programs of its own. Even its news is serviced from without — by Independent Television News (ITN), the consortium agency which also supplies news coverage for ITV.

In return for helping to fund C4, the

ITV stations get a substantial credit against the profits surtax they pay to the British treasury, an offset which effectively makes C4 subscription charges far less staggering than they seem. Also, in return, each station has the exclusive right to sell commercial time on the new channel within its own coverage area.

But C4's anemic audience numbers so far means that its commercial spots have had to be sold at what the trade calls "distress prices." Even so, the sell hasn't been easy. And there's been an added complication from the network's start — a prolonged hassle between Actors Equity, the talent union, and the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (the 4A's of Britain) over the scale of performer residuals from commercials.

Because of C4's low ratings, the IPA insists those repeat fees should be reduced accordingly, which turns out to be way below what a performer gets for spot repeats on ITV. After first resisting the idea, Equity consented to a compromise, calling for 50 percent less than the normal repeat scale, but IPA claims even that is too high and the dispute, which has kept a lot of potential business off Channel Four, is deadlocked.

Until resolved or until such time as a bigger audience attracts more advertisers at higher prices, or both, the prospect of Channel Four yielding the ITV stations a satisfactory return will probably remain dim. Meantime, C4 has a handy excuse, which at least some sections of the press have bought without question, for trimming program budgets, cutting back on new shows and scheduling more repeats.

But those bargain spot prices resulting from C4's paltry viewing levels at least have had the positive effect of opening the medium up to small advertisers who couldn't afford it before, even on a local basis.

C4's circulation reach hasn't been helped any by the fact that as of now it only covers around 70 percent of the country, simply because the IBA has been slow to get all of the network's new relay transmitters into operation in time.

Isaacs figures that lapse is costing C4 between three and four million potential viewers. The network's "blank spots," significantly, include several areas of the country where high education and affluence levels make them a natural constituency for the fourth channel.

**I**t may be too soon to talk about the channel's lasting impact, but not for praise for its early achievements in stretching the frontiers of programming. True, some of those new access programs, like one affording the labor unions a platform for their views at a time when unions seem to have a negative image, are boring as charged. That may prove that good intentions aren't enough, but it's surely no argument against good intentions as such.

Those good intentions include a series of new British movies, like Jerzy Skolimowski's *Moonlighting* and Neil Jordan's *Angel*, both critically praised, and partly financed by C4. In this way, Channel Four also is helping to put Britain's new filmmakers on the international map. These are not made-for-TV movies, but features for theatrical exhibition, which are also guaranteed exposure on the network.

But if for nothing else, future broadcast historians will surely acknowledge C4 for the way it has extended the range of British viewpoints. Gloria Steinem would surely approve. So would the NAACP. So would anti-establishmentarians everywhere.

Taken as a whole, C4, the first new British network since the start of the BBC's second channel 18 years ago, seems to exhibit more good intentions, more sense of public service mission, than the medium has shown since the godfather days of John Reith, the first chief executive of BBC whose paternalistic belief in the medium's duty to inform and instruct as well as entertain set the tone for British broadcasting that more or less perpetuates to this day.

Our own American Broadcasting Act of 1934 which obliges stations to operate

in the "public interest, convenience and necessity" should only have been followed — both in letter and spirit — with as much fidelity.

**B**y comparison with TV-AM, Channel Four almost qualifies as a box-office hit. TV-AM is a brand new London-based station, licensed by the IBA over seven other contenders for the franchise, to supply the ITV channel with a national breakfast service. Since the beginning of February, the station has been pumping out a daily three-hour show called *Good Morning Britain* which statistically has gone all but unnoticed, pulling an average daily audience of around 400,000 in its first weeks before dropping to 300,000 or less. Commercial revenues, even at "distress" prices, sagged accordingly, and soon the station was in the red.

Under pressure from shareholders, within two months after startup the station ousted its chairman-chief executive, a former ambassador to the U.S. named Peter Jay, and two of its high-priced (upwards of \$90,000 a year) anchors, Angela Rippon and Anna Ford, both of whom made their names as video newscasters.

The roles of two other personalities, David Frost (who with Jay was among the station's founders) and Robert Kee, were downgraded. Under new management, some lesser executives also were let go, while salaries were either frozen or cut back for those who remained.

*Good Morning Britain* went on the air two weeks after the BBC's own rolling news, weather, etc., show called *Breakfast Time*, which has consistently outpointed the rival edition by a ratio of four-to-one or better. Those BBC numbers are at least respectable for openers, considering the British habit of starting the day with a newspaper or radio to go with the cornflakes.

Unlike Channel Four, TV-AM is not subsidized by anyone and as a free enterprise venture has to pay its own way out of commercial revenues. To survive,

it will need to do a great deal better.

Like C4, TV-AM has been an irresistible butt for the jokers. As the station's plight thickened, a distinct aroma of bitchy jealousy also emerged in the media, which soon tagged *Good Morning Britain's* lineup of names as the "Famous Five," a lift from a series of popular children's adventure books by English novelist Enid Blyton.

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**Provided they both weather their early problems and growing pains, there's every reason to suppose Channel Four and early morning television will eventually catch on.**

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One of the more predictable targets was David Frost — far too successful in far too many ways for Fleet Street's taste. As troubles mounted and Frost vanished from his daily sofa routine, TV-AM became the hottest story in the British Village, often page one, and on some nights even leading BBC-TV's prime network news.

After Ford and Rippon were sacked, the *Standard*, a London afternoon tabloid, editorialized that "the turmoil at TV-AM once again dominates the headlines out of all proportion to the station's influence or viewing figures" — even as the paper's own front page was dominated that very day, for the second day running, by the same turmoil. This is known as having your crumpet and eating it too.

The only success the new "breakfast" station could claim was for the million-plus viewers attracted to its weekend editions angled to the kids and anchored by popular talkshow host Michael Parkinson and his wife Mary. At the weekend, however, there was no competition from BBC, and that presumably helped. Parkinson not only was the only "Famous Five" name to remain in original place,

but he also in due course got a seat on the board of directors.

**G**ood Morning Britain, with its mix of news, weather, time checks, cooking tips, celebrity interviews, etc., has so far lacked the breakfast snap, crackle and pop — in a word, the pace — long since developed by, say, the American shows like NBC's *Today*, or ABC's *Good Morning, America*. Both British wake-up shows offer time "checks" in the form of a clock supered on the lower right-hand corner of the tube, leaving it at that — which fails to grasp the early morning video principle of radio-with-pictures. The British versions seem to suppose that everyone who's tuned in has nothing better to do at the time than gawp at the set.

But BBC's show *Breakfast Time* at least has the virtue of a more relaxed, informal presentation, better overall production, plus a seemingly click chemistry between anchors, Selina Scott, an attractive young woman, and the ad-lib polish of avuncular Frank Bough (pronounced buff).

*Good Morning Britain* has undergone a lot of tinkering lately and in the process has become a much softer and more trivial show. It has two new linking anchors in Nick Owen and Lynda Berry, who have yet to make a significant impression in either chemical or rating terms. Time grows short. The big stockholders have come up with more money to keep the station going, but meantime it still operates at a loss, and barring a reversal of form soon, there's a belief in some quarters that it could become the first licensed casualty in the history of British broadcasting. The first to go bust, that is.

That same Equity-IPA boycott dispute which has dimmed Channel Four spot sales has also hurt TV-AM for the same reason. But even had there been no such dispute, it's doubtful the company would be in profit today.

Provided they both weather their early problems, there's every reason to suppose C4 and morning television will

eventually catch on. After all, the resistant British once scorned the very thought of American junk food, but now can't seem to get enough of it. Patience is also needed; in the States, TV learned it can often take a long time to build an audience for an across-the-board show. After all, it took the pioneering *Today* several years of days to establish itself!

Meanwhile, as both TV-AM and Channel Four continue to battle against apathy, blinkers or whatever, the British government has finally flashed the green light for cable. This brave new step into the great unknown still requires enabling legislation, which isn't expected before sometime next year.

Assuming the final measure doesn't deviate significantly from a recent government policy paper, it will set up a Cable Authority to license and regulate system operators. The paper also okays pay-per-view (with certain restrictions), limited advertising but no porn, and insists operators should provide a basic cable service as well, which is one of the safeguards BBC and ITV had sought.

