



# TELEVISION QUARTERLY

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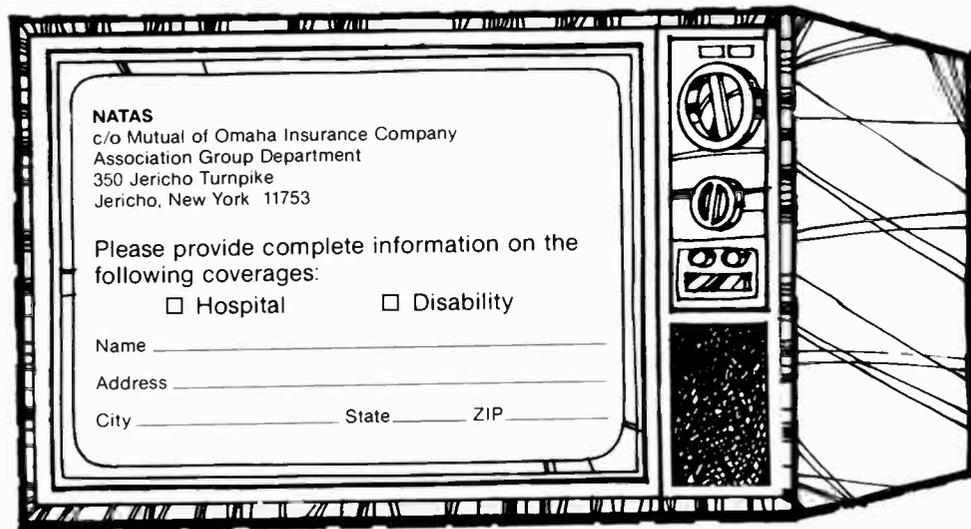
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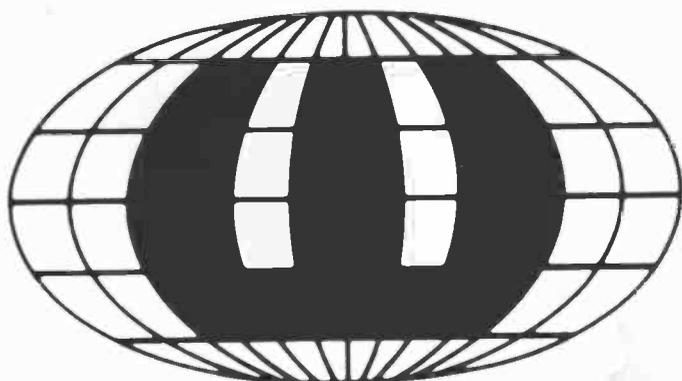
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# THE CLOSING DOWN OF WOODY ALLEN

His TV show was political and funny. What happened to it was political and not funny. Whodunnit? A producer recalls a curious episode of the Nixon era.

## BY JACK KUNEY

"*Satire is what closes on Saturday night*' on Public TV. . ." (Variety headline, February 16, 1982)

**I**t's been ten years since Woody Allen attempted a bit of satire for public television called, *Men of Crisis*. It was a program that never saw the light of day, abandoned by a group of politically intimidated men from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Public Broadcasting Service, and Channel 13 in New York City. There are quite a number of 10th Anniversary celebrations going on at the moment, and I would hate to see Woody's short-lived marriage with educational television go unremembered, especially in light of a recent black-tie dinner in Washington which celebrated the decade since Richard Milhous Nixon was re-elected to the Presidency. A goodly crowd was there: Nixon himself, John Mitchell, Dwight Chapin, Charles Colson, among others. A few were not invited, one or two refused the invite, or couldn't come. Anyway, they say it was a lovely dinner.

So this is as good a time as any to go public with a story that until now has been untold about the union of one of America's funniest men with ETV. I had the good fortune to be present during the mating process, as a Producer for National Educational Television.

In that winter of 1971-1972 I was hav-

ing difficulty recognizing exactly whom I was working for. After the passage of the Public Television Act in 1967, with the subsequent formation of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and its step-child, the Public Broadcast Service, changes were in the offing, but they were developing slowly. At the time, the main production center for educational television was still a company called NET, National Educational Television, with offices in New York City.

I was then one of approximately 20 men and women who were producers of news, informational, educational, and cultural programs for most of the nation's 246 public television stations. National Educational Television was funded primarily by Ford Foundation money, answerable to no one except NET management. In some eyes, we were part of the infamous "Eastern Liberal Establishment" the Nixon White House saw as one of its prime antagonists. NET's supposed role in undermining the mission of the Nixon administration was rather overplayed. How influential could we be representing, as we did at that time, less than one percent of the American viewing public?

Actually, I didn't feel political during my NET years—my main job was producing and directing cultural programs, lovely work that regularly took me cross country and half way 'round the world.

Then one day in November of 1971 the phone rang. It was Sam Cohn, a high-powered agent employed by International Creative Management. Sam

wanted to know if I'd be interested in having Woody Allen do a program of political satire for public television. After I had picked myself off the floor, I asked Sam what the catch was. In his bland style, he swore that there was none. Woody was just finishing shooting *Play It Again, Sam* in San Francisco, and had some free time, before starting a new film in Hollywood about *Sex*, and he had a few things he wanted to say about the current occupants of the White House, and would we be interested?

No sooner had I hung up the phone, then I raced into the office of Bill Kobin, who was the vice-president in charge of programming at NET—my boss—and told him about the surprising phone call. (It had always been articulated as NET policy that humor, and better still, satirical humor, was an important item on the public broadcasting agenda.) Bill leapt up from his desk with an incredulous, "Are you serious?" and before we knew it we were in bed with Woody Allen.

**I**t all started slowly enough. I was to meet the great little man at the offices of Rollins and Joffee, Woody's personal managers. Sam Cohn was again the intermediary, and in the space of two or three phone calls a date was set, and I was on my way to Woody's 57th Street penthouse offices. My reception was surprisingly warm, and soon I was in a story conference with Charlie Joffee and Woody about our upcoming film. It was all heady stuff for me, and I am not sure that I really remember the exact text of that conversation. I do recall Woody saying something in the softest of tones about some substantial disagreement he felt with the way things were being managed in the White House, and how he had some thoughts about how to reveal the true nature of that Administration.

He had a character in mind, an over-sexed power broker named Harvey Wallinger, someone whom the President

counted on for his every move. Woody would play this character himself, and it didn't take too much imagination to identify the role-model as Henry Kissinger, in spite of some very graphic physical differences. It all sounded very funny, and I responded enthusiastically. That was the end of the meeting, except for a few cryptic questions on Woody's part. "Are we talking about an hour?" he asked.

"Yes," I improvised.

"I'll try and get a script to you as soon as I can," Woody said.

I didn't hear anything from Messrs. Allen, Joffee, or Cohn for about ten days, and then a call came from the Rollins and Joffee office saying that a script from Woody was on its way. Sure enough, in a few minutes, a messenger

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**Woody wanted to make a political statement in the way he knew best—through his comedy—and he figured that educational television was the logical conduit.**

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arrived with a package. I picked it up myself from the reception desk, tucked the envelope under my arm—it was surprisingly bulky—and hurried to my office and started to read.

It was a completely articulated script. The thought occurred to me then that perhaps the script might be something Woody had written over a period of months with a more commercial audience in mind. But I was wrong. He had spent the ten days since our 57th Street meeting holed up in his apartment working full-time for educational television!

For the first time I began to think—and subsequently came to believe—that writing the show (and eventually doing it) was truly an altruistic action on Woody's part. As great artists often are, he was extraordinarily prescient, and

his perceptions of the Nixon regime struck as close to the bone as anyone's could six months before Watergate. Woody wanted to make a political statement in the way he knew best—through his comedy—and he figured that educational television was the logical conduit.

**T**hese were tumultuous times at NET. All kinds of internal changes were going on: James Day, a new president from KQED, the ETV station in San Francisco, had recently taken over, and he was to become the unwilling administrator of NET's last rites. Other changes were also occurring at the local level. At Channel 13, the station call letters had been changed officially from WNDT/13 to WNET/13, and a couple of inexperienced broadcasters named John Jay Iselin and Robert Kotlowitz, were lured from the New York publishing scene to take over, respectively, as Vice-President, and Director of Programming at the local level. All of us at NET were curious to see how they would respond to the external pressures that were developing. Most important of all, Ford Foundation support, the mainstay of NET's financial backing, was about to evaporate; the Foundation was now planning to phase out of its support for educational television.

The long-awaited defusing of our small segment of the illusive Eastern Liberal Establishment was now taking place. It's hard now to fix the blame on any single individual in this small media witch hunt, since there was pressure on from all quarters. Before his demise, Spiro Agnew spoke out often and irrationally, about the "media" and their supposed sins. Clay Whitehead, Nixon's appointee as Director of Telecommunications Policy, was even more specific, and as a consequence, even more insidious.

Courageously, in those rough times, NET did anything but maintain a low profile. We struck out boldly in any number of programs against hypocrisy, injustice, bigotry, ignorance, abuse of

privilege, profiteering and other corrupt practices.

One of my colleagues, Mort Silverstein, even took on the Congress of the United States in a program titled, *Banks and the Poor*, a brilliant indictment of certain abuses in our banking system, with a summary calling for reform of these abuses by our legislative bodies. The program closed with a list of more than a hundred members of Congress who each had a vested interest in American banks.

Anyway, it was now my job to get Woody's script to Bill Kobin: I sat in his office as he read it. He finished quickly. "Well?" I asked.

"Well, what?" he replied.

"This will never get on the air, not with Nixon still in the White House!" I said.

"That's not the major problem," he replied, "I just don't think it's very funny."

He was wrong. The script was deceptively simple, but funny. It was titled *Men of Crisis* and was rather loosely patterned after the old *March of Time* newsreels. In a series of barbed staccato scenes, Woody took his protagonist Harvey Wallinger, as Nixon's key aide, through a series of events which dogged Nixon's footsteps from the Eisenhower Vice-Presidency into the Kennedy-Nixon campaign of 1960. The TV debates were seen through the eyes of a make-up man who wanted to know what kind of make-up to use on "Dick," because he has a face that "... makes no statement."

The script then proceeded through the debates to Nixon's subsequent defeat. It picked up again with Nixon's Senatorial race in California, including the infamous "You won't have Nixon to kick around" farewell. It climaxed with the presidential campaign of 1968 with Nixon running against Hubert Humphrey, ending with Nixon victorious, going to Washington to be sworn in as President.

This brief history became especially telling because Woody wrote the script

in such a way that it could be expanded with as much actual stock news footage of the Nixon entourage as we could find. The shooting script called for this material to be intercut with some new footage of Woody (as Harvey Wallinger) interposed in the Nixon scene. It was not a new technique, but in this context it worked brilliantly.

Within three weeks we were ready to shoot. Woody had a date set for his new Hollywood picture, now titled *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*, and if we were going to be able to take advantage of his talents, we had to get moving. My one-man office quickly expanded to include an associate, Mary Ann Donohue, and a unit manager. Casting was in the hands of Marion Dougherty, with whom I had worked during my *Play of the Week* days, and with Woody's advice and consent she began assembling our cast. First to come aboard was Louise Lasser, Woody's ex-wife; next, a current girl friend—a young actress named Diane Keaton. Everybody was working for scale, and most were people he had worked with before.

There were to be no large parts, everybody was to have his "shtick," except for the *authentic* comic characters we were to have on film: Nixon, Agnew, Melvin Laird, John Mitchell, etc.

**A**lso working with us at this time was an extraordinarily hard-working, tenacious, and perceptive film-finder named Dell Byrne. Her job was to dig through thousands of feet of newsreels, searching the years outlined in Woody's script. We literally re-shaped the script around some of the delectable footage she found for us. The best thing about her was that she was apolitical in her search, and the result was a couple of wonderful shots of Hubert Humphrey that we used to introduce the whole '68 campaign sequence—Senator Humphrey, for example, in Doctoral robes, mounting a stage with great dignity, obviously about to be

awarded an honorary degree, and suddenly tripping as he crossed to the podium.

Then, too, I'll never forget the day that Dell called from the stock-footage library where she was going through endless reels of film, and said that she had found something that we just had to use. It was so unlike Dell's usual quiet air of rectitude that I hurried over to the vaults to take a look. Dell had discovered some footage of the famous Agnew tennis game. It was a well-publicized event early in the Nixon presidency, when the Vice-President playing an ungainly game of doubles, managed to hit his own partner while serving. An astute cinematographer with a great sense of timing had captured it all on film. When Woody saw it he roared, one of the few times I ever saw him laugh aloud, and the sequence appears in the final version of the show.

We shot the rest of the film in ten days in early December of 1971, and it was a constant surprise to me just how close we stayed to Woody's actual first script. Most of it was shot on the campus of Columbia University on a succession of cold winter days. We were trying to replicate the look and feel of Washington without leaving New York, and we generally found it. We even staged a McCarthy-like hearing in the moot courts of the Law Building.

By Christmas-time, the film had been processed and a work print was in the hands of our editor, Eric Albertson. Woody had hurriedly supervised a rather rough assemblage before he had to leave for Hollywood to begin work on *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*. The plan was for Eric and me to get the film as close to completion as we could and then follow Woody with a rough cut to Hollywood, where we would fine cut it. Woody planned to join us on his free evenings and help us finish the job.

Those weeks of working with Woody in California stand out in my memory as one of the great treats of my working life. It was just Woody and I, the editor

and a Movieola, and I really enjoyed the closeness and camaraderie. I think he opened up to me a bit, but it's hard to tell with Woody. He's very diffident in social situations, especially with relative strangers. I kept asking him all kinds of questions that he must have thought were simplistic, but he was always kind and generous with his answers.

For instance, I would question Woody about a bit of business or a gag, "How did you know 'that' was still funny?"

He would reply "I remember, or try to remember, my initial reactions to scenes we've shot, and trust them."

He was very quick to cut something he didn't like, excising whole scenes without compunction. I worried about the eventual length of the film, and frequently asked, "Couldn't 'this' be reworked?"... "Do we have to discard 'that'."

"No," he would reply, "It's better to get rid of it," and there was always an explanation why.

The film was a series of black-outs, bits and snatches, and all of them were exposed over and over again to Woody's discerning eye. Eventually I saw a film that had initially been over an hour long in roughcut, get honed down to 50-40-30, and finally 25 very tight satirical minutes.

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## **Woody had agreed to do an hour show, but here we were with less than half of that.**

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Just how funny was it? It's hard for me to say. I've now seen the completed film well over a hundred times, and a few of the things which I initially thought were funny no longer appear so. But I think most of it holds up.

I still remember fondly a sequence in the film, when Louise Lasser, with disarming sexuality, appearing briefly as Harvey Wallinger's "ex", describes the relationship as something less than the wonderful first experience every girl

should have.

The completed film was simple enough. What we now had was one episode of a supposed series called *Men of Crisis*. The distinguished personage to be saluted in that particular episode—Harvey Wallinger. Up on the screen, flashes the timeless phiz of Woody Allen as Harvey, the globe-girdling diplomat!

Woody had agreed to do an hour show, but here we were with less than half of that. Well, wouldn't you know, amible as a pussy cat, Woody agreed to come into the studios of KCET, Los Angeles' educational television station, and fill in the remaining minutes of his allotted hour by discussing some of his ideas about comedy and satire. Our show was now strengthened by a remarkable film essay on the nature of humor by one of the great American comics, and that added to our *Men of Crisis* comedy, gave us an hour program, titled: *The Politics—and Comedy of Woody Allen*.

Almost all NET programming had to be submitted to the networking agency of the new Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Public Broadcasting Service, for review. Public television stations, especially those operated by State Educational Systems, have always been essentially conservative establishments.

CPB now took over the "flagging" process, warning stations in the network that some shows about to be broadcast might contain certain language, or scenes, supposedly difficult for them and their viewers to handle.

During this period, NET was distinguished by its creative and political boldness. Everyone on staff was committed to turn out the finest work possible, and in advancing the art of television, both its technique and its content. NET was not afraid to experiment; even when it failed, the productions were interesting, and often ahead of their time.

For instance, NET's *Great American Dream Machine* series was a splendid collection of short video essays, bright little features, and courageous docu-

mentary material. Its crusading and investigative reporting were frequently effective. At the beginning of the consumer movement, it broadcast an inspired piece describing the ingredients of a frozen lemon cream pie which contained no lemon or cream—only a collection of many multi-syllabic chemical ingredients. This aroused the manufacturers of the pie and the baking industry to a frenzied attack on *Great American Dream Machine* and NET.

A continuing foe was Republican Representative Clarence Brown who seemed to spend most of his waking hours trying to slash any funds for public television. He attacked *Great American Dream Machine* in Congress as "left-wing" criticizing "Dream's" then-correspondent Andy Rooney — who went on to greater fame with *60 Minutes* — for his pieces on Nixon.

Another controversial feature by *American Dream Machine* correspondent, Paul Jacobs, a report on the FBI use of *agents provocateurs*, was excised from one of the programs. Some of the stations, and the new regime at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, were becoming wary and timid.

Unfortunately, it was a time when the entire Nixon gang was riding high, and television—especially public television —was responding to the pressure, both inferred and direct, emanating from almost every office on Pennsylvania Avenue. CPB chairman Frank Pace, and his president John Macy, appeared before the Senate Commerce Committee, and as *The New York Times'* Christopher Lyndon interpreted it, the CPB officials "deferred broadly" to White House Office of Telecommunications Policy director Clay Whitehead. A few weeks prior to that confrontation, as reported in *Variety*, Whitehead made the stunning statement "that he saw no need for news and public affairs on public TV because the commercial networks were doing such a swell job."

I never knew exactly who made the decision not to air the Woody Allen show. I suppose the ultimate responsibility for it must lie in the hands of Hartford Gunn, at that time the president of PBS.

Actually the phone call to kill the program came from someone named Billy B. Oxley. At the time, *Variety* commented "Who he?". Oxley had been

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### **PBS was cancelling the projected air date for the Woody Allen program, and replacing it with a show called . . . "Come To Florida Before It's Gone."**

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brought into the national public television decision-making machinery from somewhere in Nebraska, with the title of "Associate Coordinator of Programming for PBS."

Bill Kobin broke the news to me on an early Tuesday morning in February, a few minutes after he had received Oxley's call announcing that PBS was cancelling the projected February 21st air date, replacing it with a show called *Come to Florida Before It's Gone*, starring a comedian named Myron Handleman. Oxley was quoted as saying that the Woody Allen program was scrapped because of "problems of equal time, personal attack, the fairness doctrine, and the subjective issue of good taste."

To my regret, Woody stopped taking my phone calls the moment the show went public in the press. Charlie Joffee, always amiable, kept saying that Woody would get back to me, and we would all decide what collaborative action to take. In the meantime, Joffee kept issuing grandiose statements to the press about how "We had brought the show to public television because we knew that there we would have complete freedom."

At the time of the show's rejection, no more than a hundred people had seen it, mostly people in the business, friends and acquaintances of mine, associates at

NET, pals of some of the show staff. The feedback had been pretty good. Everyone laughed in the right places, but strangely, almost to a person, they all had some criticism, something they felt uncomfortable with, one joke they felt should be changed or eliminated. But now, the show had become strictly a "house" item. We stopped screening it for our friends and started twice-daily showings among ourselves. In attendance, at one showing or another, were most of the top management of Channel 13 and NET, and they always kept coming back to the same notion — the elimination of that one "tasteless" joke or bit of business that somehow would make the show acceptable to all.