Even before passage of the bill, there could be a dozen "pilot" systems operating. It's expected that ultimately something like half the nation will be wired by the next decade, financed entirely by private investment, in line with the free enterprise philosophy of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

In recent months, a cottage industry in cable research has developed in Britain, and depending on which survey you choose to read and believe, there's either plenty of loose capital waiting to plug into cable, or not enough. Some surveys forecast juicy profits, others claim it will prove a long and risky struggle.

As they observe the shake, rattle and roll of cable in the U.S., especially the demise of CBS Cable and the shutdown of the Entertainment Channel, some Britons incline to the view that cable, as parliamentarian Jonathan Aitken said in the House of Commons, may yet prove to be a "license to lose money," a snappy switch on Roy Thomson's

famously candid crack years ago that Scottish Television, the commercial TV station he owned, was a "license to print money."

Some of that British money that couldn't wait to get into cable a few months ago now seems less certain of a rosy future in the new technology.

Also being debated is what effect, if any, cable might have on the future of conventional television, and especially BBC, an institution without which it's difficult to imagine life in the U.K. BBC itself not only seems unworried, but even avid to get in on the ground floor of new tech — it's already positioned for DBS with the lease of two transponders on a planned British Direct Broadcasting Satellite scheduled to be aloft and operational in 1986, one for a basic subscription channel, the other for pay-per-view offerings.

While the brouhaha over breakfast TV may seem overblown in a nation with Great Britain's social and economic problems, all the talk and tattle, however, reflect the passionate involvement of the British with their broadcasting system; so does their concern with the programming of Channel Four. Perhaps this is why they so often receive a radio and television service of substance and quality. ■

John Putnam, an American journalist living in the UK, is a close observer of the British media and showbusiness scene.

## R E P L A Y

### The Art of Flaherty

“... *The personal vision of the filmmaker may be a salvation for the documentary. Compare the work of Robert Flaherty, a half century ago, with the depersonalized travelogues of his time. The Fitzpatrick machinery ground out standard short subjects, aglow with descriptions of the exotic, but not with the sense of it. Superficial impressions kept the audience at a distance...*

*“Flaherty, on the other hand, is highly subjective in his accounts of Eskimos, Samoans and Aran Islanders. One doesn't have to agree with Flaherty's romantic outlook to appreciate his lively, human response and observation. Today, the details in Nanook of the North are still vivid... and one still reacts to the good humor and warmth of the people whom Flaherty knew so well, and was therefore able to portray so memorably. Flaherty's films have stature as documents not because they pretend to be objective, but rather, because they reveal an artist's interaction with what he saw. The singleness of his view-point allows the audience to see more directly and to appreciate, as in any artist's work, a deeper truth.”*

—Daniel Klughertz,  
Television Quarterly,  
Summer 1967



WPLG-TV MIAMI

the **Larry King**  
show

THE ONE  
& ONLY



WFSB HARTFORD

*Sonya*



The **Charlie Rose**  
Show



**SILENT  
REACH**

Australia



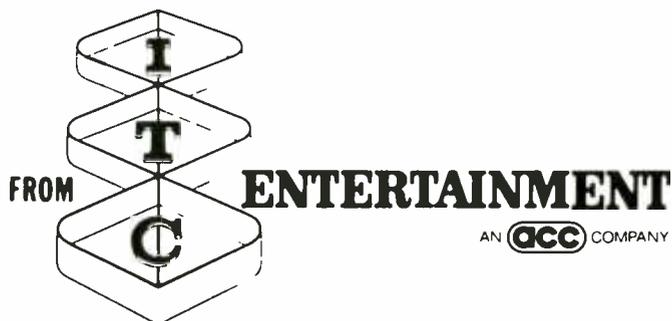
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Working with the American Red Cross, our Los Angeles station created a series of

public service announcements featuring Larry Wilcox, the popular star of NBC's CHIPS. But that was just the beginning. We also produced a special series of five half-hour programs designed to actually teach CPR on the air.

We thought it was an idea worth trying. And so did 160 other NBC television stations — affiliates who have joined with our Flagship Stations to form a "life-saving network" across the country.

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# "IT'S NOT THE COMMERCIALS, IT'S THE MONEY"

**BY THOMAS E. PATTERSON**

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

*Recently, the Aspen Institute brought together thirty politicians, journalists, broadcasters, lawyers and scholars for a conference to discuss the growing concern they shared about the escalating cost and use of television commercials in election campaigns. Their predominant conclusion: money, not television campaign advertising is the real problem afflicting the electoral process in the United States today. This article is the report of that meeting by one of the participants, Thomas E. Patterson, issued by the Aspen Institute as its latest *Communications and Society FORUM REPORT*. Following Professor Patterson's report is a dissenting comment by John V. Lindsay who also participated in the conference.*

*From now until the Fall of 1984, Television Quarterly plans to publish other articles about these vital problems. We welcome comment and articles.*

**T**o many observers, political spot commercials are the curse of U.S. election campaigns. The candidates' televised ads are said to trivialize political debate and to be the reason why campaigns are so expensive. These criticisms appeared in the 1950s when television was first used for political advertising, but they have

not diminished with time. During the 1982 elections, advertising's critics seemed, in fact, to be more numerous and vocal than ever.

It was for the purpose of studying the problems associated with televised political advertising that the Aspen Institute assembled a group of nearly thirty political leaders, journalists, lawyers, broadcasters, and scholars, at Wye Plantation, the Institute's conference center on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. The participants were to review the impact of political spots on the electoral process and to consider whether new steps should be taken to regulate them.

A somewhat unexpected thing happened during the group's deliberations. Most of the participants concluded that televised political advertising is not the root cause of the costly and sometimes trivial nature of U.S. elections. Spot commercials may not be the perfect form of political communication, but they are useful to both candidates and voters.

This report discusses the reasoning that led to those conclusions — and to the further conclusion that money is the real problem in today's elections. Among issues to concentrate on, the group identified the differences in access to funds that candidates enjoy; the role played by Political Action Committees (PACs) in election finance, and the high costs that candidates face in trying to contact voters. These issues are of the highest urgency, for, in the words of one participant, U.S. elections



are now "awash in money."

Over the course of two days' discussion, the group reached agreement on most points. But no votes were taken, nor was any formal position adopted. Therefore, while the weight of comments suggested a growing consensus, it is equally possible that some who disagreed or were unsure from time to time simply remained silent. This account is of a group's considerations, but it is one member's interpretation.

### Advertising's Content

Televised spot commercials are no substitute for debate between candidates and are almost always inferior in content to such extended forms of political communication as televised documentaries or campaign speeches. Advertising messages also are invariably oversimplified and often insignificant. Spot commercials do reduce complex issues to slogans and candidates to packaged form. These are inherent limits on commercials, which are too short to be full of information.

Brevity by itself, however, does not preclude informative communication. Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1952 campaign slogan, "Communism, Corruption, and Korea," had an unmistakable meaning and significance to many voters. George Wallace's appeal to "law and order" in 1968 conveyed a clear message, good or bad, to nearly everyone. So too was there a directness to George McGovern's 1972 commitment to "an immediate withdrawal from Vietnam." To equate the length of political messages with their utility is to misunderstand both the role of political leadership and of election campaigns. Effective leaders are typically those with an ability to popularize complex issues by reducing them to short-hand labels.

Moreover, elections are not an occasion when candidates seek to educate the public about political issues, although this sometimes happens. Elections are a time when the candidates attempt to mobilize public support, which they do by appealing to what is already on

people's minds. A few words are often enough to convey a candidate's intentions.

Televised political ads are an effective medium for this type of political communication, for they allow the candidate to repeat a message again and again, thus increasing the odds that it will be impressed on the electorate. Recent studies indicate that political advertising increases voters' awareness of well-financed candidates' positions on the major issues of their campaigns. Advertising has also been shown to be effective in building a well-financed candidate's name recognition. An advertising blitz can overcome the public's rather startling indifference to political leaders. (Only about half of America's adults know the name of their own Congressman.)

The public simply does not pay much attention to the extended forms of political communication to which advertising is unfavorably compared. Just as citizens in the old days were unlikely to attend the candidate's stump speeches, so today's voters are unlikely to watch lengthy election telecasts. A typical example is a one-hour, prime-time election broadcast that was televised in Detroit during the 1982 elections. Its audience share was only six percent. By comparison, political commercials have exceptional reach. As people sit in front of their television sets in order to be entertained, commercials intrude with political information that the viewer has made no effort to discover. Political advertising reaches nearly everyone.

A final argument that recommends televised commercials is the unreliability of the news media. There are so many contested elections in the United States that most candidates will not get enough news coverage to meet their publicity needs. Moreover, even those who are covered heavily are unlikely to find their campaigns presented in ways that they themselves would prefer. Journalists typically are more concerned with the election race than with issues and, when they do cover the issues, they often

concentrate on ones that candidates see as disruptive or of minor importance. On the other hand, advertising allows candidates to communicate their own political agendas, and most candidates use advertising for precisely this purpose. Research on election messages indicates that the themes of candidates' advertising are typically the same themes being sounded in their campaign speeches.

These positive features of televised advertising do not, of course, correct its shortcomings. Advertising is a shallow means of communication, and there are times when modern campaigns degenerate into meaningless displays of electronic imagery. On the whole, however, advertising helps voters to know the candidates somewhat better. In an age of weak political parties, this is a significant contribution.

### **Advertising's Cost**

Televised political advertising is expensive, largely because television time itself is very costly. A 30-second, prime-time spot sells for about \$10,000 in New York City, about \$1,000 in Memphis, and about \$500 in Syracuse. Political candidates get a somewhat reduced rate. Broadcast entities are required by law to make advertising time available to legally-qualified candidates at the lowest unit rate that heavy commercial buyers are charged for equivalent time. Nevertheless, candidates for major public office often spend 50-to-75 percent of their entire campaign budget for television advertising. Given the fact that election spending is rising dramatically — up 100 percent since 1976 — it is apparent that campaign dollars are greatly invested in television commercials.

But is advertising the reason why spending is escalating so rapidly? The matter is debatable. There was a period in American politics, 1960-64, when candidates in large numbers suddenly realized the advantages of televised commercials. That led to a corresponding rise of 300 percent in advertising spend-

ing — a rate of increase that has not since been equaled.

It is the growth of PACs, however, not simply the increasing outlays for television, that seems to have driven the recent escalation in campaign spending. There were fewer than a hundred PACs in 1976, but as many as 3,149 by 1982. In that year they contributed \$80 million to House and Senate races — up from only \$22 million six years earlier. The PAC contributions have grown to the point of providing about 25 percent of all campaign funds spent by candidates for federal office in the 1982 general election. It can thus be argued that it is "money push," rather than "advertising pull," that has accounted for most of the spending increase.

The basic reason why many candidates choose to invest the larger share of their budgets in television advertising is its perceived cost-effectiveness. It costs roughly a ½-cent to get one message to one television viewer as compared with 1½ cents to reach a newspaper reader and 25 cents to reach a direct-mail recipient. There are media markets in the United States where television is not cost effective for political candidates because only a small fraction of the audience falls within a given election district. In these cases, candidates do not depend on television advertising. Congressional candidates in New York City and Chicago, for example, make almost no use of paid television.

It is arguable whether a ban on television advertising would reduce campaign expenditures. The amount of spending, conceivably, might even increase, because candidates would have to turn to more expensive techniques, such as direct mail. There would be an attending disadvantage to such a development. Unlike television advertising, which is in the open, direct mail allows the candidate to segment the electorate and say one thing to one group while saying a conflicting thing to another group. When using television, the candidate must communicate the



same message to all viewers.

What cannot be contested, however, is that the staggeringly high costs of modern campaigns have created two classes of candidates: those with, and those without the ever-escalating resources needed to compete with any chance of success. The less-heeled candidate is effectively denied access to the voters. Today's campaigns impose a mean test that many otherwise worthy candidates cannot meet.

### **"Free Time"**

Some observers have proposed that broadcasters be required to provide "free" television time for the airing of campaign appeals. This proposal is justified by the argument that the airwaves belong to the people, not the broadcasters, and that free time would serve the public's interest by equalizing the television access. Nearly all such proposals have excluded spot commercials, limiting the provision of free time to lengthy broadcasts, such as 15- and 30-minute programs. On the other hand, the conclusion that political spots have a useful place in American elections might be taken as an endorsement of the free-time concept and its extension to spot advertisements.

There are, of course, many Western democracies that make free time available during elections. Important differences between the U.S. and these other systems, however, suggest that the policy would be less workable here. For one thing, a parliamentary system like Britain's has party-centered campaigns and gives free time to political parties, not to individual candidates. U.S. elections, by contrast, are candidate-centered, and it would often be problematical, particularly in primary elections, as to which candidates should receive free time and which should not.

The U.S. electoral and broadcasting systems, moreover, are decentralized, and they do not overlap exactly. That means that a free-time policy would be administratively difficult and potentially disruptive. For example, would a con-

gressional candidate be entitled to free time on a television station if its signal reached only 10 percent of the district's population? Or consider the New York City television market, which reaches into at least thirty congressional districts in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Although candidates in these districts presently find television too expensive to use, they would accept free time. Thus, in the general election alone, sixty major party nominees for congress would deliver their messages to viewers in the same market.

The broadcast time that an individual station would have to provide would be staggering, and substantial program disruption would result. Moreover, viewers would be miffed at a policy that resulted in an unending string of political messages, less than five percent of which pertained to the candidates in their district.

A policy that might work would be to discount further the advertising rates charged to candidates for public office. This could help more candidates to make use of television without flooding the airwaves (assuming the rates were not set so low as to make advertising practically free). But such a policy would assist candidates only in districts where television can indeed bolster a campaign. For that reason, a policy of free or reduced-rate advertising airtime seems inherently inferior to public financing of elections: The latter would benefit all candidates since each would be able to decide in the circumstances of his or her particular contest whether televised advertising or some other method of reaching voters would be the best use of the funds made available.

Another approach to a free-time policy would be to give the time directly to the political parties. Each party could use its time in whatever way seemed to it appropriate. In some media markets, such as Chicago or Los Angeles, a party would undoubtedly center most of its appeals on the party itself, much as the Republican Party has done in recent

elections. In other markets, a party might use its time to assist specific candidates. Although this free-time proposal has not been discussed widely, it could help to revitalize the political parties, particularly if the party organizations were also given free time during the primaries, when this time could be used to help party-endorsed candidates for nomination. The obvious drawback to this policy would be its inhibiting effect on third parties and independent candidacies, which are already greatly disadvantaged by the U.S. electoral system.

A more restrictive free-time policy would be to apply the Fairness Doctrine in such a way as to guarantee equivalent free time to any candidate whose opponent used paid time. This policy, however, would force nearly all political advertising off the air, since few candidates would purchase time if it meant free time for opponents. Candidates would turn instead to selective forms of communication, which are more expensive and less publicly conspicuous. This would not seem to be an improvement over the current situation.

### **Money and Politics**

Any campaign reform directed principally at television advertising risks falling short of its purpose. Such advertising is not a factor in some campaigns, and where it is, its shortcomings are offset by its advantages as a form of political communication. The universal and unmitigated problem in campaigns is money, which in recent years has become vastly more important to the outcome of elections. Its enhanced position is largely a consequence of the decline of political parties — both as organizations and as objects of the public's loyalty.

Parties once greatly limited what money could buy in a campaign. The support of the party regulars was the ordinary route to nomination, and the large majority of voters routinely backed their party's nominees. Thus, the candidates' own campaigns had only a mar-

ginal effect on election outcomes. But times have changed. Voters now are only weakly attached to one or another political party, and nominations are up for grabs. This has raised the price of persuasion. Where candidates once could wave the party's banner and win the support of a large share of the electorate, they must now employ an assortment of facts, symbols, and ideas — a communication process that is much more complex and costly.

The election consequences of meager financing are now devastating. The majority party's candidate in a lopsided district can still win with a scaled-down campaign, but a low-cost effort anywhere else is apt to be fruitless. Regardless of how wisely they use their funds, congressional challengers who have \$50,000 or less to spend are unlikely to win the public's attention, much less its support. The development of sophisticated techniques such as computer-directed mailings and televised advertising make it possible to reach voters in a system of weak parties, but the price tag is high — and there is no effective substitute.

While a lack of money keeps significant opinions from being heard, a lot of money can enable a candidate to drown out the opposition. Candidates with huge personal fortunes have this edge, as do those with ready access to PACs. A fairly large number of congressional candidates in 1982 received over \$100,000 from PACs, and one U.S. Senator collected nearly a million dollars from them. PACs have a keen sense of where to place their money. Despite the fact that winners outspent losers in four of every five federal races in 1982, winning candidates still received a greater proportion of their funds from PACs than did losers, 32 percent to 18 percent.