Some of the things we were accused of fell rather loosely under what is called the "fairness doctrine," a policy of the Federal Communications Commission. It's series of rather loosely drawn propositions, but not without force, because they have been supported by Supreme Court decision. Under this general "fairness doctrine" umbrella comes something called the doctrine of personal attack, which states that when someone is about to be attacked on the air, he must be notified, and given time to rebut such an "attack."

If PBS ever had to give air time to everyone satirized on the show, it would have been quite a problem, because Woody was not particularly selective in his satirized attacks — among others, he hit Nixon, Agnew, Hubert Humphrey, George Wallace, John Mitchell, Melvin Laird... and *The New York Times*.

What a joy it would have been to see all of the above — Nixon and Company and the *Times*, — broadcasting a "fairness" reply to Woody Allen. It could have been funnier than the original show!

**H**umor should never be examined under a microscope — or by a committee. Many of the jokes dealt with the love life of the jet-setting and heavy-dating Wallinger, and even I

found a few of the jokes in poor taste. But in context of today's television, the best and worse of Woody's gags seem tame in comparison with *Saturday Night Live*. As for Woody's Nixon barbs, some of them pale alongside of many of Johnny Carson's political zingers during the Watergate era.

No matter how many times I view it most of the film gives me pleasure. Among the bits I treasure is one late in the film when, with the Nixon gang firmly entrenched in the White House, Wallinger is asked about the whereabouts of the Attorney-General; he replies "Mr. Mitchell is busy — he's wiretapping Mr. Nixon's phone at the moment." How truth often replicates fiction!

Of all the criticisms that we received, my personal favorite occurred in one of the last viewings that we held trying to decide what cuts might make the show acceptable to all. (Woody, of course, was out on the Coast during all of this, not taking my phone calls.) There were six or seven of us in the room, and we had each expressed our notions of acceptability, when one of the Channel 13 executives piped up, "but what about those homosexual jokes?"

I almost fell out of my chair, "What homosexual jokes?" I asked.

He explained to me that he had divined that two of the jokes had a "homosexual thrust" to them. One dealt with a bit by Conrad Bain (now one of the *Diff'rent Strokes* stars) who, commenting as a political insider on the friendship of Nixon and Harvey Wallinger, announces that "Harvey is one of the few men who can make the President laugh. He just goes up behind him and tickles him. He tickles him, and he laughs."

The other example was a gag which dealt with Nixon's social unacceptability. Harvey explains, "The problem is, you see, that at most social functions, no one will dance with Dick except me."

By this time we had pretty well botomed out in our office and screening room discussions. No one could agree about anything, and it was decided to

shelve the whole program.

And there it has rested, for ten years. Since then, quite a few events have occurred to prove that Allen's satirical shafts were directed at the right targets. A couple of brilliant reporters from the *Washington Post*, the Congress of the United States, and our judicial system have also supported Woody's satire. The basic picture that emerged from the show has proven to be an accurate one.

The program could have been broadcast, and public television should have been strong enough to withstand any governmental pressure, implied or direct. As a great, democratic nation, we should be able to recognize our foibles and weaknesses — and if we choose, to laugh at our leaders.

Curiously enough I don't think anyone really owns the Woody Allen film. NET paid its production costs, and there is an Educational Broadcasting Corporation copyright on the film which I put there, but it's never been registered with the Library of Congress copyright office. Woody never signed a contract or received a single day's pay for writing, directing and appearing in this film!

I wish the rights could be cleared. I had always hoped that the film would see the light of day on television, and in theatrical release. It's a short film, so it would have to play on a double bill with one of Woody's other comedies. A generation is growing up with a rather relaxed image of the Watergate Gang, and perhaps the Woody Allen film would be a not-too-gentle reminder of nasty going-ons that happened a decade ago—an amusing history lesson. ■

During his thirty years in television, Jack Kuney has directed and produced and directed more than a thousand shows, including many of the classic *Play Of The Week* dramas. He has worked for the commercial networks, and also for seven years for public television, and has won five Emmys. Currently, in addition to producing, he is an associate professor in the TV department of Brooklyn College.

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

### Salute to M\*A\*S\*H

“ . . . *This antiwar, pro-wise-guy sitcom was the most innovative show of an innovative period. Despite this distinction, in a medium that is normally hostile to innovation, it has lasted eleven seasons on primetime CBS, surviving time shifts, cast changes and even post-Watergate hostility to the sixties, the days that spawned M\*A\*S\*H. It has been successful in as many ways as a television series can hope to be. In the ratings, it has hung with the Top Ten for a decade. . .*

*The show is so popular that it has achieved ubiquitous rerun syndication while still in production; in many markets two or three episodes are aired daily. It can be argued that M\*A\*S\*H has set a standard for contemporary 'quality' television. . . Not bad for a program that was panned by Time as one of the 'biggest disappointments' of the 1972-73 season, and likened to Hogan's Heroes. . .* ”

David Marc and Paul Buhle in *American Film Magazine*.



ABC Television Network

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*KTTV Los Angeles*

*WTTG Washington, DC*

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# CONFESSIONS OF AN INSOMNIAC NEWS ADDICT

Movies used to be the stayups delight. Now there's news thru' the night. A news fan samples the new late-late shows, wonders if we may be risking headline overdose.

## BY HERBERT LONDON

**L**ate-night news is the best thing to happen to insomniacs since vintage John Wayne movies. If one is going to be up anyway, it is probably better to consider the affairs of the day than to count cowboys and indians lost on the plains or sheep jumping over a fence. Or is it? This barrage of television news raises some interesting questions about what television news should do, what late night news does do and whether this news saturation is necessary at all.

During the period of Louis XIV the national museum was opened once a year to the general population. The royal family considered any other arrangement an indulgence that would be harmful to the populace. In the nineteenth century most of our country's newspapers were published only when there was a news story, to wit: only when there was a story that was of direct importance to the citizenry. These extreme examples of involuntary controls and even voluntary controls on the news are not being espoused here. On the contrary, I would actively support the public's right to know. But we have come a long way from the nineteenth century and even a long way from the defensible position that the public has a right to know. It seems to me the public should know most things, but it doesn't have a right to know all things or to be anesthetized by so much news it is im-

possible to distinguish between what is important and what is trivial.

With an explosion in television news programming, it is obvious something is at work to transform our view of the news. But if this is to be a revolution, it is occurring at a time when most of America is fast asleep. The three networks are now engaged in competing for the news addicts audiences with programs as late as 3 a.m. and as early as 6 a.m.. In effect the networks are now available for live coverage of an event twenty-four hours a day. NBC News President Reuven Frank is quoted as having said, "Networks must respond to the needs of people. If changing life-styles mean people are ready to watch at different times, we will do programs at different times."

I have no reason to question Mr. Frank's motives, but they strike me as somewhat disingenuous. The key to the network's decision to go to full-time news can be found in Atlanta, Georgia, in the person of Ted Turner. Turner's Cable News Network is now sent into 13.9 million households via cable television. According to the A.C. Nielsen ratings, CNN attracts viewers in 5.8 million of those homes in an average week. Those numbers put CNN in the big league of news, and they have obviously caught the attention of news executives at the networks.

Notwithstanding the success at CNN, it has been noted that when 94 percent of Americans are in slumberland there are 5 million sets that are on and can be

turned to the news. Moreover, this programming can be aired at relatively modest additional cost since most of the news staff is in place, as are the news services and accumulated news footage.

The weekday entries now include: *NBC Overnight* from 1:30 a.m. to 2:30 a.m.; *ABC's This Morning* 6 a.m. to 7 a.m.; *NBC's Early Today* 6:30 a.m. to 7 a.m.. Then there is a CBS marathon of news from 2 a.m. to 7 a.m., which leads directly into the 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. *Morning News*; and *ABC's* array of nightly news which begins with *Nightline* followed by a news talk and interview show, *The Last Word*, featuring Phil Donahue and Greg Jackson, which ends at 1 a.m.

If you are still starved for news after this late-night-wee hours of the morning fare, there is the *Today* show and *Good Morning America* at 7 a.m. and Turner's CNN progeny, CNN2, the headline-news service — which provides round-the-clock features to cable systems and scores of network affiliate stations. Also a newcomer, Group W's *Satellite News Channel*, a round-the-clock news service on cable.

It is obvious that news, which as late as the mid-sixties was accorded fifteen minutes of evening air time, is now on the ascendency. News is a feature, not simply a filler. What corporate executives once considered a financial albatross is now a profit cornucopia. News is now discussed as programming with "boundless opportunities." But the question still is opportunities for what? What are we to make of this trend?

For one thing, news not only competes with entertainment, it is expected to be an extension of entertainment. The anchor person must be charming in addition to seeming well-informed; his accompanying cast of characters has to be able to quip, make judgments about everything from comets to cold fronts and be sufficiently interesting to keep the viewer from changing stations or falling asleep. There is also an over-reaching for hokey human interest stories, oddities and fluff.

Even the highly-regarded Lloyd Dobyns and Linda Ellerbee on *NBC Overnight* have resorted to reports of zucchini festivals and a 660 pound salami in Yugoslavia. On one late-night news program in which I recently appeared, the interviewer asked me if Colonel Khadafy was responsible for Sadat's assassination. When I replied that there is no evidence to suggest such a link, she insisted, "Why are you hedging? Why won't you give us a straight answer!"

In this case, a "straight" answer is the answer the interviewer wants to hear, a familiar ploy. Surely this may be an extreme case, but it is not extreme for interviewers to attempt to elicit bold responses. This is the Mike Wallace school of journalism. Encourage or intimidate the interviewer to make a statement without qualifiers and then criticize him for doing so.

**O**n *The Last Word* viewers are asked to call in with their opinions on everything from a nuclear freeze to artificial hearts. One wonders what conceivable difference it makes if your view is in the majority or minority. Does a majority vote make your opinion legitimate? Or does the call-in create a sense of audience participation? Does this approach to viewer voting herald the brave new world of plebiscite democracy? At the moment it appears to be a form of late night entertainment, somewhat like the radio shows in which callers can make splenetic comments about their neighbor's dog or immigrants "who want everything for nothing."

A second effect of late night news is to reveal what is axiomatic about television programming in general: time is money. Since every executive can translate minutes into dollars all discussion is limited. This, I should hastily add, is not necessarily bad. As Wittgenstein once said of Freud, his problem is in not recognizing that conversation without limits is ultimately fatuous. Television

news discussion can often be crisp and pointed because — precisely because — the second hand is moving inexorably. However, there are times when you want to hear more than superficial analysis.

Recently *Nightline* and *The Last Word* conducted debates on the nuclear freeze issue. In the former program the national director of the freeze movement debated Edward Teller. The program appeared to have been organized by central casting. Teller was Strangelovian and the director Panglossian. Neither had an opportunity to explain his position. Teller kept insisting "You do not understand

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**In my opinion a debate between two actors on a matter of national significance automatically diminishes the issue.**

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the issues," which may have been true. And the director argued we have more than enough nuclear weapons to protect our interests. The essential question of what is enough to deter the Russian nuclear threat was not considered. In the middle of Teller's monologue about the need for a "build-up," Mr. Koppel, the host, interrupted with the comment "I'm sorry we can't go on." From my point of view he should have said "we can't go off."

Undaunted, I stayed awake to watch the same issue debated between Charlton Heston and Paul Newman on the *Last Word*. In my moderately well informed opinion a debate between two actors on a matter of national significance — perhaps even survival — automatically diminishes the issue. I keep seeing Newman as Harper, a tough, indefatigable foe of evil doers and Heston as Moses the law giver, omniscient and wise. In the exchanges that took place Newman went for the knock-out: "Why did we sign SALT I if the Russians can't be trusted?" Heston was the counter puncher: "None of us want weapons; what we want is security from fear and

intimidation." The result of the debate was a standoff, notwithstanding an audience vote favoring Newman's position. After all, how can Moses lose a debate?

But what was accomplished in this discussion? The only possible response is "not much." Technical issues are beyond the ken of these actors and attributions of Russian motives were prophecies of exaggerated misfortune or beneficence. In this instance the limitation of time was merciful for the viewing audience.

It is worth contrasting these television debates with some of those that occurred on radio during the same week. The radio discussions were less dramatic and far more informative. ABC News radio covered the issue from both points of view with, as Twain would put it, relatively little thunder and a fair amount of light. Guests were of the "expert" variety — a word about which I am very dubious — who seemed to understand the issues and were willing to discuss it in lay terms.

Television executives sometimes act as if *radio* had never been invented. In this age of television dominance, it is often useful to remember that radio has news, timely, crisp and informative that is untainted by visual depictions which influence the character and direction of reports. This is not intended to be a comparison of radio and television news, but for those who insist that late-night television news fills a gap, one should remember that a gap was filled by late-night radio news many years ago. And radio news is still with us doing a first-rate job.

**C**learly the advantage of television news is in its pictures. Yet pictures and news may not be as compatible as one has been led to believe. Showing the effects of violent crime on late-night news with its gore and grisly details is not only tasteless, it probably isn't newsworthy. After all, seeing such pictures doesn't make us knowledgeable about or sensitive to the issue of crime; it simply

evokes anxiety and fear that have no appropriate outlets.

Similarly, who can forget the aftermath of that Air Florida plane that crashed into the Potomac? Program after program showed the same film clip of a woman in a state of shock barely clinging to life in the frozen Potomac waters. This scene was replayed on the 11 o'clock news, *Nightline*, CNN and all the early morning news programs. For me it became a recurring dream, a nightmare that I relived in living color until the reality of events merged with my worst dreams.

I am not suggesting that late-night news is more culpable of tastlessness than its early evening counterparts. However, I am suggesting that the late news has a greater responsibility than early news programs precisely because it is *late night* programming. We are all more suggestible in the late evening prior to sleep than we are in midday. Gruesome stories induce nightmares, especially when every gap in our imagination is filled with visual description.

This is not a plea to have Mary Poppins read fairy tales on the air before we go to bed. But it is an effort to have late-night news executives recognize their responsibility. They have a responsibility to provide hard-hitting, clear, fair news stories that deal with important issues, including crime. They should not, however, confuse this responsibility with the ratings battleground in which a Gresham's Law of news prevails, a law which suggests shocking stories tend to drive edifying news out of circulation.

**T**he expansion of news has another important effect that must be of concern to news executives: the use and abuse of television news by those who want to air their dissatisfaction. Norman Mayer, the man who threatened to blow up the Washington monument unless his demands for a "freeze" negotiation were met, is one such egregious illustration. His face became a feature on every late night news program as

this late-breaking story dominated the day's events. In a real sense television news was a captive to the bizarre sense of justice for which this extremist was willing to give his life. At a time when playing by the rules is considered a naive manifestation of bourgeois ethics, television news, wittingly and unwittingly, becomes a force for revolutionary

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**I can't think of any newscaster who is capable of making analogies between "Lord Jim," "Madame Bovary" and current news stories as Ms. Ellerbee does with surprising ease.**

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change. Any quack, as well as anyone with a justifiable complaint, can, if he so wishes, bring himself into public view by taking an extreme action. The threat to jump off a bridge or seize a national monument will assuredly attract an army of television cameramen falling over one another to get the best possible angle for the impending disaster.

Lest one get the impression that this is a one-sided diatribe against late-hour news programming, I should point out that there is a lot about this news that's right and some things that are quite extraordinary. Ellerbee and Dobyns are usually intelligent and quite capable of a serious ad lib. I can't think of any newscaster who is capable of making analogies between *Lord Jim*, *Madame Bovary* and current news stories as Ms. Ellerbee does with surprising ease. It is also true that some of their comments about nuclear weapons, namely their through misunderstanding of "overkill" logic, makes me wish they were somewhat less daring. But this is a niggling concern compared to the program's usually interesting, straight-forward and relaxed format. Moreover, despite the fact this is an attractive team, they don't smile on cue or read lines with feigned sincerity. They are decidedly low-key

which is fine for the late hour, albeit I occasionally wish they would get worked up about something other than Mr. Reagan's policies.

**T**ed Koppel of *Nightline* is the reigning star of late-night news, and he and his program are first-rate. His coverage of the Iranian hostage crisis created an opportunity that he was quick to exploit. Now his program attempts to cover the major issues of the day in a format reminiscent of the *Advocates* or the *MacNeil-Lehrer Report*.

What sets this program apart from the others is Koppel's style. His probing is conducted surgically with a careful politeness. He appears to be well informed about the issues, but even when he isn't, his questions often elicit interesting responses. His program has pace and vitality, characteristics to which I can personally attest since I usually watch it despite a sleep that is beckoning.

Even with these bright moments, it is appropriate to ask how does this late-night news as a concept stack up? As an educator accustomed to grading I can give these programs no better than a passing grade for conception and execution. The programs themselves are overly reliant on news reported earlier in the day. Even for a news fan, the redundancy can be painstaking after the third report. Then there are the occasional stock fillers which some aide pulls off a dusty shelf in order to provide visuals for a story-about-to-break. The problem with the filler and library stuff is that it is woefully out-of-date and provides about as much on contemporary Cuba, for example, as a travelogue filmed before the Revolution.

Occasionally the desire to be frank on the late-night news translates into blatant bias and would-be expertise. Dan Schorr on CNN has predictable sentiments on everything from tax cuts to a new weapons system. CBS *Nightwatch* anchors (Christopher Glenn and Felicia Jeter) seemingly rejoice at every opportunity to attack the present Administration. Still I believe this would be a

small price to pay for forthrightness, if there were an effort made to balance editorial commentary. Yet that is rarely the case.

In the last analysis, the brass gets — and deserves — a low grade for giving us all this over-abundance of news. What it suggests — I think — is another example of "me-tooism." Turneritis is catching apparently, particularly when it is accompanied by the thought of large audiences garnered on discount budgets. However, the effect of this flood of news has not been sufficiently considered. I am also convinced the revenue from these news programs has been greatly exaggerated. And I am sure the substance of these programs has not been thoughtfully examined.

As an insomniac news follower I can say I've seen all the news all the time. But after watching news being assembled, analyzed and re-analyzed and run and re-run, I wish one station would consider a rerun of *The Sands of Iwo Jima* or even William Bendix in *The Babe Ruth Story*. I'm afraid that even news junkies overdose. ■

Author and educator Herbert London writes frequently about the media. He is dean of the Galatin Division of New York University.

# GLOB



VINIUS FOR CHILDREN



LIFE AND DEATH SEVERINA



ROBERTO CARLOS



QUINCAS BERRO D'ÁGUA



THE YELLOW WCOOPECKER RANCH



MALU WOMAN



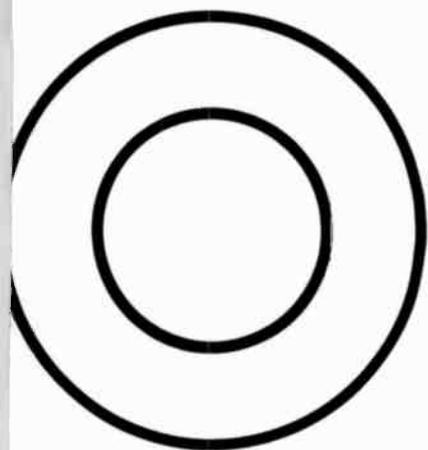
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## **INTERNATIONAL AWARDS**

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Globo TV is Brazil's largest television network.

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In Brazil, its programs are the absolute leaders in audience, reaching nearly 80 million viewers. Abroad, they have won over the public and critics in more than 90 countries.