The influence of PACs on the legislative process is hard to determine, but their money conveys at least an appearance of impropriety. A PAC targets its funds on candidates who can help its members. That means giving more to incumbents than challengers (four times as much in 1982), particularly to those in



congressional committees who deal with legislation directly affecting the PAC's area of interest.

Dairy PACs, for example, have contributed heavily to members of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees. Other PACs have taken wider aim. Medical PACs in 1982 gave over two million dollars to 80 percent of the 232 members of Congress who co-sponsored legislation to exclude physicians and dentists from anti-trust regulation. Studies have found that on a wide variety of issues the members who voted for a PAC's position were much more likely to have received its money in the previous election than were those who voted in opposition.

For the candidate facing a tough race, the support of PACs is hard to refuse. Other sources of funding may not prove very helpful. Political party organizations, for example, now contribute only a third as much as PACs.

### The Courts and Money

Looming over any attempt to limit the role of money in elections is the historic Supreme Court decision, *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976). This decision was a response to litigation surrounding the 1974 Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA), which placed overall spending limits on candidates for federal office. The Court ruled in *Buckley*, expressing the view of seven of its members, that the Act's provisions fixing ceilings on the total campaign expenditures candidates could make were unconstitutional "as impermissibly burdening the right of free expression under the First Amendment, and could not be sustained on the basis of governmental interests...in equalizing the resources of candidates."

In subsequent decisions, the Court has been unwilling to reconsider its opposition to spending limits. For example, Massachusetts had passed a statute prohibiting corporate expenditures on statewide referendum issues that were unrelated to a corporation's direct business activity. In the 1978 *First National Bank of Boston v. Belotti*

decision, the Court ruled that the statute was unconstitutional.

The 1974 FECA had also placed limits on contributions — a maximum of \$1,000 for an individual, and \$5,000 for a PAC, per election. It set further expenditure limits, too — a maximum of \$5,000 for what an individual could personally spend, and \$1,000 for what any group might spend independently of the candidates' own campaigns, per election. The *Buckley* decision upheld the contribution limits but struck down the expenditure limits as infringements on free speech. The Court said, "The concept that government may restrict the speech (i.e., money) of some elements of our society in order to enhance the relative voices of others is wholly foreign to the First Amendment."

This ruling has been followed by substantial increases in both personal and independent spending. In the 1980 elections, for example, independent expenditures reached \$16 million, most of which was spent by "New Right" groups such as NCPAC (National Conservative Political Action Committee), Americans for an Effective Presidency and the Fund for a Conservative Majority. Independent groups were even more actively involved in 1982's congressional races. Similarly, the importance of a candidate's personal wealth has increased since the *Buckley* decision. Candidates' own funds in 1974 accounted for less than 6 percent of federal campaign spending but in 1982 amounted to about 10 percent. Non-incumbents are particularly dependent on their personal wealth; incumbents derive proportionately more of their funds from PACs.

The *Buckley* and *Belotti* decisions have been widely criticized as giving protection to the polluting effects of political money. Opponents have criticized the Court's doctrine of equating spending with free speech, and a few have even suggested that a Constitutional amendment is needed to remedy the situation. But neither an amendment nor a change in the Court's position ap-

pears likely to occur in the near future.

Within the confines of the *Buckley* decision, public funding of elections is the most obvious route left open toward limiting campaign spending. The Supreme Court permitted one exception to its ruling that spending limits were a violation of First Amendment rights — this being in the case of Presidential candidates who accept public financing of their campaigns. These candidates, the Court ruled, must abide by the spending limit that is established as a condition for their receipt of federal funds. On the same principle, public financing could be extended to candidates for other offices who, if they accepted such financing, would also then be obliged to comply with expenditure ceilings.

Of course, public financing of elections has been discussed widely in recent years and has been advocated by a number of groups, Common Cause among them. Bills to introduce a comprehensive public funding system have been introduced in Congress, but none has become law. Public opinion has been divided on the merits of such a policy, but now seems to be growing more favorable. The increasingly conspicuous inequalities in the present system and the sheer growth in campaign spending have stirred a sense of alarm. At the same time, the public financing of presidential elections has seemed to work well, at least during the general election, thus lending the support of experience to the idea.

Another measure aimed at curbing the influence of money would be to limit the funds that a candidate for public office can receive in combined contributions from PACs. A bill that imposed a limit of \$70,000 in PAC contributions for congressional candidates passed the House in 1979, but was defeated in the Senate. Such a bill, enacted into law, would somewhat reduce the role of PACs in election finance. So too would a law that enabled the individual citizen to contribute to a

candidate the same maximum amount (\$5,000) that a single PAC can contribute.

Such measures would not affect independent PACs, like NCPAC, which under *Buckley* are permitted unlimited expenditures. These PACs spent large sums in 1982 on televised political advertising. One proposal to check such uncontrolled spending in the future would construe the Fairness Doctrine to require broadcasters to grant equal time free to those who would respond to the political messages paid for by independent groups.

Mandating free response time — as a matter of “fairness” — would probably bring television advertising by all such groups nearly to a halt. They would be reluctant to buy time if its purchase meant free time for opposing interests. Broadcasters, moreover, would be unwilling to sell time for that sort of message since they could then be forced to grant equal time at their own expense to other groups. But a policy that has the practical effect of discouraging political speech on television is not an unmixed blessing. It can be argued that democracy is better served if independent groups spend their money on television rather than in activities like direct-mail that are less visible to the public eye.

At present, broadcasters can, by law, refuse to sell time to independent groups. The courts have ruled that only candidates for public office have “the right of access” to paid television. If that policy were changed to give to groups the same right of access, and if those groups persisted in buying airtime even in the knowledge that opponents could then claim equal time, the Federal Communications Commission would likely be overwhelmed with complaints and disputes, not least because a wide variety of “opponents” would surely, in many cases, all claim the right to respond to the same message. The ultimate decision of which group or viewpoint had the right to respond, and which did not, would rest with the government, first a regulatory commission, then the courts. At best,



such disputes would be bogged down in reviews and appeals, especially as they grew in numbers; at worst, they would invite governmentally-imposed arbitrariness or favoritism of the sort the First Amendment was meant to prevent.

### The Task Ahead

A recognition that money, not televised political advertising, is the root problem in today's election campaigns, helps to identify a path to reform. Nevertheless, much work remains to be done, starting with a determination of the precise goals of reform.

For groups, money can buy influence over candidates; for candidates, money can buy access to voters:

- *Is it the goal of reform to eliminate the influence that money buys for particular interests? Or is it to reduce the most extreme cases of such influence? If so, what constitutes an extreme case?*
- *Should reform be directed toward equalizing the candidates' access to voters? Or should it only assure such access at a reasonable minimum? If so, what are the limits to that minimum?*

There are arguments to be made for each position, and each may lead to a different reform proposal. Public funding of campaigns may become the policy of choice in all cases, but it is not the only possibility. Applying selective restrictions and incentives to campaign contributions, for example, could both limit and diversify the sources of money. Choosing among means and ends in this area is especially difficult because philosophical and practical problems arise at the same time.

The extraordinary complexity of the U.S. electoral system almost defies rational efforts to regulate it. Most proposals for public financing of campaigns, for example, have been limited to general elections, where the criterion for eligibility is straightforward: Republican

and Democratic nominees are the only candidates assured of funding. This rule of eligibility also eases the task of assessing the program's total cost to the public treasury.

The problem with this, of course, is that in many (perhaps most) election districts, it is the primary, not the general election that is pivotal. But if primary elections are included in a scheme of public finance, what will determine a candidate's eligibility? A strict standard would make the system excessively rigid, favoring those already in power. A loose standard would create a costly, chaotic system. New Jersey offered public funding for candidates in its 1981 gubernatorial primaries. Twenty-four responded — a number that overwhelmed most voters' ability to make sense of their choice.

The unseen consequences of change can be substantial, as the *Buckley* decision and the emergence of PACs illustrate. Both developments can be traced to the reform legislation of the early 1970s. Another round of change is certain to have unwanted as well as desired effects. A system of public finance, for example, will further erode the position of political parties if the monies pass directly to the candidates. And lurking over any legislation aimed at limiting campaign spending is the vested interest of incumbents, who already have an edge in resources by virtue of position. They hold the power of reform but naturally they also want to protect their positions.

Other problems will arise out of the loopholes that will undoubtedly appear in any system of finance reforms. Legislative efforts to control the flow of money in U.S. elections span nearly a century, and every system has been more or less flawed. Public funding of Presidential elections may be the most successful reform, but it is no exception to the pattern. In 1976, and to an even greater degree in 1980, millions of dollars flowed outside of the public-finance system on behalf of the Republican and Democratic nominees. Al-

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

though technically "independent," this spending was closely allied to the candidates' efforts and was biased in the same way as the "old" system: by a large margin, more was spent toward electing the Republican rather than the Democratic nominee.

Legal complexity is the ordinary solution to unwanted contingencies, but this is a troublesome solution in elections. Campaign organizations are formed *ad hoc*; a complicated web of regulations would discourage potential candidates from even getting started. There is also the fact that Election Day gives campaigns a finality that other activities lack. Candidates do not have the time to wait for bureaucratic rulings on their access to funds. Whatever the reforms, they must be easy to understand and just as easy to apply, yet comprehensive enough to achieve the desired goals.

This task is as formidable one, but most, if not all, of the group assembled at Wye by the Aspen Institute agreed it must be pursued. ■

Thomas E. Patterson is Professor and Chairman of the Department of Political Science in the Maxwell School of Citizenship at Syracuse University. He has written widely on the subject of the mass media and election campaigns. His works include *The Unseeing Eye* (Putnam, 1972) and *The Mass Media Election* (Praeger, 1976). He is also a frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*.

**“** *If CBS had not exercised admirable patience during the first and second season of Mash, or more recently NBC with Hill St. Blues, these series would never have made it. What's wrong with more such patience? Today it seems unlikely that Mash would even get on the air. If it did, the present atmosphere embodying the quick hook would condemn it to an early demise.*

*And yet the evidence is irrefutable. Mash has been a veritable gold mine without ever catering to the theory that the audience is made up totally of 14-year-olds.*

*Mash and a few other shows have consistently pointed up the fact that an intelligent audience is out there — composed of people who appreciate a good story told with sophistication and wit, and filled with characters they like.”*

—Burt Metcalfe, Executive Producer, Mash.

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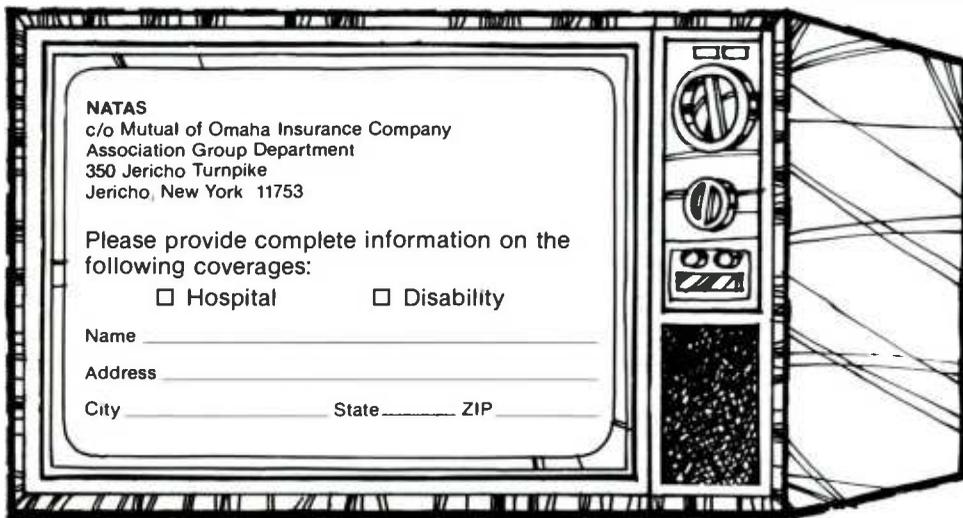
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# TV POLITICAL ADS MAKE RUNNING FOR OFFICE A BIG MONEY GAME

**BY JOHN V. LINDSAY**

**W**hile I think that Tom Patterson has done a good and professional job in trying to extract a consensus from our deliberations, I must respectfully differ from the tone of the report, and even more strongly with respect to some of its specifics. I feel that Tom has done his best to indicate there was not an agreement on all issues, but on reading the document several times, I think it important that my own views be stated lest there be any doubt as to my conviction about the terrible damage being visited on our political system by the need to raise or possess such unconscionably high sums of money in order to effectively pursue high elective office.

Overall, the report, to me, lacks a sense of urgency about the extent to which the running for major public office in today's world has become mainly a money game. Intelligent comment on this development, conveying the sense of urgency that I believe this report is wanting, has been made by such distinguished individuals as Senator Charles Mathias in his recent hearings, Elizabeth Drew in her superb accounts in *The New Yorker*, and officers of Common Cause. I associate myself more with their views than I do with the thrust of this report.

The report begins by stating that in 1982 critics of political advertising

"seemed" to be more numerous and vocal than ever. Of course they were — and are! How can one be indifferent to the multi-millions of dollars that are today flooding the electoral system?

The third paragraph suggests that most participants in the conference, surprisingly, concluded that television political advertising is not itself "the root cause of the costly and sometimes trivial nature of U.S. elections," but that the root cause is just plain money. Of course, this is correct. But why is so much money needed? Mainly to buy television. Major election contests are "awash in money," a situation which may indeed result largely from "contribution push" rather than "advertising pull," and yet the report agrees that upwards of 75 percent of these oceans of money goes for television advertising. It may well be that most of the participants are of the view that if broadcast political ads are somehow eliminated or curtailed, at least an equal amount of the money now spent on them would go to other forms of communication, such as direct mail, and it may be that they are correct. But I doubt it.

All available evidence proves that broadcast advertising is the most potent tool yet devised for political communication; direct mail can't approach television's power in this regard. Many, if not most, people don't even open the envelopes containing campaign material, but those same people would not, as unthinkingly, switch channels or leave



the room between innings of the World Series or segments of *The Johnny Carson Show* just to avoid watching a broadcast political advertisement. Television often makes an almost irresistible claim on its viewers' attention; that's why candidates buy as much airtime as they can afford.

In my view, then, the documented escalation of campaign spending has resulted directly from the growing importance of paid television commercials in political campaigns. No candidate today, running for a high office, has a chance without a television war chest of huge proportions. And I must note, once again, that although a multi-million dollar television campaign war chest is no guaranty of winning, one cannot reasonably hope to win without it.

**T**o finish this point, I must take note of the statement that the curtailment of television political advertising would lead candidates to "turn instead to selective forms of communication, which are more expensive and less publicly conspicuous." It goes on, "This would not seem to be an improvement over the current situation." Why wouldn't it be an improvement? The goal is to diminish the overwhelming importance of money in politics, is it not?

Finally, because of the wreckage left in the wake of the Supreme Court's unfortunate decisions in *Buckley* and *Be/otti*, I see no solution except partial public financing of campaigns simply as a means of stemming the tide of money in campaigns — and hence the influence of PACs and financial forces that have so overwhelmed our election contests.

I must commend Tom Patterson for his excellent analysis of the complexities involved in taking any corrective action currently under consideration. Such analytical vigor and clarity, however, tells us where we are but fails to show us where we go from here. The conference

may well have been divided on solutions, but the point was made by at least a few members that we should without delay be heading somewhere quite different from where we are now.

The mounting campaign budgets of America's major political races are a kind of fever chart that describes the declining health of our democratic process. Our next step must be to formulate a program for managing and curing this dangerous disease. ■

John V. Lindsay is the former Mayor of New York City. He has also been a member of the House of Representatives.

"From shadows and symbols  
into the truth."

—John Henry Cardinal Newman

As darkness gives way to light,  
so confusion precedes clarity.

The responsibility of today's  
communicators is clear.

To peer deeply into the  
shadows. To explain the symbols.  
And so illuminate the truth.



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TV, Charlotte • WOWO, Fort Wayne • Clearview Cable TV • Filmation Associates • Group W Productions • Group W Satellite Communications



**ABC Television Network**

# THE EMMY STORY

**A**ccording to legend the film statuette *Oscar* got its name because it looked like somebody's uncle. *Tony*, the theatre's highest award, is an abbreviation of Antoinette Perry. Now it's time for *Emmy*, and for historians, here's how *Emmy* got her name.

*Emmy* history goes back to the first ceremony.

The TV Academy's constitution empowers it to "recognize outstanding achievements in the television industry by conferring annual awards of merit as an incentive for achievement within the industry..." In 1948, Charles Brown, then president of the young organization, named a committee to select award-winners for that year. He also asked for suggestions on a symbol and what it would be called.