The high technical and artistic level of Globo TV's programs is attested by 23 international awards. Among them:

- the 1976 Quality Trophy from the Madrid Editorial Office.
- Salute'79, offered by the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences of the U.S.A.
- 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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*Paramount*  
TELEVISION

# TV SOUTH OF THE BORDER

In Mexico private and government TV both flourish. News, sports, serials and imports are high-rated. But educational programs are also abundant. And siesta time is prime time.

## BY JOSEPH GOTTLIEB

**C**ontrary to the quick impressions of some Americans who vacation there, Mexico is not merely a string of sunny beach resorts adorning both its coasts. Between these coasts is a country three times as large as Texas, much of it rugged and spectacularly mountainous; much of it drab, scrubby deserts. But there are also vast farm areas, tropical jungles with uncovered relics of old civilizations. It has the world's fourth largest oil deposits, and gold and silver mines still rich after centuries of exploitation. Mexico is the world's 17th largest industrial nation with a population of seventy-five million people, among whom are artists, writers, scientists, bureaucrats, workers, bankers, merchants and students, ranchers and farmers. Seventy percent of its population is urban, but millions of Mexicans lack an education. Large numbers, in towns as well as cities, have just made it into the 20th century; many have yet to make it.

There are wide differences economically, with a small percentage of the rich at the top, a growing, but not big middle class, and a large working class, of which perhaps half are unemployed. This makes the problem of programming television for such a complex audience a complicated one which the commercial and government networks seem to be meeting head on — not to the satisfaction of everyone, but

apparently to most, for television is Mexico's favorite indoor pastime. All of it originates in Mexico City, the capital, the cultural, industrial, financial and educational center with 14 million people peering through the worst pollution in the world. But it is also a city of beautiful boulevards, parks, museums, theaters, universities and a population more worldly and sophisticated than in the rest of the country. Mexican television began here thirty years ago.

In 1952, at the end of his six-year term in office, Miguel Aleman, one of Mexico's more progressive presidents, organized a privately-owned company called *Telesistema Mexicana*, which, about 20 years later, shortened its name to *Televisa*. Headquartered in the center of the city, in a huge, sprawling building topped by four tall antennas, it owns four commercial channels—"2", "4", "5" and "8". Each channel has different program schedules. In addition, *Televisa* owns several magazines and five non-commercial cable channels in Mexico City.

Channel "2" is the key station of *Televisa's* largest network, the most popular in the country, covering all of Mexico, in addition to beaming programs by satellite to stations in the United States, Central and South America. Channel "4" broadcasts solely to Mexico City. Channel "5" is the key station of another network, smaller than "2," but reaching the major cities and towns. Channel "8" is *Televisa's* third network, also smaller than Channel "2,"

but it reaches the principal markets. Except for brief local news shows and occasional local features, all stations on the networks take their programs from *Televisa*.

These three networks, however, compete with each other as though they were independent. Each begins its day with non-commercial educational programs, starting at sign-on in the morning, and continuing into early afternoon. The government Channel "13" follows the same pattern, broadcasting educational programs from sign-on until 2 p.m. In fact, two o'clock in the afternoon is the beginning of the first of Mexican TV's two prime time periods—the other starts at 7 p.m. Mexico has a siesta period from 2 until 4 p.m. when shops and offices close down and many people come home for rest and the main meal of the day, *comida* — and to watch television. Seven o'clock is the end of the working day, and the start of the evening's important entertainment shows.

Aside from its educational programs, *Televisa's* schedules resemble those of the States: news, sports, game shows, movies, an occasional documentary, most of them imported from around the world and dubbed into Spanish; (they shy away from making their own because they're not profitable). Plus U.S. sit-coms and adventure series, dubbed, and large servings of soap operas, mostly made in Mexico, a few from South America. If a Mexican viewer is looking for art, music, ballet, serious drama, the government network, Channel "13" is usually the place for it, although *Televisa's* Channel "8" has a considerable number of such programs.

The major government network, *Corporation Mexicana de Radio y Televisión*, is commercial, and carries a balanced schedule of entertainment shows, news, educational and cultural programs. Its key outlet is Channel "13," Mexico City.

The other government network, MRT, which is non-commercial, broadcasts mostly agricultural and other public programs for farmers. Its affiliates used to receive programs by micro-wave re-

peater stations; now, 107 satellite receiving stations make it possible to beam the MRT service to the most remote areas. (*Televisa* also relays its shows to the same 107 satellite ground stations, as well as to more than 150 TV stations in the U.S.A. for Spanish-speaking viewers.)

In some ways, *Corporation Mexicana de Radio y Televisión* resembles public broadcasting in the United States. It has broadcast a number of the *Live From Lincoln Center PBS* series, and during the past year the Leonard Bernstein Beethoven series.

There are also many concert programs produced in Mexico. Mexico's National Symphony orchestra is now internationally acclaimed; its performances and those of ballets, operas and virtuoso recitals in Mexico City are often taped

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**Anyone with a television set can receive schooling from the primary grades to the university. MRT broadcasts many hours of primary school class work daily and an entire course of secondary education.**

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and aired by the government network. The charming city of Guanajuato, two hundred miles north of Mexico City, has been the scene for the past ten years of the celebrated *Festival Internacional Cervantino*. For three weeks during May, it presents nightly performances by some of the foremost musical and dancing talents in the world. All of these are taped and broadcast later in the year.

**T**he most recent statistics say, generously, that the literacy rate is 80 percent—probably an overestimate. But from the amount of time television devotes to education, that literacy figure should become realistic and even greater before long, if the people who need education take advan-

tage of what is offered to them. Anyone with a television set can receive schooling from the primary grades to the university. MRT daily broadcasts many hours of primary school class work and an entire course of secondary education; so do *Televisa's* stations. Viewers who take the secondary school courses on TV can go to special government offices for testing materials which they can have graded.

*Televisa* has an agreement with the University of Mexico to broadcast five hours a morning, during the period from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. featuring the University's professors presenting the same courses they give on campus, including such subjects as English, higher mathematics, physics, chemistry, logic and philosophy. Many are blackboard lectures, but some are more imaginative, using dramatic sequences, for example, to illustrate problems and their solutions.

Increasing the food crop has been a continuing program of the government, especially during the Portillo administration, which tried to make Mexico self-sufficient; the MRT network was a major aide in the project, and continues this role under the new President. It brings farmers information about new ways to increase their crops, (many of them still are using primitive methods, centuries old) better ways to care for their animals—even, one ranch owner told me, how to build a fence—a better way than he had ever known.

Nothing broadcast in Mexico on radio or television, or anything shown in a motion picture theater, is permitted without first being approved by the government. It sets the standard for language, how much of the human body can be seen (and *doing* what)—and even places limitations on what can be shown on certain commercials; how many commercials may be shown during an hour; and at what time movies having ratings comparable to PG and R may be shown.

Generally, it is not a heavy censorial hand, and nothing broadcast looks as

though pieces have been gouged out of it. And there does not seem to be any great cry, or even murmurs of protest about what may have been expunged or prohibited, if any. The head of the department that oversees it all is the sister of former President Jose Lopez Portillo, Dona Margarita Lopez Portillo, general director of Radio, Television and Cinematography, who was named 1982 Woman of the Year for her "fight to promote culture in general."

Dona Margarita Portillo's department doesn't allow nudity on TV or in the movies. A few years ago there was a scandal when, during an African ballet company's performance in Mexico City, *Televisa* broadcast the recital live, and there were bare-breasted women on camera until someone in the department saw them, made a hurried phone call to the station and had it summarily cut off the air. A shot of a female body is permitted from the waist up, rear view only. If there is a scene in which two people in bed start toward each other in a passionate move, they never make it; there is a cut-away. As for language, the Spanish equivalent of English four-letter words or other obscenities are not used. When an English language movie is being shown—there are many, many of them—four-letter words are not bleeped from the sound track, but the Spanish subtitle at the bottom of the frame is a mild equivocation.

**C**ommercials on Mexican television can take a big chunk out of an hour, fourteen minutes is the maximum, six minutes in each half hour and two minutes at the middle break. So spots are shown in clusters, and that produces an over-abundance of blurbs even though, visually, the best things in Mexican television are the commercials of the big money sponsors: beers, wines, hard liquors, cigarettes, banks and public utilities. These commercials are imaginative, high-fashioned, full of beautiful women and handsome men, exotic locations, good music, creative

photography, editing and lighting. On the other hand, variety shows are pedestrian with few imaginative effects, routine lighting, familiar choreography and puerile basic ideas.

Some commercials are subject to limitations. You are allowed to see the cigarette being taken from the pack but never lighted, and never between the lips; the alcoholic beverage can be poured into the glass but not consumed. And neither cigarette, liquor spots, nor "B" and "R" films may be shown until late evening when children are supposedly asleep.

**M**exico is a country whose population is 97 percent Roman Catholic. There are thousands of churches, even the smallest town has several, most of them lavishly decorated. Religious celebrations, sacred days, solemn religious processions through the streets of towns and villages and pilgrimages to sacred places by thousands of the devout are frequent, yet there are no religious broadcasts, not on radio or television. The Mexican constitution, which states that church and state are separate, is interpreted to mean that religious broadcasts would violate that principle. So, when Pope John Paul II came to Mexico two years ago and held huge open-air Masses in Mexico City and other places, there were no broadcasts.

Not long ago, a small-town radio station, which had been broadcasting Sunday Mass for the main church for years without complaint from the government, was suddenly called to account by the department of Radio, Television and Cinematography, and the station owner fined 20 thousand pesos. In another town nearby, the same thing happened, and the station was ordered off the air for a long period. But recently I saw a homey afternoon show on a *Televisa* station in which a woman was demonstrating, in great detail, how to make a crucifix to be worn around the neck. Arts and crafts, no doubt.

During President Portillo's administration there was more freedom of the press, television and radio than ever before. A once tight censorship began to ease during the administration of the preceding president, Luis Echeverria (1970-1976). By now, members of the government, including the president, are fair game for criticism, certainly more so than ever before. Following the devaluation of the peso in February last year, criticism of the administration increased a great deal in the press as well as in radio and television. Through the presidential press secretary the administration tried to exert control over the media, issuing instructions and suggestions that more respect should be shown when criticizing high government officials. But in short order, there was a turn-about and orders came from the same office to all government agencies and state-owned companies to practice an "open door" policy towards the press, so that the Mexican people may be "amply and timely informed." At the same time, the president pledged to uphold freedom of the press, but he added that the government would no longer advertise in magazines that systematically oppose it, and would not

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**News programs resemble the major USA newscasts, with one surprising exception: both in the studio and the field, more women take part than one would expect in a country reputed to be so "macho."**

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pay or subsidize critical publications.

*Televisa* emphatically denies that there is any censorship of the news. Even people who are prone to criticize the government say they think television news is giving them what is actually happening.

There are two major news programs in

Mexico. *Televisa* has one, on its Channel "2" network, called *Twenty Four Hours*, for about 20 years, anchored by a man named Jacobo Zabłudovsky. It is the oldest newscast in the country. The other, called *Seven Days*, is on the government-owned Channel "13" network, whose anchorman was changed recently. *Televisa's* "5" and "8" networks have no major news programs, but viewers throughout the country have plenty of news. The "2" and "13" networks begin their days early with morning news programs; then at two o'clock in the afternoon, Zabłudovsky comes on for a half-hour, as does the Channel "13" news. At 9 p.m. Channel "13" returns with an hour of news, and at 10 p.m. Zabłudovsky is back with an hour.

Each of these shows resembles in every way the major newscasts of the U.S., except that both in the studio and in the field more women take part than one would suppose in a country reputed to be so *macho*. The anchorman is teamed with chic women and handsome men, and although he does the major stories, they each have a specialty and either read a news item or do a lead-in to a tape.

By the best of standards, these are slick, professional newscasts, fast-paced with excellent tapes and, in some instances, direct reports from overseas by satellite. The hour format of these news programs, however, does not encourage many stories in depth; rather, there are more short items, including a fairly complete coverage of events happening all over Mexico, in addition to excellent coverage of international news. And, while Mexico has differences with the United States on some issues, on the air there is no anti-American campaign, although there can be an expression of the differences.

The Zabłudovsky program is said to be the most popular in the nation; Jacobo Zabłudovsky, who has been called the Walter Cronkite of Mexico, is a confident man in his fifties, rather professorial in appearance, although his style is smooth and relaxed. He has a sense of

humor, but some people say they are tired of his old jokes, and prefer the impersonality of the government news programs. Until recently, he used to appear on the air every night with a huge pair of padded earphones framing his face; sort of his trademark. But he has apparently turned them in for a less obvious PL.

**S**ome people complain the government news is a PR medium for the government; others assert that the Channel "2" news is upholding the establishment. But everyone is quick to talk about the government network's nightly show of news satire as proof of freedom of speech. Two of Mexico's most famous comedians, Hector Lachuga and Chuchu Salinas—who resemble middle-aged vaudevillians—sit together with a stack of newspapers and chat about what is going on, selecting the major news items, dissecting them with great glee, making fun of it all; sometimes naming politicians, sometimes disguising the names (but not enough so that anyone with knowledge of Mexican politics doesn't know whom they are talking about). Their witty program has gone on for several years, and if anyone in a high place has taken offense at what they say, it hasn't interrupted their run or diminished their popularity.

Last summer, Mexico elected a new president of the republic, Miguel de la Madrid of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which has been in power since 1929 and whose candidates have never lost an election. No one ever doubted that Madrid would be elected, yet for months he campaigned hard, all over the country, mainly to acquaint himself with the people and to reaffirm the principles of the party. Six other parties ran candidates last year, and for the first time, all parties were given free time daily on television to state their case. The period was only five minutes beginning at 2 P.M. on *Televisa's* Channel "2" network, and the parties, one after another, rotated day after day

for several months.

People told me that, despite the short time of each broadcast, they felt better informed about the election than ever before; that it gave them an opportunity to weigh the merits of all the candidates.

Some of the Mexican intellectuals, while praising the news, commentary, cultural and educational programs, complain their television is too much a copy of TV across the border. They think the imports, the dubbed versions of American adventure-melodramas like *Dallas*, *Quincy*, *Baretta*, etc., etc. (there are a lot of them in the night-time prime time) are too violent; too many guns and police and too much emphasis on crime

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### **The highest-rated programs are sports, everything from bull fights to baseball.**

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and money. They maintain there are too many such shows; so does the actors' union, which occasionally complains that if there were fewer of them, there would be more work for Mexican actors and actresses. Every once in a while, they raise their voices loudly enough so that there is a diminishing of the imports and some domestic shows are substituted. But the American series soon come back because the people like them, and what the people like they get. Ratings are important here, too.

The highest-rated programs are sports, everything from bull fights to baseball, and Mexican TV crews are remarkably skilled at picking up athletic events. The World Cup Soccer matches in June and July last year included 52 games; every game was televised live, via satellite, and then taped so that it could be repeated later in the day. And after each game, there were highlight summaries, resumes, commentaries. The Mexican audience could not get enough of it.

For millions, there is no such thing as too much of a good sporting event, and

U.S.A. football, basketball, baseball, boxing, and tennis anywhere in the world, are watched with fanatical enthusiasm. As a consequence, commercial spots placed on sporting events are the most expensive buys.

**A**s in the United States, soap operas are the afternoon favorites; they dominate the schedules with millions of people, mostly women, watching them. Although the serials, which adhere to the ancient formulae, are filled with clichés and are stilted in sound and look, their fans love them. Many of the educated middle class dismiss the soaps as trash, but, not all of them agree.

"They say they don't watch them, but they always know what the story is and who all the characters are and who plays them," an educated and affluent Mexican woman told me. "I watch them now myself more than I used to, because they have started making real social problems part of the stories, and whatever information Mexican people can get to help them solve their problems is very valuable."

But this same viewer's enthusiasm stopped when it came to children's shows. She called them junk and hated the thought that her children watch them—in this complaint she has lots of company. For a country with as many children as Mexico, there is very little serious attention paid to their programs. Animated cartoons are the rule. Kids get them hours at a time every day—most of them imports: *Robin Hood*, *Batman*, *Huckleberry Hound*, et al. They are dubbed into Spanish, and no one seems to mind if the backgrounds are Japanese, Italian, Chinese. A Mexican version of *Sesame Street* is promised for next year.

Mexican television has little to fear from cable. At the present time, there is cable in only four places: Mexico City, Acapulco, Cuernavaca and San Miguel de Allende, a small hill town. The nation has slid into a recession, and it hardly

seems that people are going to rush to pay for cable when they can get so much for free.

On the whole, Mexico has an impressive television system, with first-rate entertainment and an admirable service of education and information. Under President Madrid, there is no sign of change, except possibly for the better.

Mexico is still considered a developing country, and while the majority of its citizens have television in their homes, there are still millions who do not, and so many people dream of someday owning a TV set for their own advancement and pleasure. It seems a worthwhile goal. ■

Joseph Gottlieb has spent much of the last seven years in Mexico. He has had a long and distinguished career in American radio and television, from the 1940's as a contributor to the *Columbia Workshop* to the '60's and '70's when he was a writer for the *Today* show. He also has been a writer and producer of game shows, dramas and documentaries.

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

### Money Myths

“ *The ‘money doesn’t buy happiness’ myth, in conjunction with two other mass media ‘messages,’ may provide the masses with a stabilizing perspective on social mobility. Television’s over-representation of moderate-to-greater wealth, exciting lifestyles, and glamorous professions may suggest that ‘space’ in the higher ranks of the socio-economic structure is more plentiful than reality dictates. This over-representation, combined with the celebration of those who overcome next-to-impossible (real-life) odds and significantly move ‘upward’ (e.g., Horatio Alger heroes, George Jefferson, Rocky), implies that ‘anyone can make it’ in this wide-open arena. However, the companion myth . . . suggests: ‘Just in case you don’t make it, don’t worry. It’s not so great at the top.’* ”

Sari Thomas and Brian P. Callahan, "Allocating Happiness: TV Families and Social Class," *Journal of Communication*.

"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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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.

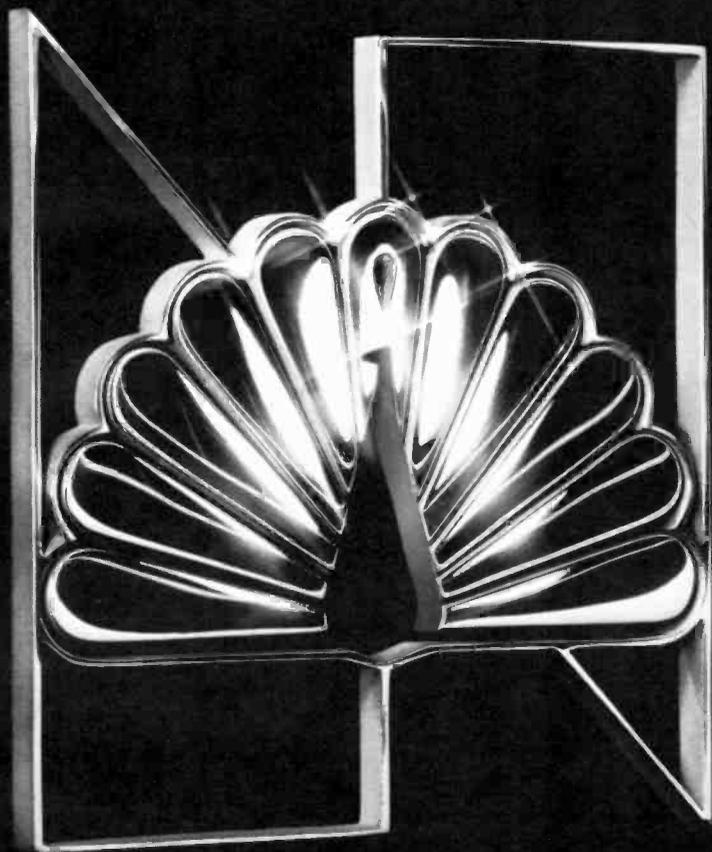
It's television without guilt. If you haven't discovered it yet, come on over. And take a load off your back.