Some thought "Iconoscope" (for large orthicon tube) would be an impressive title, but it was pointed out that it would be shortened to "Ike," a name reserved for Dwight Eisenhower.

Another television favorite was *Tilly* (for television). But in the end, *Emmy*, a derivative of *Immy* (a nickname for the image orthicon tube) was chosen. The name was suggested by pioneer television engineer Harry Lubcke (president of the Academy in 1949-50).

Once the name had been se-

lected, the next chore was the symbol. Some one hundred-and-eighteen sketches were submitted to the committee and when the candidates were cut to only two, designer Louis McManus presented an entry and the committee knew it had found its *Emmy*.

On January 25, 1949, the first annual TV Awards were presented at the Hollywood Athletic Club with Walter O'Keefe as host. Of the six awards presented that evening, one went to McManus as a special tribute.

As McManus was called to the head table, he was told, "Louis here she is...our baby. She'll be here long after we're gone." McManus was then presented with a gold, lifetime membership card and an *Emmy*.

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# REVIEW AND COMMENT

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## **AH! MISCHIEF: THE WRITER AND TELEVISION**

by seven writers for British TV

*Faber and Faber, London*  
*Distributed in U.S. by Harper and Row,*  
*\$6.95*

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**BY DAVID DAVIDSON**

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Quality writers of TV in America (they used to be called "serious" writers) are often heard to complain about lack of artistic control and revision and rejection of their best work. Some dream of chucking it all and re-settling in London where the BBC and even commercial producers offer a haven for quality.

They hold that in London TV reaches such heights that even successful playwrights and novelists regularly take time out to do stints for the air, a situation made feasible by the fact that so many British writers are bunched in or near London, the center for most of England's publishing and production.

It comes, therefore, as something of a surprise for a TV homebody like myself to read through *Ah! Mischief*. It was assembled when Faber and Faber invited seven top TV playwrights (all working also as theater dramatists and/or novelists) to do a piece about any aspect of TV they wished.

What is totally unexpected is that in

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David Davidson, author of hundreds of TV scripts, is past national chairman of the Writers Guild of America.

five of the seven chapters the writers complain, and rather bitterly, about the same bugaboos as their American cousins: a lack of artistic control over their work, tampering with their ideas and scripts by management philistines with no interest in art but only safety and numbers. They claim this to be true even at the long-esteemed BBC since the change of management in recent years. Innovations, subtlety of ideas, controversial subjects are now rejected out of hand. Or if actually shot, are shelved forever.

As novelists and theater playwrights, these writers were, by custom and tradition, in charge of their own creations. Editors and producers might make suggestions for changes but it was the writers privilege to say yes or no, whereas in TV everybody gets a whack at the script: producers, directors, film editors, top management.

Then why do these gifted writers stay with TV? Because, as the saying goes, "You can make a killing in the theater but not a living" (which goes also for the novelist). While TV scripts bring fees only between a third and a half of what is paid in the U.S., and life in Britain is almost as expensive as here, TV remains about the only regular income a dramatist or novelist can look forward to. Theatrical films are few and far between.

In the words of Voltaire about the Empress Maria Teresa at one of the partitions of Poland, "She wept but she took."

Each of the five rebels had a horror story or savage comment to offer. For in-

stance there is Trevor Griffiths, who has done five stage plays and dozens of TV series episodes. He tells what happened on one show:

"I was away in South Africa working on the second series while members of the production team were editing Episode 13 of the first. When I got back, they had taken out a huge amount of what I'd said. The final statement was a bit like a sermon on the cross. (On the mount...?) It was about a million unemployed, about social conditions, equality and justice, and they'd just hacked it to pieces. I was aghast and distraught and parted company with the series thereafter."

David Hare, author of seven stage plays and numerous "single plays" (in contrast to series episodes) tells an anecdote which inspired the book title. As a very young writer at the BBC he went to consult the then-Director General, Hugh Carleton-Greene about a proposal sure to be controversial.

"There can only be," said the Director General ominously, "one reason why a writer like you could possibly be interested in that subject; to make mischief." At once, Hare relates, he broke into the broadest smile, and rubbed his hands together. "I have never seen a man so delighted by a single word. How attractive that spirit is in him, how fine the BBC was when he ran it, how much that sound working principle — 'ah, mischief!' — is needed there today."

But of the "new" BBC, the BBC of today, Hare writes:

"A new self-righteous tone has been adopted by men who often seem to take a chilling pleasure in the exercise of their power... They appear actually to believe in something called responsibility, which by the time it reaches our screens we may take to be blandness..."

"Differences in temperament between playwrights and journalists have been at the heart of many of the problems there have been recently in TV drama. The BBC is run almost exclusively by journalists — sports men predominate and arts men rarely rise to the top — and there is

a sense in which journalists neither understand nor accept the claims of fiction..."

"Because he has been brought up in authoritarian organizations, the ex-journalist cannot understand the violence of feeling his bans cause among storytellers..."

"This strange botched-up medium is too good for a writer to resist, but too unreal for him to risk giving his entire loyalty to it."

Julian Mitchell, author of ten books, of which four have won distinguished awards, a number of stage plays and of "single plays:" for TV, finds that after an enjoyable decade in TV, it has given way to emphasis on administrative efficiency and inter-departmental intrigues.

"The making of programs has become a secondary activity... television exists for members to drink too much before lunch and lounge in front of the pavilion while the players get on with the game, and the public watches at a respectful distance.

"For a writer, the bar at Television Centre has a nightmare fascination. All those important people drinking gin after gin, then rolling back down the interminable corridors to mutilate his script! Standing there, safe in their jobs, their pension schemes pressed against their hearts..."

"What do they care about plays, with their lovely, leggy secretaries, their big desks, their mysterious wall charts, their places in the car park? They've got it made, and its not programs."

Peter Prince, also a prize novelist, who wrote the distinguished series *Oppenheimer*, speculates on the emotional damage to the writer. Reviewing a play that ends in the suicide of Paul Prior, a TV writer, he says:

"I recognize that there is much personal paranoia floating around here, but perhaps some truth too. And I suspect that it is this everyday functional powerlessness that is central to the process that can turn bright young writers into punched-out cynics... I suspect, too,

that this process is built into the system and not easily correctable. Abstinence may be the only answer. The problem is that when it comes to the crunch most TV writers will probably echo the words of the suicidal Paul Prior as, chockfull of Second pills, he prepares to go down for the third time: Television — I love it!"

Howard Schuman is an odd man out — a Brooklyn-born American who has gone to the top in British TV. Before then he had a youthful career in the U.S. writing "dreadful pop songs, pathetic imitations of chart hits, plays for summer stock, cabaret and fringe theaters" and sold what he calls "hamburger songs" to publishers for a flat \$50. In 1968, thrilled by a BBC production of *Uncle Vanya* on a local "educational" station, he took off for London. After many rejections of his somewhat surrealist plays, he finally — in his own words — caught fire and continued to blaze away until, in 1977, he quit television altogether. He explains:

"My love for British television was sudden and violent and perhaps I expected too much as lovers do. For it seems to me in 1981, that an honorable tradition is withering away as more and more air time is filled with factory product so defective they never should have left the factory floor. US/British imitations of proven genre hits, carbon copies of already smudged originals. The air, in fact, is heavy with hamburger songs."

"I also find, with rare exceptions that I am totally out of tune with the drama output (especially ITV's but also the BBC) — with a few exceptions... So much airtime is taken up with hamburger songs."

It's odd to recall that Schuman's falling in love with British TV, had a reverse parallel during the so-called "so-called" Golden Age of television in the 1950's. The esteemed Literary Supplement of the *London Times* in 1956 devoted a lengthy chapter to U.S. television and predicted that if the "single plays" of a number of the writers were to continue on the air, America would be bringing "a new art form" into being.

Alas...

Here in the U.S., script control has been a preoccupation with the Writers Guild of America for a quarter century, with management refusing to yield an inch. But now finally, in the newly-signed contract with the Educational Broadcasting Company (Channel 13), a small breakthrough has been achieved. A writer who submits original material has the right of first refusal if management decides his script needs revision. If he refuses to do the revision himself, he has the right of approval on the second writer who may be brought in to revise.

A very small beginning... but a beginning.

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## NEWSWATCH

by Av Westin

*Simon and Schuster, \$16.95*

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### BY MICHAEL SKLAR

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What does a busy television news executive write about when he somehow finds the time to write a book? He writes about that most frustrating, rewarding, demanding, exciting of occupations: television news.