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# THE NEWSPAPER TELEVISION CRITIC: A SELF-PORTRAIT

A revealing study of TV critics, their backgrounds, likes and dislikes. They enjoy their jobs, but don't think they have any influence. Like Rodney Dangerfield, they'd like more "respect."

**BY RALPH C. SMITH  
AND SURAJ KAPOOR**

**F**orty-three years ago at the height of radio's popularity, Robert J. Landry, an editor of *Variety*, contributed a scholarly piece to the *Public Opinion Quarterly* calling attention to the lack of serious press criticism of broadcasting. He prefaced the essay with an imaginary want ad placed by a newspaper publisher searching for a critic: "Radio Critic Wanted—Must be... devoted to finer things yet capable of listening to clap-trap for hours at a time. Should be socially conscious but no business hater, should have working familiarity with classics, the lower middle class, the consumer movement, the Crossley report. He must be highminded, yet possessed of humor; he must modify his boldness with discretion; he must know acting, directing, advertising, merchandizing, and orchestrating and should know about public interest, convenience and necessity. Finally, he should be free of bias, a master literary stylist and willing to work for small wages."

Even then the qualifications were sobering. Little wonder that four decades later, despite television's thundering claims for attention, regular, serious criticism in the daily press is still a comparatively minor effort. TV critics still are under-represented in the pages of America's approximately 1,750 daily papers.

We don't know whether any journalists of the radio era ever lived up to the standards proposed by Landry—or ever tried. The job of a television critic—at least ideally—is even more demanding. Of course, he, too must be a generalist, covering all bases, cultural and commercial. But more than that, unlike his radio predecessor, he should be able to cope with the new technologies, and the bewildering alphabet jungle of DBS, MDS, PPV, SBS, CATV, etc. etc.

The critic—more than in the talky days of Gabriel Heatter, Raymond Gram Swing and H. V. Kaltenborn—should be equipped to evaluate broadcast journalism in all its forms, local and national, since television news is now such a powerful force in American society. The ideal critic also should be a good writer, with some style and readability. We don't know whether such a paragon exists!

Realistically—without wishful thinking or speculations—we wanted to find out more about the nation's current television critics: who they are; what they do; how they go about carrying out their assignments. So not long ago, we set about on a small voyage of discovery. We prepared and distributed two questionnaires and sent the first to the publishers of 88 daily newspapers of 100,000 circulation or over. This was the shorter of the two surveys. We wanted the names of each paper's critic, if any, and answers to a few targeted questions.

Forty-seven replies were received from the 88 publishers, and 41 of those

reported that a staff person was specifically assigned to write television criticism. However, the job was full-time for only 30, with the remaining 11 having to serve as general TV editor, responsible for makeup of the TV section, program schedules and corrections and similar chores, as well as reviews. Most of these publishers had created the assignment many years earlier. Only three had employed critics within the last four years. Eight checked 30 years; seven, 20 years; nine, 10 years.

Twenty-two publishers indicated they subscribe to syndicated TV columns. Ten said this had been done within the last two years, and seven specifically said that the columns were used to fill in for their own writers.

Syndicated columns appeared as often as seven times a week, but generally two or three times a week. Most said their papers' critical columns were "very popular" with readers; a few said "moderately popular." From the overall responses of publishers of many of America's largest newspapers, it is clear that they at least are aware of the wisdom of giving television critical scrutiny on a regular basis. Even the six publishers not currently employing a critic, indicated they plan to employ one within the next five years.

After writing to the publishers, we sent our second questionnaire to the critics of the papers whose publishers had originally answered us. Twenty-three critics replied, an excellent response and a good sampling for our purpose.

When the replies of these 20 journalists are examined, one finds their outlook tends to be less euphoric than the publishers. In fact, several of the critics surveyed indicated that they would appreciate hearing supportive statements more often from their bosses.

To start, let us sketch the critics' backgrounds; describe their procedures for covering a non-stop event like television; and finally, report their reflections about their jobs, their readers and the television medium.

As one might imagine, there has been no single route to the critic's post. Several had been writing reviews in the fields of music, theater, film and art while others had come to TV from such disparate reporting assignments as the consumer, sports and police beats. Still others had held editorships in the city, news, entertainment, Sunday supplements, and sports departments. In light of what Les Brown, editor of *Channels* magazine, has described as a "lowly beat," it is surprising that two-thirds of the critics specifically expressed interest in writing about television. Even more surprising is that the average tenure on this job has been six years—a commendable continuity for a branch of criticism frequently deemed less than respectable.

A few columnists were nudged somewhat grudgingly into the critic's post. For example, one commented that the new editor liked his feature column but wanted to revive a TV/radio column. "I offered to try it rather than lose my column altogether."

Only one of the 23 writers mentioned extensive direct experience with the television medium; for twelve years he had been a TV newsman. Five critics referred to participating in college broadcasting stations and amateur theatricals! Most of them, however, claimed that previous success in writing critical pieces about films, drama and various popular entertainments had qualified them for their present positions.

**A**s we suspected, television critics are generalists. Indeed, most of them feel it is an essential prerequisite to analyzing a communication form which literally scans the wide world of human activity. One spokesman summarizes for the rest: "The most important factor in television criticism is to be well-read, to have an awareness of and an interest in society, to be open to other lifestyles, beliefs and opinions."

Even generalists must get words on paper according to a strict deadline. How do these writers approach the task

of riding herd on the images that tumble from multi-channels at frenetic speed? Although they write at their offices, one might assume that critics would watch a home medium at home. Not necessarily. Only five mentioned viewing exclusively at home. The rest divided their time among home, office (five actually had private offices), and local affiliated network stations which receive programs in advance over closed-circuit lines, and screen them for reviewers.

As we surveyed the special hardware necessary for critics to do their job, we also received some insight into the generosity of employers. When we asked if equipment was supplied, one critic responded, "Are you kidding?" In some cases though, a wide array of devices was provided. Nine critics had TV sets given to them, nine received video tape recorders, five had their cable costs paid and one mentioned receiving video tape supplies. On the whole, however, we were dismayed that the professional coverage of this newsworthy electronic beat depended on such skimpy technical arrangements.

The situation was much better with regard to providing critics with print resources. Traditional press affinity, perhaps? At any rate, 20 of the 23 columnists did not have to pay personally for subscriptions to the most widely mentioned publications: *Broadcasting Magazine*, *TV Guide* and *Variety*. Scattered references were also made to *Advertising Age*, *TV Quarterly*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. In addition, of course, the critics receive a flood of promotional bulletins and press releases, several of them mentioned as useless.

Having marshalled the technical equipment and fortified themselves with broad background reading, critics are now confronted with the problem of scheduling their viewing. A sampling of responses indicates that the situation is chaotic. One columnist replied that he viewed "every working moment." Another agreed that it was "around-the-clock," and a third said "catch-as-catch-can."

In an effort to impose some sort of structure on the task, one critic said that, based on advance information, he prepares a viewing calendar, checks when network feeds are available at local stations and then supplements those sessions with additional viewing and tapings primarily at night and on weekends. Another critic stressed the importance of selectivity. He attempts to catch only premieres, mini-series and major TV movies. A second never covers soap operas, and a third will not review series programs.

**F**or many, the viewing procedure would be similar to the critic who said he watched closed-circuit offerings at stations in the morning, wrote in the afternoon, and caught other on-air programs at home at night, "unfortunately on my own time."

The results of all these viewing sessions appear in a wide variety of formats with the most common (eleven) being a daily column, (two) five or six columns a week, and (seven) three or four columns a week with a special feature on the weekend. Almost all of the critics also write occasional longer reports and features.

Theirs is not a cloistered round of reading, viewing and reviewing. They visit networks and production centers as well as local stations, and a surprising two-thirds attend occasional broadcasting conventions. Over the years critics develop valuable personal sources, like the one who described his "contacts with friends in the agency business, both local and national, since they often are the first to detect shifts and changes in the industry." The following comment reminds us of their basic training as journalists rather than critics: "I also depend on tips from those in and outside the business, here in my hometown and in New York, Los Angeles and elsewhere over the country where local personalities have gone and report back."

The critics' beat obviously involves program analysis, but it includes much more. Their perception of function can be summarized through selected comments. One responded, "...about 60 percent of all my columns deal with... alerting viewers to shows they should or should not try to see." A second said, "I cover quite a lot of *local* broadcast industry news, ranging from simple news of station sales to personnel changes, to speculation on what these changes may mean for local viewers." And a third stressed the fact that "Hard news [is] a huge ingredient—Using the column to tell readers simply what's happening in the newspaper's broadest beat." Finally, one reminded us in general terms that "think pieces, humor pieces and profiles" are also part of the critic's job.

**J**ust as the medium which they write has high visibility, so too are the critics wide open to critical reaction from their employers, from the industry, and from their readers. All but one of the columnists indicated that their copy is scrutinized by an editor. Although substantive changes are rare, their language is rather carefully watched for profanity and double entendres. For example, one critic explained, "Words such as 'titillation' cannot be used supposedly because they are too suggestive or sexually oriented. Words that 'take the Lord's name in vain' such as 'God knows!' or 'Oh, Lord' cannot be used." Another critic listed three broad areas with which his editor is concerned: Are there errors of fact? Could a column, as written, be viewed as a personal rather than professional attack? Is this column, as written, television criticism or is it a general editorial?

Editorial supervision is expected by the critics, but it is the unpredictable reaction from broadcast personnel that adds interest to the columnist's professional life. Surprisingly, four of them stated that they have never heard from broadcasters. Most offered one or

two incidents, several of which reflect network sensitivity to criticism. "Recently," said one critic, "Don Hewitt, producer of *60 Minutes* called to take issue with my declaration that he systematically plagiarizes other people's investigative work without proper attribution. I cited three more examples to

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**"Generally complaints are local and come anytime I knock local programs, especially local news..."**

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him in addition to the one in the article he had called about. I also used the occasion to remind him of a deception he had attempted on me during an interview. His closing words were, 'You didn't mind that I called, did you?'"

Three other critics cited reactions from local broadcasters. One was the target of an editorial. "The local NBC affiliate editorialized on the air that I had distorted a report on ratings sweep results because I was biased in favor of the ABC affiliate. I countered with a more detailed column showing how the station manipulated the ratings information to impress potential advertisers, and the station wisely dropped the matter." A second commented, "Generally complaints are local and come anytime I knock local programs, especially local news." The third said, "Basically the criticisms I have received were from local broadcasters, particularly the news division people who routinely accuse us of taking 'cheap shots' at their news programming — which I have sometimes labeled superficial and sensationalistic." The tenor of many of the critics' comments were well summed up by one respondent who felt that most industry feedback came from "bruised egos who dislike any criticism no matter how mild or well-documented."

Apparently the readers who are prompted to talk or shout back primarily

comprise a group which feels its ideological beliefs are somehow threatened by particular, critic-approved programs. For example, one critic received many complaints about a column criticizing the National Federation of Decency's boycott of sponsors who advertised on "jiggle" shows. Another described as "bigoted nonsense" letters he received from "white supreme-cists" after a favorable review of CBS' *Crisis at Central High*. Typical comments hurled at a third include such epithets as "You are a fascist pig," "a communist dog," "a bastard."

When a critic chastized viewers for watching "junk like *Hooper* instead of *Kent State*," she was reminded by several readers that they use their TV sets for entertainment and "don't want liberals and commies polluting their minds." In some cases, of course, viewer complaints about a column simply represent differences in taste. One critic acknowledged, "I see the viewers as a co-conspirators with the networks, and producers for some of the crap on the air. I'm not timid about saying so. Actually, even those I zing seem to enjoy the feeling."

These lively exchanges represent one more activity for the critic; although, with the exception of the columnist who listed as many as 30 phone calls and letters a day, they are not unduly burdensome. In fact, several said that reader response was generally positive, and seven columnists reported being asked to speak to various groups. One appears four or five times a year as a guest on a local radio station. A final, succinct comment indicates the bemused tolerance with which most critics react to criticism. "How do I respond to reader feedback? With good humor and a wastebasket hook shot."

Certainly good humor is a necessary professional virtue when television critics analyze the overall value and nature of their work. Les Brown, editor of *Channels*, feels that an extraordinary number of critics leave the job "voluntarily, in disgust or despair, or out of

boredom—anxious to get on with real journalism, and tired of belonging to one of the lower castes in newspaperdom." However, the respondents to this survey reflect more persistence than that, and if not enthusiasm, at least an honest forthrightness and determination to see the good as well as the bad in their situation.

**W**hen asked to assess the influence they have on the medium many of them candidly admitted it is "moderate" to "little." In fact, five critics used the first word and six the second, but even they qualified their judgments so that they meshed more closely with several others who felt their influence on local stations was significantly stronger than it was on networks.

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**As one critic put it "At the network level, my influence is nil regarding entertainment. Networks do wince regarding their news operations and management peccadillos..."**

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Many submitted evidence of local changes — for example, persuading a station to air the documentary *Scared Straight* and influencing a college to start a public radio station.

One critic said local newscasters changed some irritating mannerisms "after I described them, and another was named to a permanent anchor slot after I gave him laurels in print." Another mentioned the *Newlywed Game* being cancelled, news content doubled, and various shows moved "perhaps" as a result of his columns, although he would like to believe these were "reactions to viewer preference" rather than to his urging.

In general, as one critic put it, "At the network level [my] influence is nil regarding entertainment. Networks do

wince regarding their news operations or management peccadillos. Locally, [my] influence is greater, especially in areas of program changes made purely for greed; or in the cosmetics of the news shows. On major local issues, the single device of urging readers to write to the station with a carbon copy to the FCC usually gets quick and dramatic results."

Despite these positive comments, most of the critics would also agree with other statements of their colleagues to the effect that "television is a business ruled first by the ratings," and that critics have "no influence on the bigger issue of profits vs. the public interest." In fact "Stations will choose profits every time even in the face of adverse publicity."

Finally, three critics pointed to the influence they had on readers first in "helping the receptive viewer discovers 'sleeper' shows," second in "hoping that readers will have a better idea of what they will be seeing," and third in being "interesting and entertaining to read while providing information and—if I'm really on a hot streak—a little enlightenment about television."

**T**his candid acceptance of their current modest influence on readers and on the broadcasting scene in general does not mean acquiescence. In fact, the critics had a long list of suggestions for improving their jobs and for strengthening their roles. Several mentioned tangible factors in their working situations. They wanted more equipment, specifically tape recorders, video display terminals at home, and a viewing room at work. Four critics mentioned the need for help with phone calls, mail, filing "to ease the nitty gritty burdens." Thirteen critics would like to see additional staff assigned to cover the business and technical angles of the television medium and to do general reporting on the communications industry. They themselves would like more time for writing and research and to pursue occasional stories in depth. One even sug-

gested that critics should be helped financially to leave the local scene occasionally and study television from a national perspective.

Even though five critics out of the 23 did not respond to our question about ways to strengthen their profession (one felt it was not necessary), the remaining 17 voiced provocative ideas such as the need for newspaper managers to have a greater awareness "that broadcasting is on the cutting edge of communications explosion—indeed, that newspapers are an integral part of that explosion." They suggested newspapers could recognize the importance of electronic communication by turning "young, aggressive news reporters into TV writers," and by "assigning the better, more substantive journalists to the TV beat." Further . . . "management should let television be covered as a beat rather than as showbiz by occasionally moving the critic's work out of the paper's feature section."

The critics themselves, of course, have always recognized the importance of television. But more than that, they constantly sense the potentials of the medium. And it is within the framework of what *is* as contrasted with what could be that we asked them to provide us with some general conclusions about television in America.

At least a dozen critics scored the industry for the low quality of its entertainment shows with particular reference to the prime-time schedule. They are not "intelligent." They are "pap, designed for the 10-12 year olds, who control the dials, and their intellectual peers." Prime time is not providing enough "nutrition." It is "agog with spun-sugar series that can turn our brains to mush." . . . "Safe, copycat formulas are the norm in prime time, leading to poorly written, brazen trash like *Three's Company* and *Dukes of Hazard*." Television is not "serving the small audience that wants more than light fluff."

The negative complaints about news programming were not as frequent nor as vitriolic. Only five critics specifically

singled out news. "Local news (on the whole) is not done well, nor is election coverage and foreign news."... "The local news programs are generally poor."... "Networks need more time for news."... Commercial TV has preferred to "limit itself to a hot headline service."... TV "is not reflecting the broad perspective of the minorities in its news judgments because there are no black or Spanish-speaking news executives (or few at least) in decision making positions at networks and not nearly enough at the local level."

There were many jaundiced views about the commercial system and its effects on program availability. "Except for public TV, television virtually ignores serious drama, literature, music, the arts. It isn't doing enough documentaries — news of the softer kind such as travelogues and nature films."... Television is "not accepting its social obligations and responsibilities. It is a poor role model, poor teacher, and poor citizen much of the time."... TV is not "being responsible before being profitable."... "Tyranny by ratings... has led to a particularly vicious, tunnel-vision competitiveness that results in a pandering to the absolute lowest common denominator to reach the largest number. It's either instant numbers or

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**"Given the public's perception of TV as a form of entertainment expected to please the viewer 18 hours a day, 7 days a week — TV is doing one hell of a good job..."**

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cancellation. There is also a dangerous trend toward injecting show business values into news."... "Too much dependence on the Nielsen rating stifles creativity; networks and local stations are not willing to take chances as often as they might."

Two critics rather sum up the dis-

affection of their colleagues with much of television when they reflect that it is not "inspiring, illuminating, teaching, entertaining."... And, "Television is not developing new program concepts."

**S**o much for the negative conclusions. Now, what is television doing right? The list is not as long. Sports programming received particular commendation from six critics, and news — particularly network news — was praised by nine. In this connection, several mentioned that television's ability to bring audiences live coverage provides society with a valuable, shared experience. Credit was given the medium for some block-buster mini-series like *Shogun* and *Friendly Fire* as well as a few regular series. One critic felt television was entertaining and that "no entertainment medium has ever even approached TV's service to the aged and housebound..." And another critic agreed saying that "given the public's perception of TV as a form of entertainment expected to please the viewer 18 hours a day, seven days a week, TV is doing one hell of a good job... Despite the pop fare, the medium offers stimulating, thought-provoking, insightful and intelligent programming as often as any other form of communications."

Finally, the critics were not bashful with suggestions about how to improve television. Their prescriptions were directed primarily not to the industry or the government but to viewers—to their readers. First, they urge viewers to get involved. Almost all of them stressed writing to networks and stations, especially to the top executives. Complaints are to be emphasized more than praise, they advised. Second, critics feel viewers must not be passive, but should study the medium and be selective in their programming decisions. As part of selectivity, parents should control their children's use of the set.

One critic cautioned viewers not to feel guilty about liking fluff and not to be "buffaloed by a critic." As another said

"varying opinions are not a threat to anyone." Third, several of them reminded viewers not to depend solely on television for their news.

In summary, the critics believe viewers must refuse to let the TV set use *them*: they must be more discriminating and realize they can switch the set off, or reach for other options.

Our interviews by mail leave us with the impression that these journalists are hard-working observers of the broadcast scene aiming primarily to please their readers and aware of the tiny dents they possibly can make in the heavy armor of the industry. They would make modest demands to improve the conditions of their employment, but they are indeed concerned that their work is being "sold short" and the serious analysis which television demands is not reflected in the treatment and weight their departments are accorded at the office. That the critics finally should turn to their readers as the ultimate change agents in broadcasting is indicative of their sense of powerlessness. The profession of newspaper television criticism is still a small force in a nation overwhelmed by a massive electronic communications machine. ■

*Ralph L. Smith is a professor of communications in the Department of Communication at Illinois State University. He is author of the recently-published A Study of Broadcast Criticism 1920-1955. Suraj Kapoor is an associate professor in the same department.*

## P E R S P E C T I V E

### Split Personality

“ *It is, of course, necessary when working in a medium which covers such a vast field as television to be able to look at a programme and say to oneself: 'I do not personally like this programme but it is good of its kind and it will give pleasure to a large number of people.' The danger is that one becomes schizoid and unable to relate one's genuine (personal) judgments to one's artificial (professional) standards. It is because of this unconscious dishonesty that some of the worst programmes in television reach the screen. The tragedy is that from beginning to end they have probably been worked on and over by men and women of more than normal intelligence with civilized tastes and reasonable judgments in all areas other than this.* ”

STUART HOOD, British producer and critic in his book *A Survey of Television*.

**WE'VE GOT  
OUR EYE**



**ON THE  
FUTURE**

**CBS TELEVISION STATIONS**  
WCBS-TV NEW YORK KNXT LOS ANGELES  
WBBM-TV CHICAGO WCAU-TV PHILADELPHIA  
KMOX-TV ST. LOUIS

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SUCCESS  
STORY.**

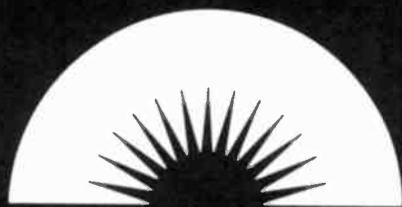
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# **Columbia Pictures Television**

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# WHEN TELEVISION REALLY WAS LIVE

Movie theater owners complained that TV was ruining their Saturday night business—everyone was staying home to watch *Your Show of Shows*. Sid Caesar himself takes us behind the scenes of that memorable program.

**BY SID CAESAR  
WITH BILL DAVIDSON**

**W**hen Florence and I got back to New York at the end of the summer, we met with Max Liebman. Max said to her, "Florence, I want you to know that your husband is going to be a big, big star." Her answer was one of those small, poignant, classic remarks for which she has become famous among our friends. She had finally become worried about my drinking during the last pressure-filled days of "The Admiral Broadway Revue." My after-work "relaxation" had increased from four or five shots to a full fifth of Scotch before I went home at night. Sensing what lay ahead, she responded to Max's question with, "Couldn't he just be a *little* star?"

As usual, I ignored the implications of what she said and plunged into work on "Your Show of Shows," which was Max's title. Everything seemed the same as "The Admiral Broadway Revue," so we had no idea of the impact we were going to have on American life in the year 1950. We wrote and rehearsed in the same old Nola Studios, across the street from the theater where *Mister Roberts* was playing, and we had only one addition to the cast: talented little second banana Howard Morris, who had worked

before with Imogene Coca, and whom Max hired away from the cast of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* on Broadway.

Including Max and me, we now had five writers. Number five was Mel Brooks. Actually, he had come with us during the fourth show of "The Admiral Broadway Revue," as the result of a three-year campaign of incredible *chutzpah* and persistence.

Ever since I had worked in the Catskills, I had considered Mel to be sort of a groupie. He was a very poor kid, a Brooklyn neighbor of Don Appel, the man who converted me from a saxophone player to a comedian, and wherever Appel worked in the mountains, you could find little Mel Brooks hanging around. He loved comics and obviously wanted to be one himself. When I opened at the Copacabana, Mel was hanging around. When I opened in *Make Mine Manhattan*, Mel was hanging around. He didn't hang around Milton Berle or Jimmy Durante. He was funny and ingenious and he liked my type of humor, so he hung around me.

When I was in *Make Mine Manhattan*, he came in through the stage door one night after the show and recognized Max Liebman. There still was a single spotlight on the stage. Mel said, "Let me sing a song for you, Max." Without waiting for an answer, he jumped into the spotlight and sang a lot of doggerel, ending with "Please love Mel Brooks." Max said to me, "Who is this *meshugener*?"

When we began "The Admiral Broad-

From WHERE HAVE I BEEN? by Sid Caesar with Bill Davidson. Reprinted by permission of Crown Publishers, Inc. Copyright©1982 by Sid Caesar Productions, Inc. and Bill Davidson.

way Revue" on television, Mel was still hanging around, but by now, Max was used to him. While we were preparing the fourth show, we ran into a crisis just about an hour before air-time. We had a skit, "The Professor and the Jungle Boy," which definitely needed something. The Jungle Boy was explaining how he ordered breakfast back home, and we just couldn't come up with anything very funny. Finally, we turned to Mel Brooks, who had been hanging around, and we said, "Do something. Write." Mel came up with a weird sound, "The Cry of the Crazy Crow," which is what the Jungle Boy used to order breakfast, and it made the skit hilarious.

So we decided to keep Mel for *shtick* like that, and I asked him how much money he wanted. He said, "Fifty dollars a week." I said, "That's unheard of. Let's make it forty." He said, "No, I need fifty."

I said, "Tell you what I'm gonna do. I'll give you forty-five, if Max gives you the other five." But Max said no. So Mel started at forty dollars a week. But after I went downtown with him and saw where he was living in a cellar on Broome Street, I relented and raised him to fifty dollars a week.

So Mel was with us when we started the first season of "Your Show of Shows," but he didn't go on the regular payroll, or get any credit, for two years.

Mel, by now, has his own version of what happened in those early years.

### *Mel Brooks*

*I first met Sid in the Catskills through my friend Don Appel. Then Don got me a job in another hotel, as a drummer and the comic, and I kept hearing about Sid, not as a comedian but as a brilliant tenor saxophonist. I went into the army and when I came out, I saw the movie Tars and Spars. I studied what Sid did in the picture and I said, "This guy is really funny, uniquely funny."*

*Don Appel took me backstage to see Sid at the Copacabana. Then, when Sid*

*was playing the Roxy, I went backstage to see him by myself. I said, "You remember me from Don Appel?" He said, "Sure, sure." He was stuck in the Roxy for quite some time because the film was the long-running Forever Amber, and he welcomed company. So I used to go backstage a lot and I got close to his brothers, Abe and Dave, who usually were there with him as part of his entourage.*

*I went away in the summer to work in a play called Separate Rooms. I directed it and I starred in it. The play was at the Mechanic Street Playhouse in Red Bank, New Jersey.*

*When I got back, Sid was in his first rehearsal at the International Theater for the soon-to-be-famous "Your Show of Shows." Sid invited me to come by because he was interested in my mind and maybe I could help him. I went to the stage door of the theater. I looked very young, even though I was out of the army and was twenty-and-a-half years old. I said, "I'm here to see Sid Caesar. He's a friend of mine and we've worked together, and he's asked me to come by." His manager, Leo Pillot, was at the door. Pillot said, "Throw him out." so these two big ushers picked me up by the scruff of my neck and the seat of my pants and literally tossed me into the alley. I said, "You're crazy. You can't do this to Mel Brooks. I'm potentially very important." They were going to call the police, but Sid heard the scuffle and came down. He said, "He's my friend. Let him in."*

*Leo just walked away. I think he spotted in me the threat of a charming, quick-talking guy who could worm his way into people's affections. He knew I was trouble for him. But I didn't want to be a personal manager. I just wanted to be a writer and a comic.*

*So anyway, I went upstairs and we talked for a while, and Sid told me he was worried about two spots: his monologue, and a thing called "Airport Interview." In this particular show, a man in a raincoat was talking to strange people as they got off airplanes at the airport. I*

created a character for him right there, called "Jungle Boy." I told Sid that the interviewer should ask, "How do you live?" and the Jungle Boy could illustrate by making this wild sound, pulling a pigeon out of the air, and eating it. Then I gave him more ideas for "Jungle Boy" and he offered to pay me fifty dollars a week for ideas.

The only animosity I got from the beginning was from Max Liebman, who saw me as some kind of adventurer and didn't think I was very talented. I was a street kid and didn't have any sophistication. Max was a classy guy who wanted to do a real Broadway revue every week. He wasn't interested in street humor.

It was Sid who recognized that I had a universal concept of human behavior, but even he couldn't get me on the payroll, with credit, for a year.

So much for differences in recollections; but that's what makes Japanese movies, like *Rashomon*. The important thing is that Mel Brooks was with us that first year of "Your Show of Shows." So was Tony Webster, another fine writer who had been doing very funny material for the "Bob and Ray" radio show. Except for Max Liebman, who was in his late forties, we were a very young group to shoulder the responsibility of creating what amounted to a full-scale Broadway show every week. I was twenty-seven, just turning twenty-eight, and the others were about my age, apart from Mel Brooks, who was only twenty-one.

Maybe that's why we all were overwhelmed when the show took off like a rocket. Television was spreading through the country very fast that year, and, in a matter of months, we had made an unforeseeable impact on America: we actually changed people's long-standing habits. Instead of the tradition of "going out" on Saturday nights, couples were staying home and watching us. NBC got hundreds of thousands of letters from fans, stating just that. The network even had to pacify a delegation

of Broadway movie-house owners who went to Pat Weaver and begged him to use his influence to get "Your Show of Shows" switched to the middle of the week, on the grounds that it was ruining their Saturday night business.

The critics were very kind to me personally—even the toughest ones of the day. John Crosby of the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote, "Sid Caesar is one of the wonders of the modern electronic age. He has more funny comedy sequences than he knows what to do with. His routines are even funnier the second time around and he has restored the art of pantomime to the high estate it enjoyed before the talkies and radio." Larry Wolters of the *Chicago Tribune*, who never found much to like in television, wrote, "Sid Caesar doesn't steal jokes; he doesn't borrow ideas or material. A gag is as useless as a fresh situation is to Milton Berle."

I couldn't believe it when I picked up a newspaper one day and read that Alfred Hitchcock was quoted as saying, "The young Mr. Caesar best approaches the great Chaplin of the early 1920's." That scared me. How could I keep it up? I went to a party once at columnist Leonard Lyons's home, and Margaret Truman, the president's daughter, begged me to do her favorite routine of mine, which was about the thoughts that go through the mind of a six-month-old baby. Later I met General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was on his way to becoming the next president of the United States. He had seen a United Nations sketch in which I had delivered a long speech in my Russian double-talk. The general, who had sat in on many conferences with Soviet officials, asked me where I had learned to speak Russian.

I'm not putting down the performances in "Your Show of Shows"—mine or anyone else's—but the key to our amazing success unquestionably was the writing.

The writing was different by today's standards because what we were doing was live. Modern television people find it difficult to understand what "live"

meant, in general. They say, "How long did it take you to do an hour-and-a-half show?"

I say, "An hour and a half."

They say, "No. You don't know what we mean. How long did it take you with the pick-ups, dubbing, fixing the mistakes?"

I say, "There were no pick-ups, dubbing, or fixing mistakes. We just got on the stage and did it."

"But how about titles and things like that?"

"The titles were printed on cards. One camera was focused on the cards, and when we needed a title or a photograph to establish where a skit was taking place, that camera was turned on while the action was continuing onstage."

"But what about costume changes?"

"We did them as best we could, during commercials, and even while something else was going on before the cameras."

"But even so, you really can't mean it when you say it took you exactly an hour and a half to shoot an hour-an-a-half show. What if you ran over and had to cut?"

"Cut what? The air? There was no film, no tape. If, God forbid, we ran over, the network would slice us off in the middle of a sentence and the audience would be watching the next program in the schedule."

"So you really mean you did it in an hour and a half?"

"Yes. An hour and a half. To the second."

There's the same total lack of understanding about what it was like to write for a live variety show in those days. There was no going to the joke books and jotting down gags and sketch-lines in advance. There was no time to think of next week's show, because we were still writing and revising *this* week's show right up until air-time.

We would meet in the writers' room on Monday morning at about ten o'clock, and we hardly ever had a clue as to what we were going to do on the following Saturday night. Someone would begin

by saying, "How about a . . .?" and we'd all start screaming and yelling and discussing it. The place was littered with cigarette butts, partly smoked cigars, and half-empty coffee cups. As each idea was refined, Lucille Kallen made notes. We couldn't use a secretary, who would take down everything, good or bad; a skilled writer like Lucille would record only the acceptable lines we all had hammered out. Mel Brooks and I never did any writing in the accepted sense, with pencil and paper or typewriter. It all came out of our heads and mouths.

By Wednesday night, Lucille's notes finally would be transcribed by a secretary. We had to have *some* sort of script so the director would have an idea of what he was going to have to do. But we never could tell if a routine was going to work until we "put it on its feet." Sometimes, a notion that looked and sounded great on paper was a disaster when it was acted out—first by the writers and then by the actors, in the rehearsal hall—and it had to be discarded. And the material that survived, we kept changing constantly. Even when we got onstage for the actual show, there was improvisation going on. In live television, the improvisation could turn out to be funnier than the original. An interesting example of that was when I was playing an opera singer making himself up in his dressing room. On camera, my brush slipped and I had a black line across my cheek. Without missing a beat, I drew three more lines, in crossed pairs, and I played tic-tac-toe on my face. It got a tremendous laugh.

But to get back to the writing, here's a perfect illustration of how a routine developed, from conception to performance:

I was having a drink in a Greek restaurant one Friday night when I noticed a fly buzzing around the room. The fly settled on a tray of canapes on the table and then zeroed in on a piece of goat's milk cheese. I studied this fly. He kept hopping on that crumb of cheese. I figured he was gloating, "It's mine, all mine," like a guy who gets a brand-new

convertible he's wanted for years.

On Monday morning I come into the writers' room and everybody is sitting around looking sick and miserable. Mel Tolkin is staring out the window like he wants to jump out, because Monday is bleeding-to-death day on the show. There's blood all over the floor. So I say, "Fellas, this week I wanna do a fly." They all look nauseated. I say, "Don't throw up because I worked out the psychology of a fly. It could be very funny." I gave them some of my ideas and then I showed them how I could be a fly. I started rubbing my wrists, the way a fly keeps washing his claws, or whatever they call his feet. Then I showed them the fly buzzing and whishing through the air. Lucille got interested and came up with something the fly could do. Then Tony Webster chipped in with a fly *shtick*. In another couple of minutes they all agreed it had possibilities and we went to work on it.

By Wednesday, we had a script, which, with a couple of improvisations, is pretty much the way I did the monologue on the air:

*We see him walking, yawning, rubbing himself, cleaning his wings, and murmuring through rounded lips, "Ah, it's morning."*

FLY: Look at the sun coming in through the window. What a house I live in. It's my house. I was so lucky to find this house. Always something to eat. Crumbs on the table, banana peels on the floor, lettuce leaves in the sink... What a nice sloppy house. Well, I'm hungry. I'll see what there is in the sink.

*He folds his insect feet and buzzes to the sink. The sink is empty. Nothing is left on the table. There aren't even any crumbs under the toaster.*

FLY: They cleaned up the house. It's disgusting! They must be expecting guests... Oh, well, why should I aggravate myself? So I'll eat out today. It won't

kill me. But I hate restaurants. That greasy food. I can't stand greasy food. I keep slipping off. I can't get a hold on it, and it gets on my wings, makes me sluggish, and I can't fly good.

*On his way to a restaurant, the fly encounters a moth.*

FLY: He's crazy, that guy. Eats wool. Blue serge... all that dry stuff. Yugh. And then every night he throws himself against an electric light bulb, knocking his brains out. He's crazy.

*Flying downtown, he is happily humming a song when he suddenly sees a sign that depresses him.*

FLY: Look at that. "Get the new powerful DDT. Kills flies instantly."

*The fly frowns and solemnly remarks: "Oh, my, there's a lot of hatred in the world."*

Expanding within this framework as I went along, this monologue ran for nine minutes when I did it on the air. It worked because houseflies are a fact of everyday life and everyone is familiar with their buzzing and probing. We just took it one ridiculous step further.

"Familiar," "fact of everyday life." Those were the case words for nearly everything we did. We didn't have to rely on the slapstick and pratfalls everyone else was doing in TV comedy. It was a repetition of my going against the trend in the Catskills when I was a teenager.

It's not that difficult to find humor in everyday life—despite what you mostly see today on TV. For example, here's our 1950 summary of one of that season's most successful monologues:

Sid is a husband who has just quarreled with his wife and has come to spend the night at a friend's apartment. He enters quietly and then shouts, "Finished! Finished, I tell you. Through! This is the end!!" He agrees

with his friend that his wife is a sweet girl, a wonderful girl, considerate and kind, but—he suddenly screws up his face in a mask of uncontrolled rage—“She’s *miserable!*” He then proceeds to recount all the indignities his wife has heaped on him. Yet when she phones to apologize at the end of the monologue, he, of course, meekly goes home.

All this time, there is no one on the stage but Sid, but you get the impression of the friend, the friend’s wife, the apartment, the telephone, his own wife, his own apartment, everything—just as if they were all there.

In other monologues and solo pantomimes, I was a bashful boy going to his first dance, then the same boy obnoxiously confident at a dance five years later; I was a vain man passing a mirror (I milked that one for five minutes); I was a husband who has had a fight with his wife and suddenly thinks of all the things he should have said in the argument; I was a husband being dragged to a cocktail party he doesn’t want to go to; I was an expectant father getting incensed about what a brat and monster his yet-to-be-born child was going to be (a satire on the Soliloquy in *Carousel*); I was a bridegroom walking down the aisle thinking gloomily about his future as a married man.

In one very funny solo skit, I was a man getting his boss hopelessly lost trying to direct him to his house by telephone. Finally I say, “Where are you now? . . . Well, you’re an American citizen. They’ve got to let you back into the country.”

Just that little one-step crossover from the everyday to the ridiculous.

It was the same with the skits I did with Imogene. Some of the best of those were what we simply called “Clichés.” The idea for this category came from Imogene herself. She had a habit of talking in clichés in real life, and one day when we were kidding her about them, she said, “I admit I shouldn’t do it, but a lot of people do, so why not a series of skits

about a couple of people who speak in platitudes all the time?”

And so we had a father and mother taking their children to school for the first time and mouthing all the clichés that parents will at such a time. We did the clichés of two superstitious people pretending not to be superstitious; also those of a pair of strangers who meet while waiting in line outside a movie theater. One of the funniest lines we ever did in a cliché skit was when Imogene and I were discussing the use of psychology in bringing up children today. Lucille Kallen came up with the following gem:

IMOGENE: I think the old method of spanking a child is *passee*.

SID: I say don’t just spank a child. Talk to the child, reason with him, find out what’s on his mind. And when you find out the reason, the real cause—*then* belt him.

Again, humor springing from real, everyday events. We didn’t have to knock down a fire hydrant with a car and cause a geyser of water, which seems to be the standard type of laugh-getter in so many so-called comedy movies of today.

A lot of our humor was a mixture of the sad and the funny. Charlie Chaplin knew that in 1910 and we knew it in 1950. A guy who’s in trouble is a very funny guy. A man who’s got enough money to pay the rent, there’s nothing funny about him. You’ve got to be involved with and worried about the person you’re going to laugh at, or cry at.