"Television news has changed the way America is governed. Television news has changed the way America votes. Television news has changed the way America thinks. It is only common sense to understand what it does, and how it does it."

That quote is from *NewsWatch* by Av Westin, executive producer at ABC Television News. Westin's book is an intelligent and comprehensive guided tour through the complex world of TV news production, as well as an informal history of the industry, from its primitive beginnings in the late 1940s, to its present stature as the nation's most powerful and influential disseminator of news and information.

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Michael Sklar is a television writer and producer.

This is an insider's perception, the viewpoint of a professional. Westin worked on the first satellite broadcasts; with Fred Friendly on *CBS Reports*, and later with him as a producer of Public Television's first experimental news program. At ABC News he helped Roone Arledge devise the format for ABC's *World News Tonight*, and produced the network's news magazine, *Twenty-Twenty*. Thus Westin is well qualified to take the reader behind the cameras, into the newsroom of a network evening news program.

We are onlookers as the staff struggles under fearful pressure to cope with the mass of reports that pours in each 24 hours, and distill it into 24 crisp minutes of news in words and pictures.

We learn the tasks and responsibility of each member of the staff, from lowly desk assistants to the executive producer at the top. As the executive producer and his close associates put together the lineup of stories, choosing some and rejecting others, we understand the considerations that govern their selections. We watch the program director, who is responsible for the "look" of the program and the technical aspects of getting it on the air. We meet the anchorman, the star of the show, the all-important link between broadcasters and audience.

Above all, says Westin, the name of the game is teamwork. "The anchor, field correspondents, camera crews, field producers, tape and film editors, graphic artists, production assistants, lighting director, technical director, program director — each person in that group provides at least one essential element in the human chain that puts a news report on the air."

*Newswatch* is replete with anecdotes that dramatize Westin's points. For instance, on the speed with which television news can respond to a sudden crisis:

"Bill Blakemore, the ABC correspondent in Rome, was on the telephone with Bob Frye, the senior producer in London. Across the room, Aldo Bisci, the bureau assistant, was listening to Vatican radio. Suddenly, Bisci heard the Vatican announcer shouting and real-

ized something terrible had happened. Bisci cried out to Blakemore who said to Frye, 'My God, the Pope may have been shot!' "

In London, Frye punched a button that put him through immediately to ABC television news headquarters in New York. Seven minutes later ABC interrupted its regular television schedule with extended coverage of the attempt to assassinate Pope John Paul.

Being an insider to some extent may limit Westin's critical judgements. No one reaches the executive producer's slot without first serving an apprenticeship in the lower echelons, and as one moves up the ladder attitudes may be shaped by management values; Westin's comments on his craft occasionally may reflect this. There is little criticism of current network news practices in *News-watch*, and gentle is the word for what little there is.

For example: answering the charge that TV news may be flawed by its use of show business techniques, Westin argues that television news, as part of television, is part show business, too. But "as long as show business techniques can be used to transmit information without distorting it, I believe they are perfectly all right."

Westin, however, is not enthusiastic about the current use of new electronic equipment to push, pull, squeeze and flip pictures on and off the air. "Show business presentation, if taken to an extreme, does distort the very stuff that is supposed to be conveyed... Less is better."

Television news production is expensive, says Westin; the executive producer must carefully weigh the merits of each story before committing it to production. Does this, as critics have charged, cause a bias in favor of the less expensive story, which may also be the less important? Westin doesn't tell us. Nor does he write much about the frequent tension between the network's news division, which aims for the best news coverage, and corporate management, which is more concerned with

profits.

Discussing the network television news programs, Westin admits they are illustrated headline services. "So an evening news program cannot be a person's sole source of information. If you rely only on the television newscasts, you are woefully ignorant."

Presumably, Westin is critical of this situation. But he accepts it with little comment, remarking that the networks have experimented with an hour-long format but abandoned it when they ran into opposition from the affiliated stations.

Nevertheless, Westin's *Newswatch* is reasoned and reasonable, a valuable addition to the literature of broadcasting.

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## **CHANGING CHANNELS: LIVING (SENSIBLY) WITH TELEVISION**

by Peggy Charren and Martin W. Sandler

Addison-Wesley, \$11.95 paperback (\$24.95 hardcover)

## **LES BROWN'S ENCYCLOPEDIA OF TELEVISION**

New York Zoetrope, \$16.95 paperback (\$29.95 hardcover)

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### **BY FREDERICK A. JACOBI**

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Written for the layreader, these two excellent books about television will be just as useful to people who have spent a lifetime in the broadcasting business, and for many of the same reasons. Both volumes deal with vital issues and important institutions with a clarity and precision that are sometimes lacking in trade publications, which often use a kind of shorthand that does more to obfuscate

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After writing about television, commercial and public, for more than three decades, Frederick A. Jacobi recently joined the Museum of Broadcasting. He says he is not one of its fossils but its PR director.

than to interpret.

*Changing Channels* is, not surprisingly, a call to arms. Peggy Charren is, after all, an activist, the founder and president of Action for Children's Television. Her co-author, Martin Sandler, is a television producer. Together they challenge us to tame the monster that is television, to harness its vast power for the public good. But to get to this goal they first explain television, and do it very well. They examine television at many different levels — demographically, sociologically, politically, structurally, technologically, and educationally, to name just a few of the stratifications.

*Changing Channels* is neither a tract nor a diatribe, although the authors are not averse to hitting the reader over the head in order to get attention. For example, American children spend more time watching television than they do at school or at play, we are reminded, with the average now at *26 viewing hours per week*.

"Perhaps those of us reared in pre-television days," they write, "can get the full implication of this statistic by trying to imagine a childhood in which we spent more than four hours a day, week-in and week-out, at a movie theater. Even as children we would have laughed at such a suggestion."

More than 98 percent of American households have at least one working television set, the authors note. In fact, more homes in America have television sets than have telephones or indoor plumbing. Television has become such an important part of our lives that by the age of 65 the average American will have spent *nine full years* watching television. Is this not mindboggling?

"There are very few aspects of our life that have been unaffected by television," the authors write. "TV influences the way we speak, the words we use, the expressions that creep into our vocabulary. . . . In little more than three decades television has also become an overwhelmingly dominant information medium in the United States. Various polls now indi-

cate that Americans, by a margin of more than 20 points over newspapers, its closest rival, pick television as their chief source of news. And according to a Roper poll, 40 percent of the American people now get *all* their news information from television alone." It makes one's blood run cold.

A book of this kind is long overdue. Sensibly and without preaching, the authors try to demonstrate how parents can exert an influence on their children's television-watching habits. For some, the recommendation is that they watch with their children. For others, it means turning off the set and planning activities without television.

"By participating in their television experience," Mrs. Charren and Mr. Martin write, "you can use the issues brought up on the screen to let them know what you think is important and to help them distinguish between fact and fiction in what they are seeing. . . . The world of TV ads has become a world of fantasy, and it's just as important to know the difference between fantasy and reality in TV commercials as in the programs themselves."

Admirable for their lucidity are sections which describe the FCC and other government agencies, cable and the new technologies, and such arcana as license renewal, ratings, the structure of the networks, what syndication is all about, who are the top ten advertisers and what they sell. All of this is approached with a verve and a freshness that can't help but enhance understanding, even on the part of the most jaded broadcasting professional.

The authors show how to mount a television program of one's own in school, and how to involve oneself in a community's decision about a cable television franchise. They challenge us "to make changes — changes in the way our families watch television, changes in the TV experiences in our community. If the new technologies are indeed to present a second chance to the American public, then each of us will have to get involved."

A couple of minor carps. *Changing*

*Channels* is heavily illustrated — for this reader too heavily. I found the layout disruptive and overly busy, surprisingly so considering the fact that the design is by those same fine folks who brought us two recent *Julia Child and Company* books, the design department of public television station WGBH, Boston. It's true, however, that some of the visuals help to call the reader's attention to matters that might otherwise have slipped into oblivion. One of a series of billboards generically headed "Would You Believe?" notes that "In 1980, Miami-Dade Community College offered a full-credit course entitled "Understanding Monday Night Football.' "

Some of the facts are fragile and have already been overtaken by events. Let us hope that there will be future revisions of this valuable book in order to bring it up to date and to (carp no. 2) eliminate a few of the glaring typos. But these are insignificant complaints in the overall scheme of things: *Changing Channels* is an important book. Television consumers and practitioners alike, should pay attention.