In so many of my routines, I played the goat—a seemingly cocky, self-assured guy who really is very insecure and keeps screwing up. I didn’t mind being the slob in any skit that we wrote for a guest star. When I was the down-trodden fellow, even the loser in all his fights with his wife, any turnaround, any small triumph by my character, got big laughs from the audience—which sympa-

thized with me. Playing a downtrodden fellow was not easy for me. It called on all my acting skills because I'm so big and strong-looking. Nearly all the other comedians who have used this technique of extracting humor out of being a little guy failing and succeeding have been little guys themselves, physically that is.

I used to love to do sad little guys, *schleppers*, in monologues about inanimate objects. Remember my number in the Coast Guard, in which I played a battered penny gumball machine who finally, through dishonesty, was promoted to be a twenty-five-cent slot machine? I did a lot more like that on "Your Show of Shows." One that is remembered by a lot of people was "The Whitewall Tire." I played this tire, who started life very proudly on a wheel of a Rolls-Royce. But then he gets thrown out when his usefulness is over and he goes through all kinds of terrible experiences before he finally ends up in a dump, with only his memories of the good old days. The audience actually laughs and cheers when he's picked up by a kid and regains his dignity as a backyard swing.

A human being playing the part of a tire? It sounds ridiculous that audiences could believe me. But they did. That's because even the inanimate-object sketches came out of reality. Haven't you ever wondered sadly about the fate of a favorite old car you had to trade in?

Realism. The facts of everyday life. That was the key to the most bizarre of our characters: The Professor, with his squashed-in top hat, disreputable looking tailcoat, and tie askew. He may look bizarre, but who can't identify someone just like him in real life—a man who pretends to know everything but knows nothing.

The Professor was a long time developing. We started out with what we called "Nonentities in the News." This was the reporter in a trenchcoat, interviewing a strange character deplaning at the airport. The reporter originally was someone from the cast, usually Tom

Avera. The Deplaning Strange Character always was Sid Caesar. I was Jungle Boy, I was self-proclaimed experts from Russia and France, I was Dr. Spaghetti, telling how to cook and eat various kinds of pasta. Some of these characters remained because, in order to spare ourselves, we were desperately trying to come up with regular spots we could do every week.

Out of all these Deplaners emerged the most interesting and long-lasting character of all—the preposterous Professor, expert in *all* subjects, the fraudulent know-it-all with a German accent.

Everyone I know has a favorite Professor routine.

Here's the script of one that's typical of what I did with him in the early days:

INTERVIEWER: Doctor, would you explain to the audience in simple language the basis for your theory of sleep?

PROFESSOR VON SEDATIVE: Yah. Schleep is vundabar. Schleep is beautiful. But schleep is no good to you if you is vide awake. . . I haff a friend vunce, he could schleep anyveres. In der boiler factory, in der foundry, in a shtockyard. He could go on a train and right away he fall aschleep. Pass all the stations.

INTERVIEWER: That's wonderful.

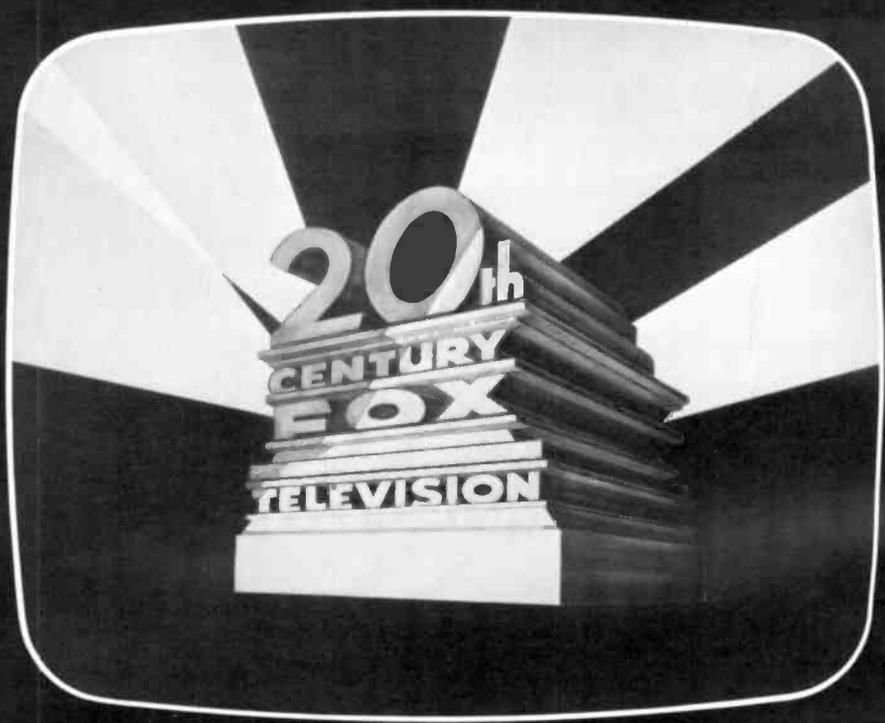
PROFESSOR VON SEDATIVE: It was lousy. He was the engineer. He wrecked more trains, dot friend of mine.

But the Professor—and many other things—began to flower on "Your Show of Shows" with the addition of Carl Reiner in that first season. ■

One of TV's greatest talents, Sid Caesar writes about his professional and his personal life in his best-selling autobiography, *Where Have I Been?* This is a chapter in the book.

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# THE PUBLIC IS NOT GETTING THE NEWS IT DESERVES

A Washington Bureau Chief warns that discrimination against TV journalists by Congress, the Supreme Court and the President threatens a free flow of information and ideas.

## BY EDWARD FOUHY

**T**elevision journalists like to think that they keep a close eye on the government in Washington, but their eye is often blinded by the efforts of government to bar TV cameras from the courts, the Congress and the Presidency.

Television reporters and their cameras are treated by judges, congressmen and even the President as if they are not entitled to the full rights and protection of the First Amendment. Television newsmen are discriminated against by all three branches of the Federal government, and the loser is the public.

A number of particularly egregious examples come to mind. In one of the most significant actions taken by the 97th Congress, the House Appropriations Committee late last year voted 26-26 not to strike funding for the MX missile. It was a vote pitting the Administration's prestige against the anti-MX Members of Congress. But was this dramatic, cliff-hanger of a vote — at what is called a public hearing by a Congressional Committee — seen by anyone but a handful of reporters? Not even television sketch artists were permitted to witness this vital issue on the public policy agenda being voted on by the committee.

For anyone who cared to protest that high-handed action by a committee of the Congress, the answer was that the

committee rules do not allow for television coverage of committee sessions and the committee meets in its own very small — conveniently small — committee room, thus limiting the number of seats available to the public. Congress can make its own rules and it holds itself above the very laws that govern the rest of us, and indeed govern the rest of the government, so there is no possibility of appeal from that exclusion. So the business of the Appropriations Committee which is the business of deciding what to do with the public's money — your money — so far as is possible is conducted in the dark. I might note that the chairman of the committee which so grievously offends the notion of conducting the public's business in public is a man who has been a Member of Congress since 1941. Congressman Jamie Whitten has represented the First District of Mississippi — largely rural in character — for 41 of his 72 years.

But this is only the most recent of the hundreds of cases of exclusionary treatment the press and public and particularly television news suffers every day in trying to cover the Congress. There have been cameras in the House chamber for the past several years, but they are cameras almost unique in our society. They are controlled by the people they are covering. Employees of the House man the cameras. You can be sure that there will never be any shots of anything that could even remotely disturb the sensibilities of any Member. If the public gets an impression of the

House which is sterile — far from its robust and very real, very attractive flavor — it is because the Members of the House don't trust the public to know the reality of floor action. That is an unfortunate policy for the legislative branch in a democratic nation.

**P**erhaps we shouldn't be so tough on the House. At least we can get a glimpse inside that august chamber. On the Senate side of the Capitol, television — the news medium most often cited by a majority of Americans as their principal source of national news — is barred altogether. No cameras at all. To cover the Senate, news executives have fallen back on the technology used to provide pictorial coverage of the Civil War — sketch artists. Generations of Americans grow up thinking the United States Senate is populated by people who somehow resemble characters in a comic strip.

In fairness, it should be said that legislation is pending to open the Senate to cameras. The legislation is being pushed by the majority leader, Senator Howard Baker. That might lead you to think it will easily pass. But things aren't always what they seem in Washington. The idea has been around for two years now, and it hasn't come to a floor vote yet, because Baker doesn't think he has the votes to pass it. In an age of instant communications, of pictures flying from one side of the world to the other via satellite, orbiting 27,000 miles in the sky, in an age when viewers are conditioned to expect pictures of news events nearly anywhere on the globe in their living rooms on the day the events occur, the Congress of the United States hides behind a curtain that prevents the public from seeing what it is doing. Is it any wonder that, according to pollster Lou Harris, the public's confidence in the Congress has fallen from 42% to 16% over the last 15 years?

What about the rest of the Government? Its record isn't very good either. Let's look at the courts. At a time when

the state courts one-by-one are dropping the barriers, and forty states already allow cameras in the courtrooms, the Federal courts of this country continue to shut out television cameras. None allowed — none anywhere — none in any courtroom.

Take what happened late last year in Florida, a state which does allow cameras in its courtrooms. In Miami a man named Alcee Hastings was about to go on trial on bribery charges in *Federal* court.

At a pre-trial hearing, Hastings argued that he would like to exercise his full Sixth Amendment right — that is, his right to a fair and public trial. He defines that right as a trial that is seen on television by anyone who cares to watch. Hastings says he is innocent of the bribery charges and he expects to be acquitted, but in order to have his reputation in the community restored and because he is a public official, Hastings argued that the trial should be televised. Well, his plea was turned down by District Judge Gignoux, without any deliberation.

Nothing remarkable about that you say? Hasn't ever been a television camera in a Federal court, you say, and so what? All of that is true but what makes this case especially interesting is that Alcee Hastings, the man on trial — the man who says he needs television at his trial to guarantee his full Sixth Amendment rights — that man is himself a Federal Judge!

And so it goes throughout the Federal Judiciary up to and including the Supreme Court. No television... no way for the people to see the way justice is dispensed in what we are proud to call a democratic society. Perhaps most disturbing is the Supreme Court. The Court, where busing, abortion and most of the other great issues of our time are decided, is as shrouded in mystery as a cloistered monastery. The wonderful arguments that are conducted there are never seen nor heard by more than a handful of people. Is it any wonder that the confidence of the people in the

courts is so low? And is there any reason for this exclusion?

For many years the boisterous behavior of the news media at the Lindbergh kidnapping trial in 1934 was cited. That trial, incidentally, took place long before there were television cameras but somehow it has been used as an argument to keep TV cameras out of the courtrooms for more than 40 years. The news business has changed a great deal since the 1930's. Newsmen are more decorous but, more important, technology has advanced to the point where floodlights are no longer needed. Lenses are faster. Cameras and microphones are small and unobtrusive. Microphones, indeed, are standard in many courtrooms in any case. But still the Federal Judiciary excludes the public from its courtrooms. One wonders what are the judges hiding from?

**A**nd finally consider the Executive branch of the government. Ronald Reagan, the great communicator as he is called, prefers not to communicate much at all unless he is in total control of all that is being said. Mr. Reagan hides from the press and television or is hidden from the press by his advisers. What little we know of what he thinks about the issues of the day we learn on the rare occasions when he comes within shouting distance of reporters. What we see on television is typically a correspondent voicing over a set-up "photo opportunity" of the President riding a horse or getting off a helicopter or sitting with a visitor.

The voiceover says the President was asked such and such — the question of the day. "Are you going to tax the benefits of unemployed people" . . . or, "Are you going to send more troops to Lebanon?" And the next picture is usually Mr. Reagan with one hand cupping his ear so he can hear better, saying, "What's that?" Then we hear the question shouted at him again, and he shouts back something fragmentary, un-

failingly affable and sometimes even intelligible. And that is the only clue we have as to what he is thinking on that day's issue.

What about Mr. Reagan's record on press conferences? In his first year in office he had six, Jimmy Carter had 21, Gerry Ford had 16, Richard Nixon had eight. As Reagan neared the end of his second year in office, he had had 15 press conferences. Jimmy Carter had 40 at the same point in his term.

Even more worrisome is that this President rarely gives interviews to anyone. His predecessors often met one-on-one with columnists and anchormen. Moreover, President Reagan simply does not participate in the kinds of public briefings that have been routine in the past. Example: the economic summit conferences held by the Western nations each June. At the conference last summer in France, President Reagan was the only chief of state who did not brief the news media representatives traveling with him at the conclusion of the conference.

Veteran White House reporters say they have never seen information as difficult to come by as it is in this administration. Recently Presidential chief of staff, James Baker issued a set of press guidelines whose intention clearly was to gag White House officials who were dealing with print and television reporters in an ad hoc arrangement, an arrangement time-honored and usually effective. In an unusually revealing example of the kind of doublethink that goes on in Washington on this subject, the memorandum outlining the presidential gag order was entitled, "Coordination of Press Contacts."

Is the complaining of newsmen of any real concern to the public? Is the President justified in his desire for privacy? Is he properly concerned that his administration speak with one voice and therefore that he limit the press's accessibility to himself and his top officials? I would hate to see a public vote on those questions, because I suspect the public thinks the answer to all of them is "yes".

The public would be wrong.

A democracy cannot function without a free flow of information and ideas. That is why the founders wrote the First Amendment, giving the press its unique status in our society; it distinguishes a democratic government from a totalitarian government whether of the left or the right. We are people who govern ourselves. Ours is the country that has as one of its principles that laws are made and enforced with the consent of the governed. It is dangerous to society when that consent is withheld. And it is being withheld.

All of us who are concerned about public affairs have been appalled as the number of people who choose to participate in this society has gone down every election year since 1960. Oh yes, we were pleased last fall when voting participation went up. It climbed from about 35% in the 1978 election to about 39% in 1982. What a disgraceful record!

Can anyone seriously argue that any branch of government is making any effort to reach out to those disaffected Americans who do not choose to vote? Are they letting the public in on what they are doing? Are they allowing the free press to operate freely? Are they taking advantage of the greatest communication revolution since Gutenberg invented movable type, to get that consent? The answer clearly is no.

The public is not getting the news it deserves, and in large numbers it is tuning out of the political process. ■

Edward Fouhy recently was appointed ABC News Vice President and Washington Bureau Chief, managing and directing ABC's largest television and radio news bureau. He previously served in many top posts with CBS News, including Vice President and Washington Bureau Chief, and Vice President and Director of News in New York. This article is based on a talk he made at Boston University.

## R E P L A Y

### Fred Allen as Critic

“Allen is one of the most rabid as well as the most critical of television viewers.

‘The trouble with television is, it’s too graphic’ he says. ‘In radio, even a moron could visualize things his way; an intelligent man, his way. It was a custom-made suit. Now everyone has to wear the same one.

‘Everything is for the eye today... Nothing is for the mind. The next generation will have eyeballs as big as cantaloupes and no brain at all...’

“Allen has been trotting around sampling opinion on television in some effort to find out what people like. ‘I talked to the oysterman at Grand Central the other day,’ he remarked morosely. ‘He likes everything on television. Even Morey Amsterdam looks good after staring at oysters all day long.’”

FRED ALLEN interviewed by John Crosby. *New York Herald Tribune*, January 6, 1950

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# INSIGHT: DBS

## BY LEON MORSE

### *Editor's Note:*

*This is the first of a series of occasional articles designed to brief Television Quarterly readers on recent developments in the complex new technology of television.*

**W**hen the history of this century is written, it's likely a great deal of attention will be paid to those little man-made birds known as satellites. For they are responsible for the current revolution in visual communications which promises to alter life profoundly for all of us. In the sixties, their impact started to be felt when they made it possible to receive instant news on television. In the late seventies, satellites gave new life to cable because they made it feasible to beam programs from a central source to cable systems everywhere. In this decade, we are about to enter the age of DBS—*direct broadcast satellites*—another technological advance for which the electronic wonder birds are responsible.

What is a satellite? It's a winged package of electronic gear sent into space and placed in a precisely circular orbit about 22,300 miles above the equator with an orbital velocity that matches the rotational velocity of the earth—it's *geosynchronous*. It appears to hang motionless in the sky above a particular position.

Satellites receive signals from earth stations below and rebroadcast them back down to other earth stations. Because the satellites seem to be motionless, earth station antennas can be aimed at them and left in fixed positions. Satellites carry banks of transponders, complex electronic circuits that receive signals from the earth stations, shift them in frequency and amplify them for rebroadcast to other earth stations. The signals that are received are, of course, sounds and pictures.

Most of the current satellite activity in television is concerned with feeding programs to networks and stations, and to cable systems, via Comstars, Westars, and other conventional satellites. Although a few individuals, usually electronic hobbyists, can and do receive programs from satellites in their own homes, for most persons the cost of such equipment is prohibitive—from \$4,000 to \$15,000. It's cumbersome, too, and takes a great deal of space. Not exactly the thing for your parlor or game room.

But if you are dreaming of the day when you can purchase an inexpensive, handy little rig for your home sweet electronic home, it's not very far off—although not as close as some of the current press hype suggests. You'll be part of that amazing age in which pictures can be sent directly to viewers—eventually. Don't be in a rush though. Keep in mind that *the direct broadcasting satellite* is a different species of bird. A lot has to happen, and many complex

elements have to mesh before DBS becomes an everyday part of our lives.

### Higher Powered Satellite

**T**he DBS has very different characteristics from those now flying in the sky. For it is a high-powered satellite whose mighty power—40 times that of the present type of satellite—makes it possible to throw narrow beams which can be received by small antennas, or earth stations, only 30 inches in diameter.

Home-style dishes of this kind, which have been tested by the Japanese and the Canadians, can be easily mounted on roofs. Some engineers and marketers claim such tiny earth stations will cost only \$100; less optimistic futurists use the figure \$300. but the dish price is only one part of the problem of making DBS truly viable.

For individual home reception, two other elements are required—an outdoor and an indoor electronic unit. The outdoor apparatus will convert signals from the satellite to other frequencies, then boost them and feed them to the indoor unit. The indoor gadget, which is attached to the TV receiver, provides for channel selection, FM demodulation and unscrambling the picture.

This is the home-base end of the system. The rest will take longer—probably about three years to build the new, more complicated super-power satellites. It may take from four to nine years to attract millions of DBS subscribers.

Also facing backers and builders of DBS system are other tough problems which must be solved — legal, financial, marketing, technical, governmental. All this in a society which, because of the other electronic media now in place, is virtually saturated with telecommunications. Before DBS becomes a significant factor in television, it may be 1995. More likely, it will be in the 21st century.

What need is there for direct broadcasting? VHF and UHF television stations, and cable, already serve almost

all of the viewers in the United States; there are more people with TV sets than with telephones. Nevertheless, there are said to be some 30 million persons who are "underserved" by the present video media. They are not being reached because many thinly-populated areas, particularly in the West, cannot receive any TV signals. DBS will be able to serve these deprived millions.

Urban areas, too, offer excellent opportunities for DBS. In fact, DBS's greatest challenge may be to cable, especially in some of the larger cities. The cost of digging up the streets to wire for cable is huge, often much higher than anticipated, as Warner Amex, for example, found in Dallas. One estimate for wiring all of New York City is two billion dollars. Because DBS can be received through the air, in some areas it can reach city dwellers for much less investment than cable.

It is generally agreed that many parts of the big industrial cities of the East and Midwest will not be cabled, because of urban blight, where the cost of building cable systems is too high to serve a population too poor to pay for the services. In such areas, DBS might provide an answer.

The Satellite Television Corporation—STC—led the corporate race into DBS in 1980; STC is the subsidiary of the Communications Satellite Corporation, better known as Comsat, the special instrument created by Congress to function in the international telecommunications sphere. Until recently, there was no competition on the scene, but now STC must deal with seven other applications.

The eight contenders, including STC, were recently granted interim authority construction permits by the FCC to build satellites, although the FCC had to withhold frequency assignments, orbital positions and final operational authority.

Because satellites are international in nature, meetings are held periodically with other nations in the Western Hemisphere to determine how the spec-

trum — the space in the sky—is to be allocated among them. Otherwise, there might be traffic jams in the sky.

In June, 1983, a Regional Administrative Radio Conference (RARC) will be held in Geneva, and the North and South American countries will get together to make permanent allocations of the spectrum. The conference will parcel out the space to Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and other countries as well as to the United States. The indications are that the DBS spectrum will be completely apportioned, although many of the countries will not be in a position to use their allocations for many years.

The U.S. position is that assignments should be made only "as needed." However, the other nations generally believe that once a space is occupied, it will become more difficult to evict the occupant. They wish to avoid such problems. Regardless, the U.S. Senate will have to ratify this international treaty, which could easily take another year or two. Then, the FCC will have to draft final rules and regulations to cover DBS.

How does the FCC know that these complex new satellites will work? During the seventies there were a number of DBS tests. The first DBS capable of direct-to-home service was Communications Technology Satellite (CTS), a joint experimental project of the U.S. and Canada, launched in 1976. The Japanese began their DBS tests in 1972 and launched "Yuri," their experimental satellite in 1972.

Essentially, the eight American DBS contenders will be providing four kinds of service or a combination of them: Pay DBS is to be offered by STC and the Graphic Scanning Corp; Advertiser-supported DBS by the United States Satellite Broadcasting Corp. (USSB is owned by Hubbard Broadcasting), and Video Satellite Systems; Common carrier DBS by the Direct Broadcasting Satellite (DBSC); And non-common carrier DBS by RCA and Western Union (Common carrier service is available to all; non-common carrier discriminates

among potential users.).

CBS plans to use DBS to promote high definition television (HDTV), said to permit greater resolution, improved color rendition, large-screen display, a much wider screen and stereophonic sound. It would mean the present American 525-line NTSC standard would have to be replaced by a 1,125-line standard.

### STC as Model

**T**he model for pay DBS will probably be STC. It has the resources, the plans and is willing to make the commitment. Subscribers are expected to be charged \$25 monthly for three channels of pay programming; it will lease some of its receiving equipment. The model for advertiser-supported DBS is probably the one proposed by USSB. At its inception USSB plans to affiliate with one station in each of the top 50 markets. It will rebroadcast its programs locally so viewers will not be receiving their pictures directly from satellites. In most cases, these stations will be the independents, or if they're not available, low-power stations.

Obviously, USB sees its venture as the nucleus of a fourth national network. One of its advantages over pay DBS is that, since most of its audience will be in place, it may be able to present more ambitious programs sooner.

DBSC, RCA and Western Unions systems will be leasing their channels to entrepreneurs with their own programming. They may attract backing from advertisers, or the advertisers themselves may create the programming through their agencies. Their shows can be designed to reach a broad audience or a narrow one.

Certainly the U.S. will not get all the spectrum space it wants for DBS. The eight DBS applicants may be forced to standardize their proposals, curtail some of their more ambitious plans and perhaps join forces. Probably, only three or four services—pay TV, advertiser-supported DBS, common and/or

non-common carrier — will be allocated space in the sky. How the FCC will eventually handle CBS' HDTV which faces a set of difficult financial and technical handicaps is hard to foresee.

**I**t is a truism of TV that the key to success lies in programming. What can DBS offer that is better than the shows already coming over the tube? The applications made to the FCC by DBS applicants only speak about their programming plans in generalities.

The most elaborate programming plans are Comsat's STC. It has specified that it will be offering three channels of programs instead of one as is the current practice by HBO, Showtime and other pay cable services. The STC premium channel, "Superstar," plans to telecast 24 hours of major motion pictures, popular concerts and specials each day; "Spectrum," its second channel will present movie classics, children's shows, variety, performing arts and cultural attractions; "Viewer's Choice," the third STC channel, will offer sports, adult education and special interest programs.

Other DBS programming will likely originate with producers or advertisers that will lease channels for the entire range of programming for which they believe there is a market.

Pay DBS, of course, would be the natural place for pay-per-view. So perhaps the great annual sports contests — like the Superbowl and the World Series — eventually will find their way to the service. The Hollywood major studios will also consider pay-per-view DBS as another outlet for their blockbuster movies — but not for their average product, since recent events on cable and subscriptions TV have already demonstrated that only a few really super-attractions draw a pay-per-view market.

For many years, most programming certainly will come from the two major entertainment production centers — Hollywood and New York. However, if DBS takes off and really flies, then, at

long last, it would make a reality of the dreams of many local television people, who have hoped that there could be other big-league production centers throughout the nation. In that case, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Miami, Atlanta, Dallas, Houston might develop into important sources of original programming.

For showbusiness—for the makers and shapers of programs, for all the creative people in front of and behind the cameras—DBS will not necessarily provide an immediate boom or bonanza; they should be wary that, at first, DBS may offer more blue sky or pie in the sky, especially if it is prematurely oversold as a new electronic marvel.

### To Catch Up With Cable

**T**he program budget of Comsat/STC's national operation was estimated by them at \$76.9 million. Assuming that, according to its projections, it will have an average of 325,000 subscribers during its first year on the American scene, about \$25 per subscriber—or \$6.66 per channel — will be spent on programming.

STC says it plans to spend about \$.30 per subscriber for its movies. Contrast this with cable: For their better films, HBO and Showtime spend between \$.50 and \$.75 per subscriber — but HBO in November 1982 had about 11 million subscribers. To reach so many millions of viewers would take STC years.

From this example, it is clear that DBS will not be able to compete with the commercial TV networks — or even with the major pay services in cable — for the big entertainment attractions.

While cable in all its forms has a substantial headstart over DBS, even cable's investment in programming is nowhere near as large as that of the conventional TV networks — another indicator of how far DBS will have to travel before it becomes a major market for new entertainment. For example, the basic cable networks spend at most \$25,000 per half-hour program, the pay

networks about \$60,000. The cost of an average half hour show on the commercial TV networks is now about \$300,000, and for an hour about \$650,000. The ABC-TV network has estimated that its 1982 programming costs were about \$531 million — in the same year, all of the pay cable services total bill for programs was \$521 million.

It will take many years for DBS to attract audiences even as large as those of cable today; and to reach that point will require DBS to invest heavily in *original* programs—probably far more than current estimates by the DBS corporations. Rather than offering a great deal of new programming, the likelihood, is that the DBS companies will make frequent use of older, less expensive shows.

DBS, of course, will have more than entertainment to offer. Other services for which it can be utilized are: data transmission, teletext, stereophonic sound, closed captioning for the hearing impaired, foreign language dubbing, second language sound, special audio for the blind and facsimile reproduction of newspapers and magazines. But so far there has not been any overwhelming demand for any of these services.

**D**B S is a business for high rollers — it's what financial analysts describe as "capital intensive." It is a game in which only corporate goliaths with unlimited access to capital can sit and play for high stakes. In the initial period, those applicants on record have already announced they would spend \$2.23 billion for DBS and a minimum of \$4 billion for fully implemented DBS.

RCA reports a national channel leased for a year will cost \$80 million; from DBSC \$30 million and from Western Union \$50 million or \$10,000 per hour. Both Comsat's STC and USSB have estimated their costs — when their plans are fully implemented—as noted, at one billion each.

Much of this investment will probably go into manufacturing and orbiting into space the more advanced satellites and

spares. STC expects to build a control complex with an uplink center at Las Vegas and a back-up facility at Santa Paula, California. The receiving equipment of DBS subscribers will have to be manufactured in advance. This means a prior commitment of millions to manufacturers — and subsequently, the sale or lease of equipment to subscribers.

There is every expectation that many, if not most, of these applicants will drop out of the game even if after the RARC Conference they get a go-ahead from the FCC. Obviously, much depends on the financial climate in the United States and the climate is chilly. RCA is already contending with financial problems. Video Satellite Systems is a new enterprise without any track record. CBS spent \$30 million on its cultural cable venture and called it quits. Is CBS really ready to spend hundreds of millions on HDTV?

The one company with the capital is STC, because it is already profiting from international telecommunications and has produced the earnings to attract more money from the financial markets.

By the end of its first year in business, STC hopes to enlist 650,000 subscribers to a national system. It estimates, however, that it will take two million subscribers before it becomes profitable. Others maintain that five million subscribers is a more realistic figure. That can easily take from three to five years. A network of authorized dealers will have to be created to sell subscriptions, to lease and install and maintain equipment. Servicing subscribers will be difficult and costly. These functions were to be handled for STC by Sears-Roebuck as a co-partner, but once it considered the dimensions of the assignment, Sears moved out of the venture. Other partners, possibly local utilities or retailers, will have to be found.

Substantial technical questions remain to be answered about the viability of DBS equipment. Will the high-powered amplifiers on the satellites last between five and seven years, as ex-

pected? How dependable will the satellites, the multi-beam antennas and small home antennas be? So far, unscramblers have yet to be perfected.

**W**hat will be the impact of DBS on commercial television? Obviously, it will provide another choice for some viewers and thus to some degree will fragment the medium. The fragmentation, however, will be small according to a study done for Comsat, which projected a three percent loss of network audience where DBS offers one channel of programming and achieves a 16 percent penetration of any market. But the loss could be greater, if a DBS system were to offer three channels of programming.

It would not be surprising if DBS began to take off much more rapidly in Europe and Japan than in the United States. Japan has extensively field tested DBS, and its DBS system is expected to become operational this year.

In Europe, London's Satellite Television Ltd. is offering limited DBS transmission over the Orbital Test Satellite (OTS) which provides two hours of advertiser-supported programming to cable systems in Scandinavia and Europe. It will function until 1985. Government TV systems in Germany and France feel threatened by a proposed DBS system from Luxembourg and have entered into a joint program to develop their own; each country is expected to have one DBS satellite operational by 1983. Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland and Sweden have also established a group to study a common system of DBS. Initially, they probably will link their DBS to cable systems.

Already, DBS is involved in international political controversy. Aware of the possibility of DBS "footprints" (signals) crossing the territorial boundaries of countries, the UN recently passed a resolution which would prohibit such satellite transmission without the prior consent of the receiving country. The resolution

originated at the behest of the Latin-American and Iron Curtain countries. The United States and other Western nations opposed it because they felt prior consent is undemocratic.

In the United States, DBS will get underway more slowly because we have commercially developed TV systems which provide entertainment free. Another factor in the slower development of DBS is the commercial broadcasting inexperience of many of the current DBS movers and shakers.

There are, of course, a host of intangibles in the path of DBS. For instance, how will the public respond to it? Will it be just another novelty, or will it really catch the fancy of viewers everywhere and result in audiences two or three times larger than projected? Will DBS be able to develop popular programming that is truly different from that offered by regular television?

There are communications experts who do not see DBS as an urgent necessity. Anne Jones, a Federal Communications Commissioner, who voted against the FCC's recent grant of construction permits for seven more direct broadcasting satellites, commented: "It's much too premature to devote this much spectrum to something whose time has not yet come."

Whenever that time does come—later or sooner—DBS will need programs, *new programming*. If DBS is successful, the services will have to invest big money—not just in equipment but in programs, the basic ingredient. Before the arrival of the 21st century, DBS could open up fresh opportunities for a new generation of creative talent. ■

Leon Morse is a free-lance writer who has covered radio and television for several decades. He has also been on the staff of *Television Magazine* and *Dun's Review*.

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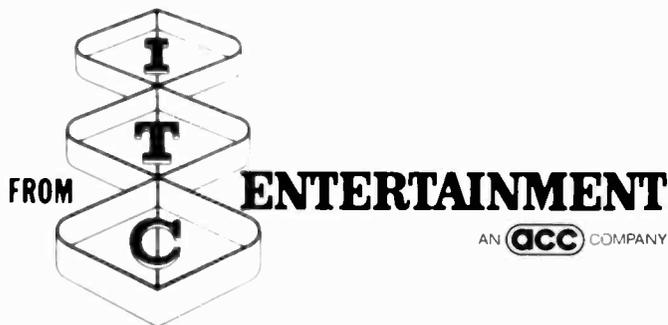
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# REVIEW AND COMMENT

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## TELEVISION: THE MEDIUM AND ITS MANNERS

by Peter Conrad

Routledge & Kegan Paul, \$12.95

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### BY JERRY TOOBIN

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There is nothing in the brief biographical sketch on Peter Conrad to prepare one for the delights ahead in his *Television: The Medium and Its Manners*. While I am unacquainted with his work, the mere subject matter leads one to doubt his expertise in the arcane (its producers and devotees like to *claim* it is arcane) world of television. Certainly such titles of his as *Romantic Opera and Literary Form*, *Shandyism: the Characters of Romantic Irony* and *The Victorian Treasure-House* seem remote subjects. But as they say in the TV biz—stay tuned. It's a short book, but its a rare page that fails to illuminate some aspect of the *Great Medium*. In ten brief chapters, Conrad covers the spectrum, at least to my satisfaction.

Look at the subjects of said chapters:

1) *Furniture*: a sly, devastating study of how a whole industry has been built on hiding what Conrad calls "our dirty domestic secret." I'd better not start quoting more or I'll spend this whole review on his uproarious description of how the Oxford dons he works with (he is a University lecturer in English) ob-

fuscate their television watching by camouflaging the set in innumerable, ingenious ways — all to make it appear they never watch the damned thing.

2) *Technology*: he reminds us of the now fabled TV camera on 49th Street which NBC turned *outward* onto the sidewalk and captured gawkers all the way from Harry Truman on a morning walk to a Dick Cavett newly arrived from Nebraska, being seen by his family back home as he stood gaping at the technical marvel on the other side of the plate-glass window, catching stray shots for the *Today* show.

3) *Medium*: TV as spy on, well, on everything. The producer who planted a microphone under a zebra's carcass, "so it could record the grisly sound of the dead beast being eaten by a lion."

4) *Talk*: possibly the centerpiece of the whole work. Again, just too many examples to more than suggest the uncanny way in which Conrad — seeming like some astonishingly perceptive child looking out at this world for the first time — and thus I suppose, the perfect TV viewer — searches out examples of the genre's "contributions," Barbara Walters, "the most pryingly aggressive of television's inquisitors," her interviews, "harangues," lecturing Richard Pryor on his malfeasances, snooping on Alan Alda's marital fidelity, berating Olivier for calling himself a worker. (Sir Laurence mildly retorted, "God is a worker."); Mike Douglas' "pruriently coaxing trade secrets from his guests"; Donahue recruiting his "psychiatric

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Jerry Toobin is director of News and Public Affairs for WNET/13, New York City.

freaks" and "maimed artists," and "then delivers them to the studio audience."... And so on and on through Soaps and Games and "the ads specializing in deodorants and detergents more realistically purvey relief from the present torment of anxiety. Sweat, euphemized by the ads as wetness, is a gross fault because it's the exterior admission of inner turmoil."

5) *News*: Examples abound of what Conrad calls "reality [is] remade as televised fiction, for, rather, than reporting the news, television's presumption is to invent it. (Note his bizarre—but by no means unique example of a newsman who was appalled to find he'd been sent on a non-story of a weakening prison riot and spurred it on a little by giving the "finger" to a group of inmates and inciting them to renewed vigor and activity by this gracious gesture.

Conrad is not xenophobic however, castigating British newsmen with fine impartiality for their coverage of the Iranian Embassy in London terrorist takeover in the Spring of 1980.

Overcoverage is exemplified by the 11,500 media folk who cowed the 3,381 Democratic delegates at the 1980 convention. The climaxes of newspeoples roles, if such goings-on can have climaxes, are Cronkite's boomlet for VP on the John Anderson ticket and Miss Walters begging the Carters on the eve of his presidency, with an almost beatific air (hers, not theirs): "Be good to us, be kind to us." Wow!

This is a delicious traversal of the never-never land that we all spend too much time in. Perhaps it takes an "amateur" like Peter Conrad to show us so clearly the divestiture of the emperor's clothes. But Conrad sees there is no emperor. Just a money-grubbing hack who will do anything for the bang which will bring in the buck.

To be sure there is more to the picture (no pun intended) than Conrad shows us. The cultural specials on PBS and even occasionally on commercial television are redeeming, and some of the documentaries. There are eloquent,

meaningful personalities on the air.

Anyway, it's great to get this fresh perspective on TV's people and programs. Indeed, how Conrad managed to see so much TV even if the set was disguised as a bookcase beats me. But I'm happy he did see so much and so will you be if you read this little volume.

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## **ON THE AIR!**

by Tom Shales

Summit Books, \$15.50

## **MEDIA UNBOUND: THE IMPACT OF TELEVISION JOURNALISM ON THE PUBLIC**

by Stephan Leshar

Houghton-Mifflin, \$13.95

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## **BY HARRIET VAN HORNE**

Of books about television there is no end. They now fill hundreds of feet of shelving, testament to the medium's impact on our life and times. Literary critics who once dismissed TV as the boob-tube now write respectful reviews of almost any book dealing with this unblinking eye that has changed the way we look at the world.

The two books under consideration here have little in common. Stephan Leshar, a former *Newsweek* reporter, assumes a lofty stance as he tells why he is dismayed by the way news is presented on the tube. "Television," he writes, "has made journalism's intrinsic weaknesses manifest."

Leshar's book is instructive, thoughtful and occasionally — I am sorry to say — vindictive. Tom Shales' book, by contrast, is great fun. He has a quirky, original mind. As TV critic for the *Washington Post*, Shales watches virtually everything that moves. He is often witty and, now and then, explosively funny.

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Harriet Van Horne is contributing editor of *Television Quarterly*.

With an air one must call disingenuous, Shales calls himself an average man of low to middling taste. "I love the food at McDonald's," he writes. "I love to watch *Family Feud*..." He sees the TV screen as the salvation of the lonely. "I think it has probably dried a lot of tears in its time," he muses. And he gives the back of his hand to critics "who wipe their feet on television."

A discerning reader may note some fairly strenuous foot-wiping in *On the Air!* Certain of the author's insights bite like a serpent's tooth. But one also senses that Tom Shales truly loves television and as a lover has a right to scold and mock upon occasion.

No critic has ever coined more lethal nicknames for America's favorites. David Hartman of *Good Morning, America* is Mr. Potato Head, and Tom Brokaw is Duncan, the Wonder Horse. When Dan Rather bundled himself up in sheepskin and wool draperies for his foray into Afghanistan, Shales observed that he "looked like an extra in *Dr. Zhivago*." Later he took to calling Rather "Gunga Dan."

Like Stephan Leshar, Shales finds much fault with TV news. He wishes it were more visual. Correspondents and anchormen, he writes, simply refuse "to shut up and let the picture talk."

Few of Shales' comments on the news will gladden the hearts of network news directors. "TV news melodramatizes events to make them good shows, cast with cartoon personalities, and this stream-lined version of what is happening in the world becomes the TV reality millions see..."