With the possible exception of certain superior cookbooks, this new edition of *Les Brown's Encyclopedia of Television* is one of the few reference books which can be read cover-to-cover like an engrossing novel. From "A.A. Rating (Average Audience)" to "Zworkin, Vladimir K. (Dr.)" this 496-page volume — subtitled "Your A-Z Guide to the Shows, the People, the History, and the Business of TV!" — is packed with useful, edifying, entertaining and thoroughly eye-opening entries.

Now editor-in-chief of *Channels of Communication*, a bi-monthly magazine about television, Les Brown honed his considerable writing skills at *Variety* and *The New York Times*, for both of which he reported about television. The result is a polished, witty and stylish prose which sheds much light in dark places. His essay on ABC is a model of candor; the essay on

PBS a brilliant capsule history of its hopes, ambitions and travails (along with the reasons for them).

Do you really know the difference between "above-the-line" and "below-the-line"? Read Les Brown and you will. He not only explains ratings but shows you how to read them. And we all know what the Red Lion Decision was all about, don't we? Check this reference book and you'll discover how much you forgot long ago. How did BMI get started and where did it go from there? What are IBA and ITN in Great Britain? You'll find succinct answers in *Les Brown's Encyclopedia*, a handy refresher course about many things professionals tend to take for granted. And for the layman, the book is a real gold mine of information.

While the entries are even-handed and impartial, the twinkle in the author's eye frequently shines through. Take, for example, the well-rounded cameo portraits of such personalities as Howard Cosell, Mike Dann, Fred Friendly, Nicholas Johnson and Van Gordon Sauter ("He was an anomaly in the executive echelons, because he did not dress in the conventional manner and cultivated a beard.") Imagine that in a *Who's Who?* This kind of three-dimensional observation is a pure delight, and worth the price of admission. ■

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## QUOTE ... UNQUOTE

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“By seeking to associate television with most of our society's ills — violence, stupidity, the general decline in the quality of life — fatalists distract us from the probable causes of these ills. They distract us from the problems of poverty, of organized bigotry, of corporate irresponsibility, of illiteracy, of beleaguered teachers, of bankrupt schools, of overfunded war machines and underfunded science research and nonfunded social programs. I need hardly point out that violence and stupidity were rampant long before *The Dukes of Hazzard*, and that the *'Children's Crusade'* antedates *Strike Force* by several centuries. The idea that we can regain *The Garden* by banishing television is, I fear, a delusion of potentially tragic dimensions.”

—James Morrow in  
*Television and Children*

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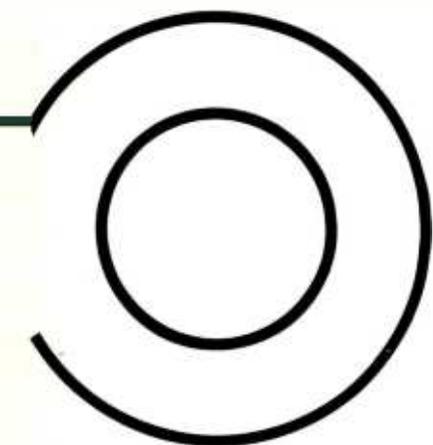
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- the '79 Iris Award by the National Association of Television Programming Executives — NATPE — bestowed on the series "Malu, Woman."

- the '79 Ondas Award from the Spanish Broadcasting Society and Radio Barcelona bestowed on the series "Malu, Woman."

- the Golden Teleguide Award, offered by Mexican critics for the serial "Dona Xepa."

- the '80 Ondas Award for the special "Quincas Berro d'Agua."

- the '81 Ondas Award given for the special "Vinicius for Children."

- the Prague D'Or Award at the 17th International Television Festival of Czechoslovakia, presented to the actress Regina Duarte for her performance in the series "Malu, Woman."

- the '81 Fonte D'Oro Award from the Italian Association of Television Critics.

- the Guaicaipuru de Ouro Award, granted by the trade press of Venezuela to the Globo Network as Latin America's best television.

- the Silver Medal at the '81 International Film and TV Festival of New York, granted for the special "Vinicius for Children."

- the '81 Golden Emmy granted for the program "Vinicius for Children" in the Popular Arts category.

- the '82 Iris Award from NATPE offered for the program "Vinicius for Children."

- the '82 Ondas Award from the Spanish Broadcasting Society for the program "Life and Death Severina."

- the Silver Medal at the '82 International Film and TV Festival of New York for the documentary "Amazon — The Last Frontier."

- the Gold Medal at the '82 International Film and TV Festival of New York for the mini-series "Lampião and Maria Bonita."

- the '82 Golden Emmy for the programa "Life and Death Severina" in the Popular Arts category.



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## **BBC CRITICISM OF FALKLANDS ARTICLE**

*To the Editor:*

I write to register my grave concern about an article in *Television Quarterly*, Volume XIX, Number III, by John Putnam, entitled "Britannia Rules the Airwaves".

The article is generally confusion of impression and interpretation: Putnam is entitled to that — although it says little for the quality of his journalism or indeed the calibre of your publication that such material should be printed.

For example, to say that BBC TV News "has less than an hour's worth of its own footage cleared by censors: ditto for rival Independent Television News" is not only arrant nonsense: it is untrue. In fact, there are many hours of coverage, including battle footage, certainly enough for the BBC to have been able to produce a best-selling videocassette about the Falklands conflict. (Putnam, of course, conveniently ignores the fact that the Falklands coverage used by ITN was, in fact, BBC material, made available to them under a pool arrangement.)

It would be tedious in the extreme to list all the errors in this article. But I am extremely angry about the statement in which Putnam alleges — entirely without foundation — that the BBC "at the behest of Defense... backed off from interviews with kin of personnel killed in the campaign lest one of them blurt a

dissenting opinion about the virtue of dying etc."

That is quite the most disgraceful allegation I have ever heard. It is not true that the BBC "backed off" from interviewing relatives of servicemen killed in the Falklands: we talked to many of them.

To suggest the BBC would have acceded to such a request is not only to underestimate the standards and calibre of the BBC and its journalists, but maliciously to misrepresent the BBC's position as an independent public broadcaster.

— Alan H. Protheroe

Mr. Protheroe is Assistant Director General of the BBC.

*Comment from London by John Putnam: "I stand by my story."*

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## **MORE ON WOODY ALLEN**

*To the Editor:*

I just read the article in *Television Quarterly* about Woody Allen and public TV. I am an admirer of Woody Allen, though you may see me as a culprit, for I played a small part in keeping "The Politics and Comedy of Woody Allen" off the public air. Let me explain.

I had left CBS in 1968 to teach at American University. In 1971, Sam Holt, in charge of programming at PBS, invited me to serve as a consultant, and I agreed. The two programs that created difficulty — all around — were the Landau-Jacobs program on the FBI's use of provocateurs and the program starring Allen. The FBI program was thoroughly rehashed in a special two-hour edition of *Behind the Lines*. I won't review that. But I must tell you something about what went on at PBS regarding the Woody Allen film.

I was called in to screen it — I believe Holt and Hartford Gunn, president of PBS, were also at the screening, though I am not sure. I watched and laughed as often as I imagine Jack Kuney did at his first screening. Some of it struck me as being in poor taste. One bit seemed to me not only in appallingly bad taste but libelous. I believed Kissinger had grounds — good grounds — to sue, and with the Nixon Administration aching for such an opportunity to pounce on public television, it seemed foolhardy to give it legitimate cause.

Indeed, I should have thought that Allen, prompted on the point, would have welcomed the cut. If my memory serves, PBS suggested the elimination of only two brief passages in the entire hour and that Allen's reaction was, "No, you buy the package as is or not at all." I was sorry. The program deserves a national audience. Incidentally, I thought the half-hour interview with Allen on the nature of humor was the best, most informative discussion on the subject I have ever heard.

— Edward Bliss, Jr.

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

“ USA Today: “*You were the nation's first anchor woman on the network evening news. Why are they now all male?*”

Barbara Walters: “*There are only three networks and that's always been a no-woman's land. It goes without saying that every local station has a female—it's almost a cliché. I think there will be an anchor woman. I can't say how soon because Dan Rather is new and doing very well, and he doesn't need a woman. With Tom Brokaw and Roger Mudd, it is hard to slide a woman in there, and we have three people on ABC-TV in world news. I think it should happen. I think it should be a matter of course. I don't think it will be like the first woman president or woman vice president. It is not a historical occasion, because women have proven themselves so well in all areas of television. . . .*”



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