The cardinal sin, in Shales' view, is blandness. He wants more hard facts from the Great Inside. And he is puzzled by the networks' disavowal of the Fairness Doctrine.

"They say it inhibits them," he writes. "They say we should trust them to be fair."

"Like hell we should trust them to be fair."

When Mr. Shales has a point, he doesn't fudge it.

That slyly crafted last paragraph — with a stinger in the tail — is a Tom Shales trademark. His appraisal of Farrah Fawcett begins, "Maybe it's the hair. Maybe it's the eyes. Maybe it's the teeth. Maybe it's the intellect."

"No, it's the hair."

Sometimes Shales writes a valentine to a star he admires. He is sweet on Carol Burnett and his admiration for James Garner is touched with boyish awe. He even pens a nice tribute to Howard Cosell, though he notes in passing that the gang down at the Sweetwater Tavern in Denver had a fine time one night hurling bricks at the TV set when Cosell came on.

Commercials, in Shales' view, are a more brilliant art form than the average run of programs. Still, he cannot resist rewriting the old NAB code for network advertising. Among his strictures: "Unnecessary violence must be avoided. Ferocious snow tires, marauding odor eaters and aggressive scrub bubbles are forbidden... Toilet paper shall not be squeezed, petted, played with or otherwise flaunted in public... Commercials for wine and beer that show happy people enjoying the product must also include scenes of fat old men dead drunk and lying in the gutter."

Tom Shales watches television 40 hours a week. When the prime time shows are over he settles down for a few hours of "video noir." That's the useful term he has coined for re-runs of *Mike Hammer*, *Naked City*, *The Twilight Zone*, and other hits of yesteryear. "A good print of an old *Perry Mason* can be visually beautiful—actually beautiful in a stark, high-contrast, heavy '50's way," he sighs.

A critic, you say? Tom Shales is a *fan*. He may even have the disease he so deplores in others. That's "videophobia... the fear of leaving one's television set." It's a disease so new, he says, that even Phil Donahue doesn't know about it.



Television news discovered its awesome power, Stephan Leshar writes, on

the night of February 27, 1968, when Walter Cronkite "decided unilaterally that U.S. policy in Vietnam was wrong." President Johnson, watching the news that night, told press secretary George Christian that losing Cronkite meant losing "the center," i.e., the moderate majority.

From that point on, TV news became, in Leshar's view, America's super-ego. This new surge of power did not, he argues, indicate a surge toward excellence. Still, the power and authority continued to grow until today "it could be argued that, to an extraordinary degree, until TV reported it, it had not happened."

In a sense, Leshar's book is a grievance list. He weighs the coverage of the hostage crisis, the war in Afghanistan and the 1980 election and finds it all inadequate not to say offensive. You could call Mr. Leshar a nit-picker. He expects perfection in a profession that is only human and therefore subject to error. Some of his criticism is deadly accurate but his thesis, over and over, is vitiated by a certain spleen, a meanness of spirit he cannot disguise.

Though he writes well, some readers may feel that Leshar goes too far in calling TV journalism "promiscuous" and characterizing TV reporters as "trained dogs who leap blindly to whatever is held aloft." He even belittles Ed Murrow for having presided over the celebrity interview series, *Person to Person*.

Leshar reserves his harshest criticism for *60 Minutes* and Mike Wallace. He is particularly indignant about the treatment of Col. Anthony Herbert, the officer who charged the Army with covering up numerous atrocities, massacres he claimed to have witnessed. The colonel later sued CBS, writer Barry Lando and Mike Wallace for \$44 million. The case is still pending.

Why is Leshar so hard on CBS? There's a possible clue in an epilogue headed "Acknowledgements." Here the author acknowledges that he had once been interviewed for a job as director of public affairs at CBS. "I didn't get the

job," he admits. Later, when Leshar opened a public relations firm in Washington, he "tried unsuccessfully" to persuade CBS to retain him. CBS declined.

"Both occasions concluded with mutual civility and respect," he adds. One wonders.

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## **ANCHORWOMAN**

by Jessica Savitch

*G.P. Putnam's Sons, \$12.95*

## **THIS IS JUDY WOODRUFF AT THE WHITE HOUSE**

by Judy Woodruff with Kathleen Maxa

*Adison-Wesley, \$12.95*

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## **BY MARION T. MARZOLF**

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During the 1970s women struggled to the top in the competitive world of television news and anchoring and attained a rough if tenuous parity with the men who pioneered and still dominate the field.

In just ten years these women in their 20s and early 30s became highly visible (along with blacks) on local and network television as the industry bowed to pressure from civil rights and feminist groups and to new governmental regulations.

Shattered were the old myths that women's voices did not convey authority and seriousness and thus were unsuited to news — as well as the belief that women would fall to pieces under deadline pressures or from the sordid scenes they must sometimes report.

Their numbers rose from the mere handful that worked for network news in the early 1960s (Pauline Frederick, Nancy Dickerson, Lisa Howard, Liz Trotta and Marlene Sanders) to become

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Marion T. Marzolf is an associate professor of Communications at the University of Michigan and author of *Up from the Footnote: A History of Women Journalists*.

nearly 20 percent of the network reporting staffs at the start of the 80s. These women who emerged in the 70s (along with the rise of television news to a new popularity and high ratings) were typical of the new breed of television journalists who come directly from college into broadcast work, without previous news experience in newspapers or wire services.

What they gave up for their quick rise to celebrity status and six-figure salaries, and what it really takes to get to the top in this most competitive and visible industry, are usually overlooked by starry-eyed youths who take these as their role models. But in the 80s, as these television journalists have become secure in their own professionalism, the autobiographical books are beginning to tell that story. Dan Rather led the way in 1977 with *The Camera Never Blinks*, still a favorite among college students for its vitality and professional seriousness.

Now, two of the women, both from NBC News, Jessica Savitch and Joan Woodruff, have published their stories. Each has taken seriously the responsibility to talk directly to the young and set forth their work lives in forthright and sobering detail. Although both are protective of their personal lives, they do share enough to give the readers an understanding of the sacrifices and risks of such a career. Both, too, tackle the ethical problems that currently trouble the world of journalism.

While *This is Judy Woodruff at the White House* does more to explore in vivid and dramatic detail "what it is like to work in Washington in times when crises seem to have become routine," Savitch's more personal *Anchorwoman* deals effectively with the ethical and professional dilemmas and begins to chip away at the glamour myth that surrounds this profession.

These books are valuable additions to a very limited selection of contemporary career biographies of journalists in print and broadcasting, and as such are most welcome. Both portray the grueling

drudgery and frustrations of the work. But only the faint of heart and spirit will really be daunted by this; the glamour and excitement are real, too, and both women have had their share.

A common factor shared by successful women journalists of the 20th century is self-confidence bolstered by determination. These women are survivors. They know who they are and what they want to do, and they do it. They learn how to make the most of the opportunities for work that are available. They learn the craft from their peers and throw themselves into the work with energy and gusto. Woodruff believes her youth as an Army brat prepared her with the necessary flexibility and coping skills. Although Savitch doesn't discuss it directly, the loss of her father in her teen-age years quickly thrust her into a more responsible and mature role in her family.

As in most success stories, these too, are stories of unswerving dedication to a career. Work comes first. They put in the hours at routine entry-level jobs, made their mistakes in the smaller markets and found mentors who encouraged their progress. (Only one mentor was female, an indication of the scarcity of women in higher-level jobs in broadcasting.)

They arrived in Washington, D.C., to work for NBC *Nightly News* in 1977 — Judy Woodruff at the new Carter White House and Jessica Savitch at the Senate. What the casual observer saw on the screen — two good looking, poised and competent women reporters — was the result of solid experience in the craft. Savitch had worked two years as a reporter for KHOU-TV in Houston and five years for KYW-TV in Philadelphia as co-anchor with Mort Crim and Vince Leonard. Judy Woodruff had five years of television reporting and anchoring experience in Atlanta for WQXI and WAGA and two years with the NBC bureau in Atlanta.

Both women met and battled discrimination along the way. Savitch was bowled over when she was told that the

Ithaca College radio station had "no openings for women on air" despite her previous experience. Woodruff was hired to her first news secretary job in Atlanta in 1970 "because of her good legs" and barred from a reporting job "because there was already a woman on the staff." Savitch got her first television job in 1970 in Houston "in spite of, not because of, being a woman."

Once in Washington, both were again viewed as "tokens" and had to work especially hard to earn colleagues' as well as audience esteem. For Woodruff this came at the time of her fast and capable eyewitness account of the attempted assassination of President Reagan by John Hinckley, with which she opens her book. For Savitch, it was the successful narration "on sight" of the shooting on the Guyana airstrip of Congressman Leo Ryan and NBC correspondent Don Harris and cameraman Bob Brown. The field producer for NBC *Nightly News* had been too shaken to preview the film which arrived only minutes before airtime.

Both authors stress that the overriding concern for any journalist today should be responsibility to the public. As Woodruff so aptly observes, there is a great need for better quality news coverage, for more substance, more explanation and special reports. "Print sets the agenda, but TV dominates the dialogue," she says. The increasing competition from cable and the new technology present new challenges to network news. Woodruff, for one, hopes that the response will be more in-depth work from the talented professionals who have emerged in the 70s and a greater self-examination and accountability in the profession.

Long working days and unexpected trips across the country to cover breaking news play havoc with a social or family life. So it is not surprising to find TV career women frequently delaying marriage until they are well established, usually in their early 30s. Even then, despite their belief in two-career marriages, it isn't easy.

As Savitch learned, marriages, like careers, take effort. Her first in 1980 ended almost before it was begun, partly a victim of the hectic schedules of both partners during a political campaign year. Her second, was tragically marked in its first year by the death of her husband (a suicide brought on by the recurrence of a serious illness) and a miscarriage. Intense work and a move to New York City helped her regain her balance as she continued to anchor the NBC *Sunday Evening News*

Judy Woodruff married a fellow reporter, Al Hunt of the *Wall Street Journal*. Their shared career interests work for them, she says, and so far they have been able to juggle schedules to provide time to enjoy their first child. Woodruff, after 6 years of covering the White House, joined NBC's *Today* show in the fall of 1982, because she had... "had enough. You are a witness to history, but you aren't doing real reporting."

Woodruff, who was assisted by Kathleen Maxa in her book, does a fine job of conveying to the reader the actual processes of news coverage. She speaks with sensitivity about the difficulty regular White House correspondents have in getting balanced and accurate information that is neither self-serving publicity for the powers in control, or the opposition.

These books reveal the seriousness of purpose and sensitivity of two of the nation's top newswomen and illustrate how far women have advanced in the field. They also give aspiring student journalists a well-balanced view of the field, and men as well as women will find them rewarding reading. Both authors, however, underscore the scarcity of women in top management broadcast jobs. And both warn that the litmus test for women correspondents and anchors will be whether they will continue on camera in their 40s and beyond.

Television is a visual medium and appearance is crucial, Woodruff explains. One must look pleasant and not detract from the message either by

over-dressing or looking too glamorous. The question is whether aging for women is going to be a detraction that sends them into early retirement, while aging for men is supposed to add distinction and dignity.

These attitudes have long prevailed, but they are being challenged. And they are changing, as we learn from growing numbers of studies of values, life styles and markets. Books like these and movies like *Tootsie* raise the issue in thoughtful and inciteful ways.

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

### The Gatekeepers

“When broadcasters lobby for deregulation, for a prohibition of all controls they are really demanding what is not possible—deregulation in a closed market. Perhaps when technology of cable permits narrow casting everywhere and makes over the air broadcasting obsolete, decontrol will be possible. But as long as 3 or 4 or even 7 VHF stations in each market dominate telecommunications, we still need to concern ourselves with who are the gatekeepers, the people deciding what is news and are subsequently setting the national goals.

... I am opposed to all prior restraints or any FCC review on a program by program basis. But I think we've seen over the past five years that the Fairness Doctrine is no longer the chilling threat that broadcasters screamed about. It is true that in the 1960's and the 1970's zealots at the FCC tried to execute the doctrine as though it were a law with sharp teeth. And that mentality produced such bizarre cases as *Red Lion v. FCC* and *NBC v. FCC*. But in 1982, the Fairness Doctrine is once again only a doctrine and one that every responsible journalist should strive for:

1. To devote reasonable time to the discussion of controversial issues, and
2. To do so fairly, in order to afford reasonable opportunity for opposing viewpoints.

FRED W. FRIENDLY, the Edward R. Murrow Professor Emeritus, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

We'd like to interrupt  
this Quarterly with  
a couple of important  
words for people in the  
television industry:

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## CONSULTANTS PRO AND CON

*To the Editor:*

Thomas Patterson's article in *Television Quarterly* offers valuable insights into the phenomenon of the political consultant, who has become the *wunderkind* of the so-called new breed of politician. He overemphasizes, however, the importance of the consultants and minimizes their shortcomings.

I believe that the paid political consultant has a function, although some possess neither the political acumen of the traditional political boss, nor the solid professionalism of the advertising and broadcasting pros. I find especially disturbing the acceptance of consultants by candidates who permit themselves to be manipulated and packaged by opportunistic showmen lacking the necessary political savvy, and broad communications skills.

Too often, the media consultant tries to pass himself off as a TV impresario, an advertising genius and a political seer — all in one. I've never met anyone who could live up to that billing, even in Hollywood.

Some consultants tend to over-reach, use too many gimmicks, and are too slick. (A few have even achieved celebrity status for themselves and give press and TV interviews, as if they were the candidates.)

When building and executing TV projects for their clients, consultants often

take a simplistic approach to complex problems and issues. The ideas of a candidate — the content of his campaign — becomes subordinate to presentation. The shades of the TV screen are confused with substance.

—Lester Wolff

A former advertising and marketing executive, who now produces and moderates public affairs programs, Lester Wolff was an eight-term Congressman from New York.

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## VIOLENCE REPORTS SIMPLISTIC?

*To the Editor:*

The National Institute of Mental Health's *Television and Behavior*, which *Television Quarterly* excerpted in a recent issue, may well set back rather than advance the cause of public understanding of television's effects. The report credits television with far more power than can be documented by research, and goes off the deep end in its consideration of depicted violence.

*Television and Behavior* treats charges about the effects of television violence as though they have been proved, while dismissing substantial and credible arguments to the contrary. By doing so, the NIMH report tends to choke off the healthy debate and discussion which should continue among concerned viewers, broadcasters, academicians, and research professionals.

The overview at the beginning of the summary volume of the report declares that "the consensus among most members of the research community is that violence on television does lead to aggressive behavior." No such consensus exists. A substantial number of mass media scholars and research professionals do not agree with the causal connection theory which seeks to link viewing of violence and subsequent violent behavior. The report encountered considerable criticism when Dr. Pearl presented its conclusions at a 1982 meeting of The American Association For Public Opinion Research.

The conclusion presented in the overview is inconsistent with material presented later in summary volume I. Like the 1972 Surgeon General's Report, this one from NIMH actually presented extensively qualified conclusions; it is ambiguous rather than definite on the main issue of television and behavior. Among the reservations appearing in the summary volume, the report notes that "all the studies that support the causal relationship demonstrates *group* differences. None supports the case for particular individuals. . . group trends do not predict individual or isolated events." The summary volume further acknowledges that no single study unequivocally confirms or refutes the conclusion that televised violence leads to aggressive behavior.

The term "aggressive behavior" is itself a source of confusion. Very little if anything in the report links viewing of television with criminal violence. As used by social scientists in experimentation with younger people, the term "aggressive behavior" covers a range of less-than-violent acts and speech which the lay public may confuse with violent criminal behavior. Aggressive behavior reported in some studies included such things as "giving dirty looks," "doing things that bother other people," and "saying mean things," which should not be confused with criminally violent acts. The public may admire an aggressive football player and fear a violent mug-

ger; the use of specialized social science definitions in non-scientific contexts can blur such a practical distinction in an unnecessarily alarming way.

The NIMH report relies heavily on definitions of violence used by Dr. George Gerbner, whose annual "violence profile" equates humorous and fantasy violence with realistic portrayals, and includes accidents and acts of nature as "violence." Other investigators, as well as broadcasters and many viewers, regard this approach as much too broad and simplistic.

Curiously, four of the seven advisors to the NIMH staff for this report — Dr. Gerbner, and Drs. Eli Rubenstein, Jerome Singer, and Alberta Siegel — have already been strongly identified with the causal connection theory. Three of these — Drs. Gerbner, Rubenstein, and Singer — participated in or oversaw research which the report evaluates. As members of Dr. Pearl's committee they were, in effect, judging their own work, which raises basic questions of detachment, if not fairness.

The summaries of *Television and Behavior* give the impression that research supporting the notion of causal connection between viewing of violence and aggression is generally applicable to the television audience, when in fact it is extensively qualified and its applicability cannot legitimately be extrapolated. The simple cause-and-effect research model is being recognized increasingly as insufficient.

Despite the earnest attempt in the NIMH report to link television and aggression, the key questions remain unanswered. Let research and debate continue, but let's put aside the fruitless search for simplistic certainties.

—Roy Danish

Mr. Danish is Director of the Television Information Office.

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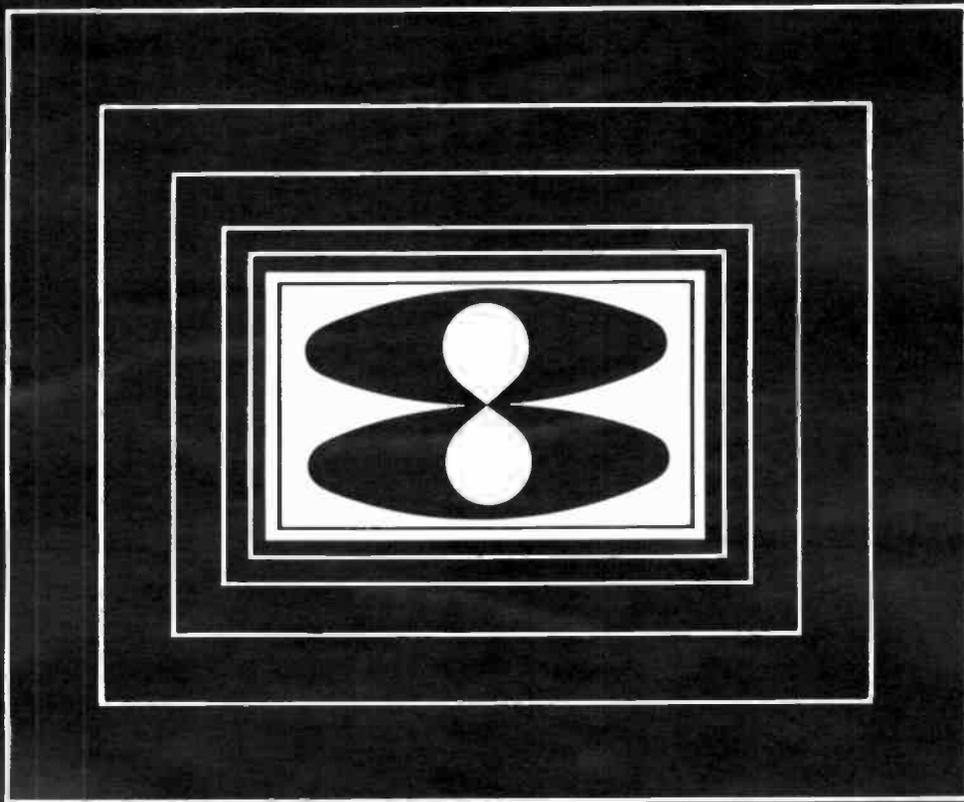
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